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Working Remotely - IEU FAQs for Teachers

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Overview

This FAQs document is intended to address the professional concerns teachers may face if they are required to work remotely.

Support staff who are directed to continue interacting with students in an online environment will also find this document useful.

While general leave issues will be broadly addressed, it is not the intention of this document to provide specific industrial advice in this area as this is currently a very fluid environment. You are advised to consult the [Union website](#) for the most up to date information regarding the provision of leave in your school/sector during this current situation.

Where the information presented in this document is in conflict with guidelines or practices currently in place at your school and is of concern, you should contact your IEU Organiser who will be able to provide the most current advice and, if necessary, provide you with assistance in organising Chapter meetings to deal with these issues at a local level.

Members are reminded that their professional judgement must be acknowledged and respected, especially during these critical times. Where you are experiencing difficulties, you are advised to contact your Organiser for advice and support.

Mark Northam

Secretary IEUA (NSW/ACT Branch)

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1. When will I be required to work remotely?

Where a school is designated as non-operational (closed) by either a government agency or an employer, teachers would generally be expected to continue to carry out the same, similar, or alternative duties either:

- on-site with no students, or a limited number of students, present
- from your home
- from another suitable location.

2. Will I be paid for working remotely?

If you continue to carry out your work or similar/alternative duties at the direction of your employer, you are entitled to be paid.

It is the view of the IEU that, whether duties or alternative duties can be performed or not, all staff who are fit and available for work would continue to be eligible for payment, although some allowances may not be applicable during these periods.

3. What if I get sick while I am working remotely?

As is normally the case, if you are sick there is no requirement for you to work. You will be paid your normal sick leave provided you follow the usual school notice and evidentiary requirements.

The IEU recommends you confirm with your school what evidence requirements are appropriate as we assume employers would not wish to unnecessarily burden the medical system.

4. Am I covered by workers compensation when working from home/externally?

You are covered by normal workers compensation provisions provided you are actively engaged in employer directed duties.

5. Who will pay for my internet usage/hotspot data?

There is currently no clear indication as to whether additional allowances will be made for teachers working remotely. The IEU will be raising this with the employers.

All teachers are advised to keep accurate records of data usage and payment plans in the event of there being a future claim.

Teachers are also reminded there will be tax deduction implications for home office work.

6. Should a substitute teacher be engaged to replace me if I am sick?

It is the expectation of the union that the usual process of engaging casual teaching staff will continue, however, it is not entirely clear how schools will be able to respond to this situation. This may depend on the availability of casual staff and how feasible it is for casual teachers to have access to the school's Learning Management System (LMS).

The expectation from the union is that no member should be required to accept any additional workload due to the staff absences. All relevant Industrial Instruments continue to apply with respect to class sizes and teaching hours.

7. Do I have to work during school holidays?

As is currently the case, teachers are not required to work during non-term time. Teachers might continue to carry out their usual preparation, however, there is no obligation to interact with students, parents, or other faculty members during this time.

8. Should I receive training before being asked to work remotely?

If there is an expectation that the technologies for delivering the curriculum remotely are different to those that you currently use in the classroom, then training should be provided by your employer.

9. Do I have to provide work for students when I have some at school and some working from home?

While the schools remain open, there is no requirement to provide work for students who are voluntarily kept at home by their parents. This position may change over time.

Teachers should expect to contend with only one mode of instruction, face to face or online, and staffing arrangements at the local level should be organised so as to facilitate this. This may involve collapsing classes and/or forming multi-year instructional groups in primary, especially in the face to face context.

10. What issues should I consider when selecting a remote working environment?

If you are working on the school site you should continue to work in your usual workstation, in your classroom, or in another area determined to be safe and suitable.

If you are working from home or another off-site location, you should consider:

WHS issues

- Especially with respect to the ergonomics of your desk, chair, and computer setup (see Working Safely at Home brochure).

- You are also advised to be careful of trip hazards with respect to extension leads.

Privacy issues

- It would **not be appropriate** for you to be in a public forum (cafe etc) or in the general living area of your house when others are present while conducting a lesson.

The specific needs of the curriculum you are delivering

- For example, if you are delivering lessons which might require students to make verbal contributions, you will need to consider the possibility of external noises (traffic, television).

Protect yourself from reportable conduct allegations by maintaining appropriate and safe work practices

- Ensure that any digital platform that you are teaching on has been approved by your employer.
- If it is necessary to engage in one on one private conversations with students, you are advised to ensure there is a record of the conversation being kept.
- You are reminded that conversations which may appear reasonable in a face to face environment may be misconstrued in the online environment.
- Use students given names and avoid using nick names.

