

## Letter to NTEU members at RMIT about resisting any unsafe return to work

This letter was sent to members at RMIT on Wednesday 29 July. We've incorporated the amendment sent out next day to the wording around the right to refuse unsafe work.

We're posting the letter here as a decent example of a union branch leadership giving a lead to HSRs and members. It's positive in that it states clearly there should be no to return to face-to-face work in circumstances of widespread community transmission (such as in Victoria currently), and assures members they have the backing of the branch in resisting this.

- NTEU Fightback

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Subject line: Unsafe Return to campus email

Dear Member,

In the recent NTEU Branch Delegates meeting, concerns were raised in relation to return to campus. I wrote to the RMIT Health and Safety Representatives to ascertain whether they had been consulted regarding return to campus (see the attachment).

In the midst of record levels of community transmission of COVID-19, RMIT is proceeding with a return to campus timeline which is almost indistinguishable from that developed prior to the current spike. There have been [three students](#) who have tested positive for COVID-19 after attending Bundoora campus since Tuesday 14 July, and staff members at Brunswick campus have been advised of another case there.

RMIT staff and students should not be compelled to return to campus amidst the resurgence of a deadly pandemic. [Workplace clusters are the main driver](#) of the latest wave of COVID infections in Victoria. Under the current [Metropolitan Melbourne restrictions](#) if we can work from home, we must do so, and universities "should continue to provide online or remote learning where possible".

Contrary to [RMIT management's statement](#) that only "students training in essential services are being supported to safely attend campus to complete practical elements of their courses that cannot be undertaken remotely", we understand non-essential reasons including some non-practical classes. There is little and inconsistent evidence that staff and their elected Occupational Health and Safety representatives have been properly consulted let alone allowed to conduct workplace inspections prior to returns to campus. In the delegates' meeting of last Friday heard from technical staff members whose repeated feedback on scheduling of spaces to reduce duration of close contact and allow sufficient time for cleaning were simply ignored by management.

**Call to action**

If your work area is being asked to return to campus, you should talk to your workmates and health and safety representative about

1. Whether it is essential that this work be done on campus, cannot be done from home, and can conceivably be done safely in the current context of community transmission.
2. Conduct an OHS risk assessment on your workplace prior to agreeing to any return to campus. Refer attached factsheet and for information visit:  
[https://www.nteu.org.au/whs/fact\\_sheets](https://www.nteu.org.au/whs/fact_sheets)

The bottom line is that you do not have to undertake work that you believe poses a serious and imminent risk to your health. If you and your workmates are being asked to work on campus in an unsafe manner, contact your Occupational Health and Safety representative and the NTEU at [rmit@nteu.org.au](mailto:rmit@nteu.org.au) for support in standing up against this.

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Attachment:

Email to RMIT HSRs regarding return to campus

29 July 2020.

Dear Health & Safety Representatives,

I write from RMIT NTEU Branch to ask whether you have been consulted regarding return to campus. RMIT is currently proceeding with a [return to campus timeline](#) which is almost indistinguishable from that which was developed prior to the current wave of COVID-19 infections. The NTEU do not believe that staff should be compelled to return to campus in this context.

[Workplace clusters are the main driver](#) of the latest wave of COVID infections in Victoria, and under the current [Metropolitan Melbourne restrictions](#) if we can work from home, we must do so, and universities “should continue to provide online or remote learning where possible”.

Where management is making a decision that could have an effect on health and safety in your workgroup, you must be consulted. This applies to any decision that staff should return to campus, as well as decisions around what safety measures should be used to keep them safe while there.

The NTEU have seen little evidence, and inconsistency approach to the question whether adequate consultation had occurred where staff had been asked to work on campus.

Please let us know whether you:

1. have been consulted about the return to campus (if return has occurred or is imminent in your area)
2. have a functional OHS Committee in your work group which meets regularly

3. are currently an OHS representative, or if not, whether you do have an active OHS representative for your work group.

If your work area is being asked to return to campus, we recommend that you

1. Consider whether it is essential that this work be done on campus, cannot be done from home, and can conceivably be done safely in the current context of community transmission.
2. Conduct an OHS risk assessment on your workplace prior to agreeing to any return to campus. Find relevant information here: [https://www.nteu.org.au/whs/fact\\_sheets](https://www.nteu.org.au/whs/fact_sheets)

The NTEU can provide you with support and advice in your role as an OHS Representative. You can find resources at [NTEU COVID-19 Workplace Health & Safety](#), and the union has staff dedicated to working on workplace health and safety issues. If you are not currently a NTEU member we would encourage you to [join the union](#) today.