

Must I Meet with my Manager?

Mick McCarthy explains the effectiveness of the Commissioner's Guideline 'Role of a Support Person' from the big boss of all NT government employees: the Commissioner for Public Employment

A fact of working life is that just about everyone at some stage is going to have to deal with a formally convened meeting with their (often) senior manager. Teachers and other educators are no different. Such meetings might be about already documented underperformance or inability but, more likely in our setting, they will be about a workplace incident or around allegations that have been received about you.

Longtime teaching career veterans of the AEU NT estimate that an individual teacher will hit a "patch of hot water" on average, about every 10 years. But you still have rights (from common law) and, more often than not, the opportunity to explain facts and provide evidence resolves the issue in a constructive way.

How to find out about those common law rights and what to expect in any investigation process will be one of the reasons many of you are union members, so read on. And if you are a sub-branch rep read on and keep as you will often be the best placed person to support a summoned member.

Modernised guidance to all the NT public service (NTPS) on the role of a support person was finalised in 2021. The Guideline might be called "Guidance" but it's from the big boss so it is to be followed and gives members and those seeking to assist them, much more clarity about how meetings should be conducted, allowing those members in the hot seat to better focus on the substance of why they are there.

Key elements of the current Guidelines include:

- Employees must be provided the opportunity to bring a support person.
- Recommended notice period for meetings is 48 hours.
- Employees to be advised of all those attending the meeting.
- Advance provision of either an agenda or the specific purpose for the meeting.
- Recognition that a support person need not be a silent witness.

- Information about what can and can't be done in their role.
- Meeting notes to be provided after the meeting is concluded.

AEU NT is pleased to have found that these guidelines are largely being closely followed by all managers, principals, and directors of the Department of Education. It should only be in extremely rare cases involving the most unusual and heightened of circumstances that this role will vary.

You will note in the Guidelines that support persons are not to advocate or 'story tell' for the employee they are supporting. However, there is a straightforward work-around this office has been successfully using and that sub-branch reps might utilise where they need to. The 'limited' support person role only applies when managers call meetings, not when union officers or sub-branch reps request a meeting with managers. Thus, if AEU believes there must be active advocacy in a particular matter, we will request co-extensive meetings, providing an agenda, with the same manager, who summons our member. This means that, in practice, we will begin a meeting and cover the manager's agenda, acting as a support person. Once that is completed, we will move into our own agenda items and provide advocacy.

Finally, please note, the AEU office regularly briefs members and sub-branch reps who are about to become a support person in a particular member's matter. Do feel free to seek our advice and some handy tips.



Further references:

[Role of a Support Person: Commissioner's Guideline](#)

Join AEU NT at <https://join.aeunt.org.au/>