

In this edition

- Collective Bargaining
- Graduate Information Sessions
- Teaching Students With Special Needs
- Teaching In Remote Areas
- Thoughts From a 2nd Year Teacher
- Graduate Registration
- Member Profile
- What's New?

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING What It Means For Graduates

As a graduate, support and advice from your employer, colleagues and union can ensure you are on the right track for a rewarding and satisfying career.

A survey conducted by QIEU in late 2008, highlighted that a lack of support and a fear of the unknown were some of the most common concerns facing graduates in the first year of their career.

Collective bargaining negotiations are currently occurring in both state and non-government education sectors and providing support for graduates is a key element.

Collective bargaining is a process by which employers and employees engage in structured discussions to determine employment conditions in the workplace and there are many graduate issues that are being brought to the table.

Making sure formalised induction programs are in place in workplaces, having clear processes in regards to teacher registration, reduced teaching loads and mentoring, are some of the issues currently being discussed.

In addition, professional rates of pay for all education professionals is an important goal for which QIEU members are fighting. Negotiations are currently focusing on the need

for professional rates of pay at least consistent with interstate benchmarks. Currently, Queensland graduate teachers are the lowest paid on the Australian mainland; failure to achieve commensurate wages could see graduate numbers falling and a further exodus of experienced teachers from the profession.

The ability of QIEU members to be successful in their claims around these and other issues is dependent on a majority of staff standing together as members of our union, being educated about the issues facing our profession and taking action to ensure that all education professionals, especially graduates, are treated with respect and dignity.

Recent statewide workplace meetings, held in over 550 Queensland schools, was an example of QIEU member collective strength. The workplace meetings demonstrated to employers that achieving professional rates of pay is critical in ensuring the best quality teaching and learning environments for all Queensland students in the future.

As a graduate, you have a very important role to play. By being a QIEU member, getting involved in chapter activities and encouraging your colleagues to do the same, you will be supporting the campaign to ensure the best possible working rights and conditions for all Queensland teaching professionals is achieved.

QIEU Graduate Information Sessions

Earlier this year, QIEU held a series of Graduate Teacher Information Sessions throughout Queensland. The sessions run in Bundaberg, Townsville, Emerald, Rockhampton, Gold Coast and Brisbane, gave an overview of what new teachers need to consider when starting their careers.

Issues such as duty of care, provisional registration, teaching loads, fixed term contracts, occupational health and safety, classroom strategies and professional issues were covered.

QIEU organiser Sherryl Saunders said the information sessions, which also included one via teleconference to remote area teachers, were designed to give as much information as possible to graduates.

"The sessions were about giving practical information to professionals in their first year of teaching and showing there is a variety of help available," she said. "We also discussed how best to get involved with your union and how this can further one's professional development."

Nicola Gordon, graduate teacher from the Islamic College of Brisbane, said the graduate information sessions were invaluable. "It was great to find out the answers to many of the questions I had," she said. "It was good to get professional advice from outside of my workplace also."



Graduate teacher Nicola Gordon from the Islamic College of Brisbane with QIEU Organiser Sherryl Saunders.

REGIONAL AND REMOTE AREA TEACHING - REWARDS FAR OUTWEIGH THE CHALLENGES

Being a graduate teacher in a regional or remote area school may seem daunting to some people, but for Danielle Mastrippolito, teacher at St Peter's Catholic Primary School in Halifax and Debbie Jensen, teacher at St Patrick's Primary School in Winton, the rewards far outweigh the challenges.

Danielle decided to work regionally because she wanted to experience life in a small rural community. Danielle said working at her school, which has 23 students, two full time teachers and is situated between houses and cane fields, has enabled her to have many opportunities as a graduate.

"My role in the workplace lends itself to many things," she said. "I am the P-3 teacher, music teacher, parish council member, playgroup co-ordinator, safety person, union representative and P&C committee member."

Likewise, Debbie, whose school of 37 students is 32 steps from her front door, said remote teaching had always appealed to her.

"I sing and have travelled a lot around Queensland performing when I was a young girl and I always found people in the bush, lovely down to earth people," she said. "I felt I had something a bit extra to offer a rural community and I can combine my love of performing with classroom teaching."

Life as a remote area teacher can be challenging. Both Danielle and Debbie said preparing classes for a diversity of year groups, not having many colleagues to share ideas with, lack of resources, taking on extra duties and sometimes missing out on professional development, can be isolating. However, Danielle feels these challenges have only helped her to be further respected in her



Debbie Jensen

community and more qualified and experienced in her field.

"Planning for a multi-age class is a hard reality to become familiar with," she said. "However, I do not have the issue of hours of marking or reporting, so I can spend more time planning and individualising programs for students to achieve the highest they can."

Debbie agreed. "The small classes allow you to really get to know the kids, their abilities, strengths, likes and dislikes," she said. "You have more opportunities to work one on one with children who need support, plus there is always time for a laugh!"

Both teachers believed the most attractive aspect of working regionally or remotely is being part of a small community. "Living in a small town you get to develop relationships with parents who tell me that their kids love coming to school each day," Debbie said. "What more could a teacher ask for?"

Both also feel it is wise for graduates to be members of QIEU. "It's great to know that I am supported," Danielle said. "Any beginning teacher should seriously think about becoming a member."

Danielle and Debbie said if you are thinking about working in a regional or remote area you have to prepare yourself for the change in scenery and for the multi faceted roles you will undertake.

"It never ceases to amaze me just how flat and desolate the country is out here," Debbie said. "I have seen a plague of grasshoppers jump right over my car and the amount of stars and the clarity of them is just incredible."

Added Danielle, "You also have to prepare yourself for the wonderful welcome you will be given and how you will be perceived as just not a teacher, but a person."



Danielle Mastrippolito

Teaching Students With Special Needs

QIEU's graduate survey, conducted earlier this year, highlighted that first year teachers wanted to find out more information about working with students with special needs.

Special needs students are those who have been given a diagnosis such as Autism, Attention Deficit Disorder, Intellectual Impairment or Spectrum Disorder, by a professional and also receive government funding.

Elaine Dobeli, QIEU member and Middle and Senior School Enrichment Assistant from Canterbury College, Waterford has been supporting students with special needs for over a decade. Elaine said there are some students who do not fit into the special needs category, however do have learning difficulties.

"They continually score poorly in assessment items and are well known as being the students who are of a lower level to the mainstream students," she said. "Areas like general comprehension relating to a maths task can leave the student confused, even though they may well know how to achieve the end result."

Sometimes special needs students can be hard to identify. Elaine said you need to look for signs such as disengagement, a student putting in a great effort but achieving poor results, or a student appearing to understand in class, but having shown no comprehension when it comes to assessments.

Elaine said the best way to feel comfortable teaching students with special needs, is to make sure you make yourself aware about whom it is you are teaching.

"I would recommend that graduate teachers approach the Learning Support Department within the school and ask whether there are students in their class who were identified as being special needs," she said. "Most importantly, is the need to understand the intricacies of special needs students. (This) entails knowing what the underlying components are and what is standing in the way for students with these disabilities."

Elaine said differentiation is the key to success in the classroom. "If a student is having problems with the structure of an assignment, it may be necessary to scaffold," she said. "At the beginning of the year, it is advisable also to set the classroom in a U-shaped position until you get to know the personalities of the students and rotational group activities which suit all learning styles would be great."

Elaine suggested accessing professional development related to special needs education as much as you can, but felt patience is the key to working with these young people. "Be positive with students who have learning difficulties, they already know they are 'different,' she said. "Reward, recognise and encourage the efforts that students with special needs have put into tasks, however small it may seem."

Confidence Grows in Second Year of Teaching

"My first year of teaching in 2008 was fantastic, however at times it was really stressful and hectic. I love the world of business and the opportunity to combine my favourite subject area with teaching was perfect.

My first day of teaching was terrifying. I was so worried about whether the students would be polite and how I was going to go being in a classroom all by myself. By the end of term one last year, I started to feel comfortable in my workplace and I began to experiment with different strategies in the classroom. I loved the fact that I could develop my own classroom ethics based on my evaluations. I found this very fulfilling.

I found marking assessments very challenging in my graduate year. I had a Grade 12 class and I was very conscientious about marking drafts. I also had to ensure I was teaching to syllabus requirements and marking to the same standard as my colleagues. I also had to make sure I was providing students with the right amount of guidance in terms of completing assessment.

One of my biggest challenges as a graduate teacher was my younger age. Of course students want you to relate to them but there were times when I felt marks were overstepped. Students sometimes considered me a friend and I had to make it clear to them that while I could empathise, I was their teacher. I did seek advice about how to handle these types of situations from my union representative, who suggested I keep a working diary, which I now have.

Starting my second year of teaching this year, I knew what I had to do, although I was still nervous about having new classes and how they would respond to my teaching. However, I felt more comfortable and confident as a teacher. I have been able to focus on lessons from last year and have started to suggest changes to assessment with my Head of Department. One big lesson I did learn from my graduate

year, was that you have to set expectations and guidelines for when goals are not followed through by students.

I am planning to apply for full registration in Term 3 this year. I have identified different lessons that worked well from my first year and I will be able to show my principal the best of my teaching. I am glad I have waited until my second year to do this, as I feel I have planted my feet firmly in my school, which will make the teacher registration process easier.

I have found that openness is the best policy to have as a teacher just starting out. It's fine to ask for help and being a part of our union is important. Being a part of this collective has made me feel more secure and my chapter representative has been a mentor to me, freely answering my questions on issues I am unsure about."



"It's fine to ask for help and being part of our union is important."

Melissa Favero-2nd year Business, Accounting and Enterprise Education teacher and QIEU member-St Rita's College, Clayfield.

The graduate area on the QIEU website has recently been revamped with new information and resources added.

