



COVID-19

Member Update - 14 July

Here we are in the early days of another unusual and disrupted term for many members. As you know, the holiday period saw an urgent re-evaluation of schooling arrangements in light of a significant spike in COVID-19 cases. On Sunday, it was confirmed that schools in metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire will move to remote and flexible learning from 20 July for all students except for Years 11 and 12, students in Year 10 undertaking VCE or VCAL study, and students enrolled in specialist schools. [Detailed advice from the Department of Education to government schools can be found here.](#)

These arrangements are expected to continue until 19 August, but of course in these uncertain times we must be prepared for further changes. We have been and continue to be in urgent discussions around this with the Department of Education, our colleagues at the AEU, the Catholic Education Offices and independent school employers and representatives.

Our primary concern is the safety and wellbeing of IEU members, and so we have been advocating for safe and sensible approaches to educational programs and school staffing arrangements over coming weeks. On Sunday, we emailed all principals of all non-government schools in the area covered by Stage 3 restrictions, asking that they take steps to minimise on-campus staff attendance and that they consult urgently with your IEU Rep and your elected Health and Safety Rep. [You can find the letter here.](#)

It has been made clear that principals have discretion to introduce arrangements up to and including all staff working remotely except where required to run supervision programs or senior classes. Independent school leaders have even greater latitude to ensure that staffing levels are managed in a way which minimises the risk of transmission, and the following advice has been issued to principals of Catholic schools by Catholic Education Melbourne:

Meeting these requirements does not preclude a school-based decision to permit some or all staff to work from home where this is compatible with the circumstances of any individual school. This decision must be made by a principal using the consultative arrangements agreed at the school.

The principal must be assured that:

- *meeting such a request will not compromise their capacity to ensure the above requirements are met on any given school day; and*
- *it is reasonably practicable for the teacher or teachers to work from home (including the use of a reliable, safe and secure digital environment).*



We commend the many school leaders who have already done the right thing by announcing provisional staffing arrangements both for this week and for the upcoming period of remote learning which prioritise safety, make allowance for the many different personal circumstances of staff and acknowledge your professionalism. We ably demonstrated during Term 2 that we can deliver quality education and pastoral support with most staff working from home – and minimising staff attendance means a safer workplace for those who do need to be on campus.

We acknowledge the reasons for the current decision to continue on-site teaching of VCE and VCAL classes, particularly on equity grounds. We recognise that senior students, if properly resourced, supported and encouraged, should be able to maintain better hygiene and distancing practices than younger students. However, given the rapidly evolving nature of this health crisis, we believe it is essential that this is carefully monitored and frequently reviewed, both by the state government and by individual schools. Teachers of on-site classes and staff running supervision programs must be consulted and empowered to raise concerns about protocols, classes or individual students and have these rapidly and proactively addressed.

In recognition of the effect that remote schooling is likely to have on the income of some groups of members, we are extending our fee-waiver for CRT members until the end of August. I encourage any other member suffering significant financial hardship to email us at info@ieuvictas.org.au to request a fee-waiver.

I'd like to end by thanking IEU Reps and Health and Safety Reps for their extraordinary work advocating on behalf of their colleagues. We will continue to work with and support them, particularly in those workplaces where satisfactory risk-mitigation measures have not been put in place.

Please don't hesitate to contact us for advice or support – you can reach us at info@ieuvictas.org.au or by sending a text message to 0480 092 251.

You can find further information and updates on the [dedicated section of our website](#) and by following us on [Facebook](#), [twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

In unity

Debra James
General Secretary