

AEU NT Member Bulletin 6/2020

17 April 2020

Special bulletin – update #6 on COVID-19

In this bulletin:

- Schools to open as normal in Term 2
- Workload and work requirements
- Additional health guidelines and measures
- School hygiene and cleaning
- Working from home arrangements
- Member survey results
- Join the AEU

Schools to open as normal in Term 2

The Chief Minister confirmed yesterday that NT schools would open as normal in Term 2. That means all students and staff will be expected to physically attend from Monday unless they have a valid reason to stay away.

In his press conference, [Mr Gunner guaranteed that students and staff are safe to attend school](#), based on the health advice he has received. "If the medical experts said to me, 'Gunner, the schools aren't safe,' I would shut them down in a second," he said. "If I ever get that advice in the future, I will shut them down – but that is not the expert advice. Remember we are not Sydney, we are not Melbourne, we do not have the community transmission. The Territory is the safest place in Australia and our schools are the safest schools in Australia." In the same press conference, the Chief Minister announced that Cracker Night (in 10 weeks) would not go ahead and said there would be no easing of other restrictions for the time being.

The AEU NT has surveyed members this week and more than 1000 of you have responded. The results show many members have a very different view to the Chief Minister on the safety of schools. Two-thirds said you do not feel safe about schools reopening as normal next week. More than half said you do not believe the Government has considered your health and welfare in making this decision (more on our survey below). Members should be aware that the AEU NT did not support the decision to proceed with schooling as normal in Term 2, and nor were we consulted on it before it was made last Wednesday. The decision was communicated to staff via a letter from the Education Minister. Alternative proposals put forward by the union such as an initial return to school of only some students have not been considered by the Government. However, with the decision having been made, the Full-Time Officers are focused on how to address the major issues impacting members on your return to work. These centre on workload and work health and safety. Below we provide some initial remarks as advice on issues to consider upon returning to work next week; further advice will be forthcoming in Week 1.

Workload and work requirements

With all students expected to physically attend school, the Full-Time Officers were successfully able to insist that there will be one mode of delivery of learning: face-to-face. This means that for students whose parents keep them at home without a valid medical reason, no additional work should be done by members to cater for those students – they will have access to centrally produced learning packs and online learning, but no additional support from teachers. If you are asked to provide additional learning support to students who are being kept home without a valid medical reason approved by your school, you should refuse and notify the

union office immediately. (The exception is members approved to work from home, for whom it may be appropriate within the scope of your revised role to provide support to students learning from home.)

Additional health guidelines and measures

The most common WHS concern raised by members is how to apply health measures such as physical distancing in a school environment. Some of these requirements are clearly impossible. However, we now have some guidelines from health authorities. The [AHPPC has published specific health advice for schools](#) – something the AEU has been promised for many weeks. The guidelines provide specific, detailed advice on how to minimise health risks in a school setting. We advise all members to read the advice and to commence discussions immediately in your workplace about how to apply the advice, to identify problems with implementing guidelines and to advise the union office of specific difficulties. Our officers will advise and assist sub-branches to manage WHS risks to ensure the work environment is as safe as possible.

School hygiene and cleaning

The Department has provided grants to schools to allow for additional cleaning. Our survey results suggest that in some areas this has not led to an appreciable improvement in hygiene. For example, only 43% of members report observing additional work being undertaken by cleaners. We also note from the survey comments many teachers have felt obligated to undertake additional cleaning work within the classroom. We are analysing the information collected in the survey and will have additional advice to come in this area.

Working from home arrangements

Members who meet the “vulnerable” definition and have an approved personal action plan will continue to be able to work from home. We understand that approximately 100 approvals have been granted. Members who are unduly pressured to end these arrangements should contact the office.

Information on the process of applying to work from home was [supplied in a previous bulletin](#). For those who don't fall within one of the agreed categories, applications will be considered on a case by case basis. Should you wish to apply, we advise you to contact the office to discuss your options.

Member survey results

A huge thank you to members for your incredible response to our survey. In just 48 hours, more than 1000 of you completed the survey. Your responses, and the comments many of you supplied, gave our office important data on workload pressures, safety concerns and specific problems to do with things like cleaning and hygiene. The final summary results were tabled with the Minister for Education today and provided to the Chief Executive. [You can view the results here](#).

Join the AEU

We ask members to be pro-active in encouraging all eligible non-members in your workplace to join the AEU NT – this includes not only classroom and senior teachers, but principals, trade trainers, counsellors, classroom support staff and school council employees involved in education provision. New members can sign up online by visiting <https://aeunt.org.au/membership/>.

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

Phone 08 8948 5399; Fax 08 8948 2577; admin@aeunt.org.au; www.aeunt.org.au

Unit 3, 8 Totem Rd, Coconut Grove NT; PO Box 41863, Casuarina NT 0811

Authorised by Adam Lampe, Branch Secretary, 3/8 Totem Rd Coconut Grove NT 0810