

Queensland Teachers' Union

Submission to ACTU Inquiry into Insecure Work

1. An overview of your union and the industries it operates in (including membership, number of workers in the industries, main types of jobs).

Membership of the Queensland Teachers' Union (QTU) is available to teachers in the Queensland Government's primary schools, secondary schools, special schools, senior colleges, TAFE colleges and other educational facilities. Currently the QTU has more than 44,000 members, which equates to a membership density of 96 per cent. Temporary and supply teachers make up approximately 15 per cent of QTU membership. Temporary teachers are those on contracts to fill vacancies of five days or longer and supply teachers are those used to fill vacancies of no more than five days. Some of our members are supply and temporary teachers by choice but the majority of temporary teachers are seeking permanency.

2. The prevalence of insecure work in your industries. Reasons for its growth.

As in other sectors, the Department of Education and Training (DET)'s filling of vacancies with temporary staff is largely a cost saving measure. While only temporary vacancies (caused by leave) should be subject to the use of temporary teachers on contracts, in such a large bureaucracy it is difficult to ensure that DET is applying this principle in all situations.

During 2011, the QTU noted a higher than expected level of temporary employment. Our belief is that this has resulted from a misuse of the Department of Education and Training Teachers' Certified Agreement 2010 <http://education.qld.gov.au/teacher-agreement/docs/teachers-certified-agreement-2010.doc>

This agreement requires DET to make an offer of permanent employment to a temporary employee after three years' continuous engagement as a teacher with DET. It seems that some departmental officers are using this provision to avoid appointing teachers who do not have this service to positions that could have been filled permanently.

3. What your union has done to counter the spread of insecure work; particularly, what industrial strategies have you pursued, and how successful have these been. What has worked, and what has not?

Improving the conditions of temporary teachers was a key objective of the QTU EB6 campaign in 2009. Industrial action was taken during this campaign and as a result of this and continuing advocacy by officers and senior officers, the QTU has been able to secure significant improvements to the current working conditions of temporary teachers, including giving them access to some of the provisions already available to their permanent colleagues.

Conversion to permanency

The conversion to permanency process described above is supported by a memorandum of understanding www.qtu.asn.au/moa_conversion_to_permanency_may_2011.pdf

Vacation pay

Temporary teachers who have worked for a full year and are then re-engaged by no later than the third week of the next school year now receive full payment (including loading) for

the duration of the summer vacation. The provisions now also provide payments for the summer vacation periods for teachers who have worked less than a full year (pro-rata).

Credit for long service leave purposes

Periods of temporary teaching are recognised for long service leave purposes, provided that there is no break in service of 12 months or more.

Temporary teaching service is computed to full-time service and the teacher is credited with the equivalent period of service (200 days temporary teaching is the equivalent of one year's service).

Superannuation

Contributions for casual employees to QSuper Accumulation Plan (SGC plan) are paid in automatically by the State Government in the following ways:

- for full-time or permanent part-time employees, contributions are paid at the end of each fortnightly pay period
- for casual employees who work 10 or more hours in a week, contributions are paid at the end of the appropriate pay period during which payment has been made to the employee
- for casual employees who do not work 10 or more hours in a week, but whose total earnings from supply work in a financial year are at least one-half the income tax threshold, contributions are paid at the end of that financial year.

Departmental accommodation

If teachers are temporarily appointed to centres which provide accommodation for teachers, then they are eligible to occupy any available accommodation.

Expenses

The department may offer to pay the appointment/transfer expenses associated with moving to a country centre to take up a contract. Usually, the teacher is required to meet return expenses.

Sick leave

At the commencement of the appointment, no sick leave bank is provided. Sick leave accumulates on a pro-rata basis at the rate of 0.5 days per 18 calendar days. Sick leave can accumulate from one appointment to another, providing a break in service does not exceed 12 months.

4. Employer attitudes and responses to insecure work, and campaigning against it.

Despite securing significant gains in both achieving permanency for teachers and improving the conditions of temporary teachers, the QTU remains diligent in protecting what has already been achieved. Regular meetings are held between senior officers of the QTU and senior officers of DET to discuss and sometimes dispute matters, including levels of temporary teacher employment and the conversion to permanency claims of individual teachers.

Despite the terms of the certified agreement, which include provisions intended to both reduce inappropriate use of temporary teacher employment and improve the working conditions of

temporary teachers, some provisions have not been fully implemented by DET. For example, temporary teachers and supply teachers continue to find it difficult to access professional development (a requirement for the continuance of teacher registration), as without a secure logon, they are unable to access the department's secure intranet to complete online registration processes.

Securing and strengthening the provision of permanency and the improved working conditions of temporary teachers will form part of the QTU's EB7 claim and campaign in 2012. In line with its policy and the expectation of members, the QTU places a high priority on the plight of temporary teachers. This is not only because temporary teachers make up a significant percentage of union membership, but because temporary teacher contracts are the first offer of employment received by many newly-graduating teachers, something which may very well have the effect of making employment as a teacher an unattractive option and so impact negatively on the profession.