Background Images etc

- If you do choose to conduct video conferencing be very aware of what background images the students can see eg the content of bookshelves etc.
- Be aware of camera angles and how they might distort your features or compromise you in any way.

Dress

- Teachers should always dress professionally if they are engaging in video conferencing.
- Teachers should insist that students are appropriately attired if they are engaging in video conferencing.

Use of personal devices

- Teachers are strongly encouraged to ensure the device on which they are working is free from any personal material which they do not want to be made public.

Wifi access

- Teachers are advised to avoid accessing a publicly available wifi, such as a common building wifi account.

11. What hours will I be expected to teach when working externally?

The IEU recommends that teachers should adopt a practice of officially logging on/registering by electronic means (eg an email or text) at the commencement and conclusion of your working day.

Teachers should expect to be interacting directly with students online for the same number of hours as they currently undertake in the face to face environment. Other time throughout the day would be spent preparing for future lessons and providing feedback on students' work as appropriate.

12. Do I need to provide evidence of the work I have been undertaking during the day?

As is currently the case, a teacher is responsible for managing their own professional planning time. There is no expectation this would change as we move into a remote working environment.

While it may be appropriate for your coordinating or supervising teacher to discuss with you on a weekly basis the broad outline of the areas of preparation you anticipate undertaking during the week, any request for evidence of work being completed which adds to your existing workload should be declined.

13. What should I be taking into account when considering conducting video lessons while working remotely?

The IEU is mindful that all schools will have their own social media and child safety protocols.

The IEU advises that, unless you are delivering your lesson through a school provided Learning Management System, you should avoid engaging in video lessons. Extreme caution should be exercised if considering a publicly available platform which allows you to view students in their home environment or students to view you in your home.

If you are wanting to use a publicly available video conferencing platform, you should have the explicit approval of your principal.

Be aware that there are software programs available which allow students to record your audio-visual presentations without you being aware it is happening.

The video conference room is a classroom and the same school behaviour and discipline policies apply to this environment.

Do not allow any unauthorised access to the video conference room, this includes parents, unless they have been authorised to attend by the teacher prior to the class. An example of this may be a Kindergarten class with reading and the parent/carer who may usually come into the class to support reading time.

Similar to the classroom, teachers should ensure that all invited guest adult speakers have a Working With Children Check (WWCC) before being admitted into an online room.

Most of the products will allow the teacher (host) to remove participants if needed. You should familiarise yourself with this facility prior to commencing your lesson.

You are strongly advised to add a password to the room to ensure extra security when using Zoom.

Where possible teachers should enter the room before the start time, so students are not in the online room without a teacher who is the host or co-host for the prescribed lesson.

Teachers should not conduct a 1:1 lesson or wellbeing focussed meeting with a student. In the rare event that this may need to occur, it is best practice to ensure that there is a student nominated parent/carer present and another teacher.

Turn off student camera rights for students unless they need to demonstrate their learning to the class. In most programs, individual camera access can be enabled and disabled as required by the teacher.

Be careful when using screen sharing; confidential information can be accidentally shared if it is open on your personal device.

Limit students' ability to chat amongst one another during a lesson unless it is required for group work. An in-meeting chat can be disabled by most software for the entire lesson.

If you are uncomfortable engaging in video conferencing with students, you should request that your employer allow you to deliver the curriculum in another manner. Please contact your IEU Organiser if this request is refused.

14. What is an appropriate level of student engagement/feedback when working remotely? How available should I be to my students?

Teachers are advised to be mindful that they will largely be responsible for setting the boundaries with respect to their online availability. The teacher's professional judgement in this respect should be recognised and acknowledged by both the school leadership and parents.

Many schools now have mature email policies which serve to regulate student and parental online access to teachers. Teachers are encouraged to set clearly defined limits with their students. Where possible teachers are encouraged to work with their school leadership teams to develop an agreed set of guidelines or a policy which seeks to clarify what constitutes appropriate demands on teacher availability.

Many schools may have policies and procedures with respect to exam turnaround marking times. Teachers are reminded that, while these timeframes may be appropriate for the defined period of semester or end of course exams, it may not be appropriate to implement such tight turnaround expectations in an ongoing capacity.

As with any sound teaching practice you are advised to provide students with:

- Clear instructions regarding the learning activity

- Clarity as to when and how students should submit work (consider having mini deadlines to ensure students are consistently engaged)
- Easy access to any resource materials.

Many Learning Management Systems (LMS) allow for a chat room/discussion/forum section. Encourage students to ask their questions here, allowing you to answer FAQs for the whole class.

