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Early Childhood Education



CHAPTER BRIEFING No. 10

DECKAS FUNDING – SOME CLARIFICATION

Dear Colleagues

The Queensland government has finally provided some clarification in relation to the future of DECKAS funding for early childhood education centres.

We have attached to this briefing a copy of a letter which was received yesterday from the Minister for Education, Training and the Arts.

Despite the content of the letter a number of key issues remain unresolved for employees in the early childhood sector.

Comparability of Wages

The Minister for Education, Training and the Arts has indicated that the revised DECKAS funding model will provide for a 4% wage increase effective from 1 July 2009.

Historically, teachers in early childhood education have received the same wage increases as those received by teachers employed by Education Queensland. The quantum of the July 2009 wage increase for teachers in Education Queensland is yet to be determined by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. Whilst the state government has offered 4% from 1 July, the Queensland Teachers Union has claimed 5.4% from 1 July to take account of the delay in the payment.

The Minister for Education, Training and the Arts must commit DECKAS funding to match the wage increase eventually determined by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission.

ACSEA must negotiate now

Over recent months the Australian Community Services Employers Association (ACSEA) has refused to participate in collective bargaining negotiations. The reason given for this refusal related to uncertainty around DECKAS funding.

In light of the letter from the Minister for Education, Training and the Arts there is now no impediment to ACSEA heeding the calls of employees and their union to return to the negotiating table.

Further, ACSEA must not use these negotiation in an attempt to reduce any existing conditions of employment.

Employer position on wages

The attitude adopted by your employer will be crucial in maintaining the comparability of your wage rates and the rates received by teachers employed by Education Queensland.

We have written, on your behalf, to your employer's representative asking for support in maintaining the comparability of wage increases with those received by teachers in Education Queensland.

Consequently, the opportunity exists for your employer's representative, the Australian Community Services Employers Association (ACSEA), to demonstrate that it values the work of teachers in early childhood education by supporting the claim for comparability of wage increases.

On behalf of Assistants we claimed significantly enhanced wage rates in June 2004. ACSEA has never provided a counter proposal. Their only response (in the limited negotiations which have occurred) was to suggest that the rates for Assistants need to be discounted because, unlike assistants covered by the child care award, they 'only work' for 41 weeks.

Again, the opportunity now exists for your employer and/or its representative to adopt a constructive position on valuing the work of early childhood education assistants.

Teacher registration

On 23 July 2009 the Minister for Education Training and the Arts made the following statement on Hansard:

"We are on the road to providing universal access to a kindergarten program for all 3½- to 4½- year-old children in Queensland as part of the 'flying start' election commitment. Offering programs run by highly trained teachers is a key aspect of this strategy because we know that professional early childhood teachers play a crucial role in preparing Queensland kids for school and life. In Queensland, registration with the Queensland College of Teachers ensures teacher quality. That is why I am committed to looking into options for formally recognising teachers working in early childhood education settings under legislation.

Currently the Queensland College of Teachers Act formally recognises under legislation teaching experience in schools for full registration purposes. Recognition of teachers in ECEC settings occurs only under board policy and is currently limited to those teaching an approved program who are seeking full registration. I would like to see this formalised in legislation and extended to provide suitably qualified teachers in ECEC settings the same recognition as teachers in schools. This would enable teachers to work across ECEC settings and schools without having to complete a return-to-school program. This will provide greater mobility for schoolteachers wishing to teach in an ECEC setting as well as stronger linkages between Queensland's kindergarten program and the early years of schooling.

These changes will also provide the Queensland community with confidence in the quality of kindergarten programs because of the qualified teachers educating these young children."

After years of advocacy we look forward to this commitment becoming a reality.

Modern Award

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) is due, on 25 September 2009, to release its decision regarding the Modern Award to cover early childhood education.

The AIRC can determine that early childhood education is covered by:

- the education awards which apply to schools; or
- a new education award(s) applying specifically to early childhood education; or
- the 'modern award' proposed to cover childcare.

Whatever the AIRC decision, a further opportunity will exist to provide submissions to the AIRC. Consequently, QIEU is organising an information session on the AIRC decision to be held on Friday 2 October 2009 at the O'Shea Centre, 19 Lovedale Street, Wilston, for employees in early childhood education.

This session will consider the content of the AIRC decision, its implications for the employment conditions of employees, and the responses necessary on behalf of employees. A further Briefing, providing an opportunity to RSVP, will be sent to you closer to the event.

Kind regards

John Spriggs
Senior Industrial Officer