

# AEU NT Member Bulletin 3/2019

13 March 2019

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### **Ochre card update**

The union’s Full-Time Officers have demanded answers about the events of two weeks ago, in which a bureaucratic bungle saw hundreds of teachers and educators confined to desks due to their Ochre cards not being renewed on time.

We have been assured by Education Minister Selena Uiobo that she wants all steps taken to ensure this doesn’t happen again. The FTOs attended a meeting this week convened by her chief of staff with senior representatives from the NT Police, SAFE NT, DoE and Territory Families. All agencies agreed to work together to improve processes.

It was acknowledged that SAFE NT has a large work volume, currently processing up to 3000 applications working with children clearances a week, however according to SAFE NT nearly all applications should be processed within one month from receipt. With large numbers of teachers due to renew their Ochre cards soon, the Department acknowledged the need to get on top of the problem. An internal review will be conducted of how DoE manages renewal of clearances. If required, the Chief Executive will seek bulk exemptions from Territory Families if renewal applications can’t be processed in time.

With a review of the *Protection and Care of Children Act* due, there may be options to amend current laws to provide more flexibility in processing working with children clearances. The AEU NT suggested that, for teachers, allowing the working with children check to be conducted under the auspices of the Teacher Registration Board would streamline the process and reduce pressure on SAFE NT. We will pursue this option with DoE and the TRB, but these changes would take time.

For now, the AEU NT advises all members with Ochre cards to take the following steps:

- Familiarise yourself with the relevant DoE policy and fact sheet.
- Check when your clearance is due to expire and ensure all your details are up-to-date with SAFE NT.
- Submit your renewal application with all required details as soon as you receive a renewal notice.
- Track the progress of your application at the SAFE NT website. The online register will tell you when your clearance notice has been issued – due to delays with postage, it may take weeks for your physical Ochre card to arrive.
- Notify your principal or manager if you are concerned your clearance won’t be renewed in time, so that an exemption may be sought.
- Contact the AEU NT office if you have any further concerns or questions.

Remember that the cost of applying for and renewing your Ochre card will be reimbursed by your school on request.

### **Permanency Project continues**

The Permanency Project has been extended by another 12 months by the Commissioner for Public Employment. This measure allows classroom teachers who have been employed for 12 months or more on a fixed period contract to be converted to permanent without the position being advertised externally. Over the past year, 279 teachers secured permanency through this process.

The AEU NT anticipates more teachers gaining ongoing employment, and encourages eligible members and sub-branch reps to discuss with your principal how many positions may be filled in your school. As before, where there are more applicants than available positions, a closed merit selection process applies. An elected staff representative must sit on the panel. If you have any concerns about process, we encourage you to contact our office on a confidential basis for advice.

With the Permanency Project set to run for another year, we will shortly commence formal discussions with the Department about bedding down an enduring framework of managing the process of ongoing employments and maximising permanent employment opportunities. We expect this work to be complete by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, we are very close to reaching agreement with DoE on a transfer framework, meaning that by the second half of the year a centrally-managed system will be in place enabling teachers to apply for transfers on a school-to-school, compassionate and remote incentive basis. An important part of this framework will be procedures for “unattaching” (and later placing) most teachers who have been out of their substantive position for more than two years. We expect this to free up more positions to be filled on a permanent basis.

### **NTPS staffing cap**

Yesterday the Treasurer announced a staffing cap for the NTPS which is expected to lead to the cutting of 300 jobs across the public sector. All agencies are expected to institute a position freeze and find savings to keep their workforce numbers at their 2018 levels.

It is unclear at this stage what this means for education, however we have been assured by the Treasurer that frontline positions i.e. teachers and support staff in schools, will not be affected, and that the Government will keep its commitments from the 2016 election.

Members may recall that central to Labor’s 2016 commitment was a pledge to invest an additional \$20 million to employ an extra 165 teachers. With extra funds in budgets, school-based staff numbers increased significantly in 2017, but they actually declined last year due to schools not spending their allocated budgets. Furthermore, education was savaged by the CLP Government, with more than 500 positions cut from 2013-16.

Any further reduction in staffing in education would, in our view, represent the breaking of a commitment, and be disastrous for our schools, which are already struggling to meet the needs of our students. The AEU NT will strenuously oppose any attempt to reduce staffing in education. That includes not just school-based positions, but the vital office-based roles that support students such as counsellors, disability advisers, etc.

### **Conference registration deadline – only a week to go!**

There is just over a week to go to register for our 2019 annual Conference, taking place in Katherine over the May Day weekend. If your sub-branch hasn’t elected a delegate or put forward any proposals, this is your last chance! [Rego forms are available at our website.](#)

A reminder also to consider nominating a colleague for our 2019 Quality Educator Award, which will be presented at our conference along with a prize valued at \$1000. [Download a nomination form here.](#)

### **Women’s officer election – nominations open**

Nominations opened on Monday 11 March for the position of Women’s Officer on our Branch Executive.

They will close at 4.30pm on Friday 12 April.

More information about the position and a nomination form are available [on our website.](#)

## Work health and safety review released

During last year the AEU NT worked with the Independent Education Union (QLD and NT) to make a detailed submission to an independent inquiry looking into the effectiveness of the Work Health and Safety regulator NT WorkSafe. The final report from the review has been released today, Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> of March, by Attorney-General Natasha Fyles and it addresses many of the concerns that the education unions expressed. The report calls for:

- Stricter penalties and enforceable undertakings for employers who fail to provide a safe workplace
- More inspectors visiting schools and other businesses to conduct reviews and be visible
- Increasing activity within remote communities and to deliver services and training in appropriate language to workers in remote settings
- A plan from the Regulator to support Health and Safety Representatives and encourage more HSRs to be elected
- Making training for HSRs mandatory
- Developing an action plan to assist workers and employers to eliminate psychosocial hazards in the workplace

The report also observed that government employee housing is a serious issue across the NT and calls upon the NT Government to develop and adopt a Quality Housing Policy to apply to all agencies.

This review is an important step in changing the culture in NT workplaces and placing a higher emphasis on safety. It is very much in line with the work the AEU NT has been undertaking in schools. AEU officers have been working with union sub-branches in schools to address violence at work. Through united statements and actions, schools have taken stands against persistent threatening behaviour being exhibited at work. The issue is not based on individuals but on behaviour that is leaving teachers and students bruised and fearful. By standing together and stating that violent behaviour is unacceptable, teachers and educators are rejecting the idea that violence is just “part of our job”.

If you have an example of violence, threatened or actual, or if you have an issue with safety and security in your GEH, please contact the office and provide us with the details so we can assist in resolving these issues.

## TRB (remote) nominee sought

A resignation from the Teacher Registration Board has created a vacancy on the Board for an AEU nominee based in a remote school. Expressions of interest are sought from AEU members based in a remote school who would like to sit on the Board. More information is available on request - please contact [admin@aeunt.org.au](mailto:admin@aeunt.org.au) ASAP. EOIs must be received by our office by **Friday 22 March**.

## Student climate strike this Friday

A national student walkout over climate change will take place this Friday, with events planned in the Territory, [including in Darwin](#). Members may have students who are planning to participate in these actions. The AEU has pledged in-principle support for this action, recognising that this is an important issue and that students should be able to express their democratic right. However, members are expected to fulfil their regular duties on the day, and should not encourage students to attend - that decision is a matter for them and their parents or carers. Students who are planning to attend should be advised to follow the normal processes of notifying their school of their absence.

## Contact the AEU NT office

**Please let us know ASAP if your workplace, contact details or income have changed**

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