Develop and publish an explicit class communication plan which advises students:

- How to use the discussion forum (or its equivalent)? You might wish to remind students about this on a regular basis.
- The usual timeframe in which you would expect to respond to questions/posts.
- The threshold where students might wish to send you an email. You might even wish to have a policy where they should only send an email if you invite them to do so in the chat room.
- What sort of regular communication you will be sending out? Get them into a regular habit of checking.

As is currently the case, you may wish to make yourself available for a one on one chat to support a student with more complex needs. You should keep in mind all the social media and child safety advice previously detailed.

15. What involvement should I expect from parents/care givers?

As is always the case, parents/care givers should be considered the first educators of their children. While students are working from home, it is the responsibility of parents to ensure they are in a position to actively and effectively engage in the learning process.

It is reasonable to expect that a parent or care giver will check on the student from time to time to ensure that the student is actively engaged in the learning activity and is not experiencing any technical difficulties.

Parents should not attempt to communicate with a teacher when they are conducting an online lesson but should communicate with the teacher as per standard practice, eg via email.

If students are not actively engaged in the learning activities made available to them, teachers should advise the leadership team and the parents.

Schools should have an email policy providing guidelines for how parents should interact with staff. The timeframe within which staff can be expected to respond to email inquiries or requests should continue to apply in the remote working environment.

16. What if I have my own carer's duties to attend to?

You will continue to have access to carer's leave during this time if your child or a member of your immediate family or household is sick.

The union is seeking to clarify with employers the leave arrangements which apply to staff who are absent from work to care for children who are not sick.

17. What if I have technical issues while working remotely?

Prior to you moving to the remote working environment, you should establish with your school leadership team what processes might be available to you in the event you experience technical issues. It is recommended that you should have an appropriate school phone contact in the event of the internet being down.

If there are significant issues such as the network being down or a systemic failure of the school's LMS, you should keep accurate records of the times when you are unable to directly interact with the students.

18. What if I have students without access to the internet?

It would be best practice for your school leadership team to establish which students will not have access to online learning from home prior to moving to remote learning.

If you suspect that a student has their access to online learning interrupted (eg they have not logged in for a scheduled lesson), you should notify the appropriate person at the school.

19. I work with special needs students. What should I be doing?

The IEU recommends that teachers working with students with special needs establish clear protocols and expectations with the students, parents and the school leadership to ensure the appropriate level of curriculum delivery.

20. What should I do if I suspect a student is experiencing emotional issues?

As per standard practice, you should contact the relevant person at your school and/or parent as appropriate.

21. Should I agree to supervise a small number of students on-site?

The IEU acknowledges that schools will be important places during this difficult time for students at risk and the children of essential service workers.

It may be a reasonable request of staff to continue working on-site, depending on the circumstances, the outcome of a risk assessment, and appropriate hygiene and safety materials being made available.

Members are advised to raise any concerns they have with their employer and contact the union for further advice or support if required.

Staff should follow normal school protocols with respect to being alone with students, building security, physical distancing etc.

22. Will I need to change my teaching programs?

This will be an evolving situation. The IEU is advising that teachers should attend to the everyday processes of ensuring students have ongoing work and are receiving appropriate levels of feedback. Any paperwork regarding programs and registration should be kept to a minimum as teachers make the transition to remote learning.

23. Will this affect my accreditation cycle?

NESA is yet to clarify this, however, the IEU will be strongly advocating that teachers should not be adversely affected by the current situation.

Resources

This section will be updated regularly

eSafety Commissioner – classroom resources

<https://www.esafety.gov.au/educators/classroom-resources>

Australian Curriculum – Online Safety

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections/portfolios/online-safety/>

So You Want to Temporarily Teach Online? Some practical advice for instructors in the short term

https://insidehighered.com/advice/2020/03/11/practical-advice-instructors-faced-abrupt-move-online-teaching-opinion?utm_content=buffer3e0b0&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=IHEbuffer&fbclid=IwAR3II7i2ziv7I60FLY8IRGkr3bZ0QweBSibJ5jPvpScqdLd6gzOH58c3L-8

How to Clean a Laptop Keyboard

<https://www.wikihow.com/Clean-a-Laptop-Keyboard>

Covid 19 and Online Learning for Students – School Governance

https://www.schoolgovernance.net.au/news/covid-19-and-online-learning-for-students?utm_campaign=School%20Governance%20&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=84951205&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8-8c9ce304P1DZDwNmewO6b2nVRLQzZV8zoSM9DfBL-DaRGN-YDLbE-BBTK6vUJOOhtaSFulzCqw6AaT5j839POhz_sg&hsmi=84951205

Safe Work Australia - COVID-19 Information for workplaces

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces>