



AEU NT Member Bulletin 5/2017

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AOs – vote NO! to NTPS EA offer

Non-teaching staff in schools will be going to an employee ballot next week on whether to accept the offer by the NT Government for a new enterprise agreement (EA). AEU members covered by this agreement include preschool assistants, SESOs and vocational trainers.

The AEU, along with the other public sector unions, is recommending employees covered by the NTPS general agreement vote NO. The key reasons are:

- The offer is for only a 2.5% p/a pay increase over a long four-year agreement.
- The NT Allowance (\$960 a year) would be removed for new employees and current employees who don’t currently receive the allowance.
- Entitlements and conditions currently in by-laws and determinations are not locked in and can still be changed without agreement.
- None of the AEU claims relating to school support staff have been agreed to.
- The Government put this offer to a vote without addressing numerous unresolved union claims.

Voting NO means unions can force the government back to the bargaining table and demand a better deal.

Teacher and AT bargaining update

The AEU bargaining team and representatives from DoE and OCPE continue to meet weekly and work through the union’s log of claims. Although progress has been slow, discussions have been constructive, with the employer treating all AEU claims seriously (including providing costings estimates), and working collaboratively on the text of the existing agreement to update the document where appropriate.

The AEU team continues to work to try to incorporate existing conditions of employment into the agreement wherever possible. This includes Special Study Leave, the content of the Teacher Responsibilities guide and other matters in our log of claims.

The OCPE has indicated that it intends to provide more detail as soon as next week as to what might constitute a formal offer. Both parties have agreed that negotiations will continue into the new year.

Special Study Leave policy tightened without consultation

In the latest round of study leave applications, a significant number of teachers have had their applications rejected. The grounds for rejection are largely that teachers have not accrued enough study leave points at the time of the application, or that the proposed course of study has been deemed inappropriate.

In the past, most study leave applications were rubber stamped. Study leave was treated as a reward for service in some of the most difficult to staff schools in the country, as well as an opportunity for professional development and to reacclimatise with urban living. Not any more.

Senior DoE officers say that the previous process of study leave approval was a lax implementation of the study leave provision. Union officers are being told that the current process of study leave approval is a corrected process; it is how study leave should have always been approved. This is news to us.

This year teachers applied to take study leave in the second semester in 2018. Some of them hadn't accrued their 20 points, but would have in the normal course of work accrued the requisite number before semester two rolled around. Now teachers are being told that they can't apply until they have enough points.

Thus, a teacher on 19 points this semester will have to wait until 2018 to have their applications considered for 2019. This means teachers who should be eligible after four years of service may have to wait five years or more before the Department will even look at their study leave.

The union office has received numerous complaints from members and sub-branches about this tightening of the rules and Full-Time Officers are raising the matter with DoE. This unilateral change by the Department to how study leave applications are treated highlights the importance of strengthening this provision via its inclusion in the EA.

Delay on school funding review – not good enough

Members across all regions are reporting that schools are being pushed to shed staff because of budgetary pressures. It is very apparent that the so-called needs-based funding model for schools is utterly inadequate. Thus it is extremely disappointing that the release of an external review of the model has been delayed by the Government. The union's senior officers were told that the review, finalised in September, would be made public this month. Last week we learned that it may not be released until the end of the year.

The result of this delay is that our public schools will suffer for at least another year under an inequitable funding model that penalises the most disadvantaged students and communities. We have been notified by schools in Alice Springs, Barkly, Palmerston and Arnhem regions that they will be forced to either operate at a deficit next year or cut teachers.

There were high hopes when this Government was elected that it would reverse the damage of the CLP years. Sadly, members in many locations report that the reality on the ground largely has not changed, and the global school budgeting model is central to the problem. It forces schools to operate like businesses rather than focus on their core responsibility – educating children.

Our union questions why the Government seems committed to persisting with an absurd funding system that forces principals to hire teachers based on how much they cost, and which has seen the proportion of teachers on contracts skyrocket to 40% (up from 13% in 2013).

The AEU will continue to pursue this issue with the Gunner Government and the Department.

Dispute over urban teachers' start up going to FWC

The union has made a submission to have the Fair Work Commission (FWC) conciliate a dispute with DoE over the 2018 starting date for urban teachers. The Australia Day public holiday falling on a Friday means urban teachers will be required to commence on Thursday, effectively losing a day of recreation leave and the standard entitlement of six weeks of uninterrupted leave over the Christmas break.

The union wrote to the Minister and the Chief Executive and asked them to resolve the matter by altering the start date and they refused. Accordingly, the union will now seek to resolve this matter through the FWC. A hearing has been set for 4 December. We will keep you informed of developments.

Contact the AEU

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

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