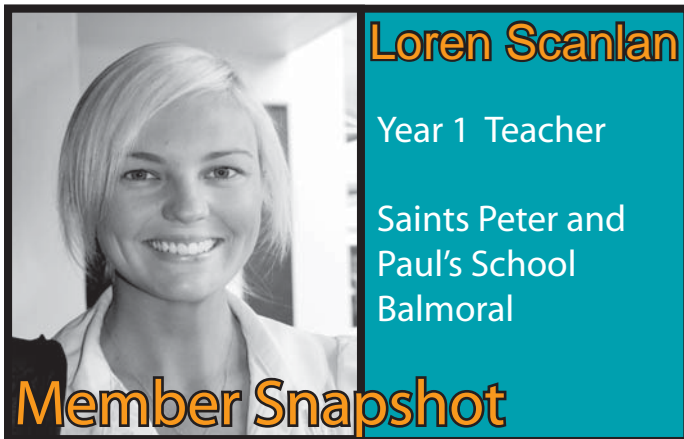
The new area on the website now includes:

- The QIEU membership form and information about membership benefits;**
- Information about upcoming events;**
- Resources to assist you as you find your feet in your first year;**
- Back issues of Grad News and other QIEU publications;**
- Frequently asked questions; and**
- Information about how to contact QIEU.**

You can access the graduate section of the QIEU website at www.qieu.asn.au by selecting "graduates and associates" under "membership sectors" on the home page.

Graduates are reminded to keep up-to-date with their requirements regarding moving from provisional to full teacher registration with the Queensland College of Teachers (QCT).

More information about what is required can be found at the Queensland College of Teachers website www.qct.edu.au. If you need any further advice or assistance regarding your teacher registration, please contact the QIEU office on freecall 1800 177 937 and ask to speak to a Member Services Officer



What have been the highlights of your year so far?

The highlights of my year have been: building a positive rapport with students, colleagues and parents; creating a classroom environment that nurtures, includes and motivates all students; and witnessing the sense of triumph and pride felt by students when they accomplish something they never thought possible.

What issues have you identified as concerning you as a graduate teacher?

The increasing workload placed on teachers makes it somewhat difficult to fit everything into the daily life of the classroom, which is already extremely busy. It is therefore imperative to plan your days and ask for advice if needed.

Do you have a mentor this year? If so how has this relationship helped with your professional development?

I am extremely fortunate to be working alongside two dedicated, professional and experienced mentor teachers. They offer constant advice, guidance and a listening ear. Without their patience and support, along with that of my colleagues, I would not be as confident and comfortable in my classroom as I am today. Words cannot express the positive impact these mentors have had on my professional development.

What type of professional development would you like to undertake over the next year?

I am prepared to undertake any professional development that will allow me to develop knowledge, skills and understanding in the teaching profession. My aim is to be the best teacher I possibly can and professional development will aid this vision.

How has your union chapter made you feel included?

My union chapter has warmly welcomed me into their community. QIEU has also done this in various ways, including mailing of important and useful documents, telephoning to check all is running smoothly and simply offering a friendly voice when needed.

Why do you believe its important for graduate teachers to join QIEU?

It is important for graduate teachers to join QIEU in order to develop a strong and reliable support system where questions can be asked and advice gained. QIEU offers guidance across a variety of teaching areas. It is imperative to be covered for any issues that may arise and to have confidence that these issues will be handled appropriately. It is wonderful to be rest assured that your career is in capable and competent hands.

What do you see as your biggest challenges?

My biggest challenge is to continually develop and grow as a teacher, aiming to master and vary my ways of teaching. I endeavour to create a nurturing, stimulating, motivating and inclusive classroom, incorporating a vast array of teaching techniques to aid the many learning styles of students. It is my responsibility to guide each student to achieve optimum success and a sense of purpose in the world.

What's the best thing about teaching?

There is no greater feeling then walking into your very own classroom each morning, greeted by 26 smiling, happy and inspiring children ready and willing to learn. I feel so much pride and joy witnessing such excited students take part in rich learning experiences created by myself. Contributing to the school life of many students is a truly sensational feeling!

WHAT'S NEW AT QIEU FOR GRADUATES?

"What's New At QIEU," is a new section in Grad News which will provide information about what QIEU is doing to assist graduates in the first year of their career. Some recent activities include:

- A revamped website which will provide you with more information and resources to assist you in your first year, including information about wages, working rights and professional development opportunities.
- The QIEU call centre is currently ringing graduates who finished university at the end of 2008 and mid 2009 to see how the job search is going.
- Professional development opportunities for graduates continues. The information sessions earlier in the year have been followed up with a session about finding employment in the non-government sector which was held early in July.

JOIN YOUR UNION TODAY

Help build strength in order to enhance the working rights and conditions of all GRADUATES and EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS in schools.

To join QIEU, download a membership form from www.qieu.asn.au or call our membership department on freecall 1800 177 937.

ISSN: 1835-9612

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