

To	Executive	HX20/017
	Te Huarahi	Strategic Plan Ref: Policy
		18 March 2020
From	Michael Stevenson, General Secretary and Yvonne Oldfield, DGS (Policy)	

Zoom meeting – 7 pm, Sunday 22 March 2020

Recommendation:

1. THAT the report be received.

Association response to COVID-19

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to update the Executive on the Association's response to COVID-19. Both our member-facing work and Association operations are discussed.

Though the rate of infection is declining in China, the spread of COVID-19 is increasing in other parts of the world, including New Zealand.

We are learning, all of a sudden, what a global pandemic requires of us and this is difficult for everyone - difficult for students, difficult for parents and difficult for teachers, emotionally, practically and financially. We worry about each other, our friends, our comrades, our loved ones and ourselves.

We do not know yet what all the global risks will be.

As a union, we must commit to working in the spirit of solidarity and co-operation, joining with members across the motu to fight this global health emergency.

2. Government response

On Tuesday 17 March, the New Zealand Government announced a \$12.1 billion support fund. This followed a decision from prime minister Ardern on the weekend to impose a 14 day quarantine period for anyone entering the country (excluding travel to and from the Pacific Islands).

Unlike some other nations, New Zealand is yet to close all schools.

3. PPTA events

It was with a heavy heart the professional conference was postponed until April 2021.

If the conference had proceeded, it would have been without the international keynote speakers and some workshop presenters. Registrations were also starting to fall.

It is better to hold the best conference ever in 2021, rather than a flat conference next month in the midst of a pandemic.

We are starting to postpone further events, e.g. mahi tika and regional wellbeing workshops. The Subject Association Forum will be held by Zoom.

At some point, we will have to make a call on the flagship July events of MTC, Fono and the inaugural PCT's conference.

4. PPTA management

DGS (Policy) Yvonne Oldfield is the PPTA manager responsible for our response to COVID-19.

There are several reasons for this, including: the General Secretary still has leave planned for late April to early June (although the Executive are within their rights to cancel this) and Yvonne's family situation is better suited to overseeing pandemic management should New Zealand go into lockdown (Michael has 3 small children).

5. Regional chairs meet by Zoom

We held a briefing by Zoom for regional chairs on Thursday 19 March. The purpose of holding the regional chairs meeting prior to the Executive Zoom was so the Sunday evening meeting could be informed by the questions raised by chairpeople.

The key points for the regional chairs meeting were:

- Information sources: we are putting out information on a daily basis, please look at it. And you can trust the MoE information – safe to refer to that.
- Leave and Pay entitlements: no major problems; teachers will continue to be paid.
- Health & Safety at school: now is the time for health and safety reps to be involved in aspects of health and safety decision making relating to their school's Covid-19 response.
- Supporting student learning when the school is open: supporting student learning where there are a few students away - either because they are self-isolating or are recovering from the virus - is not different from any student absence.
- School closures – working remotely and supporting students: schools will be closing, although not necessarily for lengthy periods, or all at once.
- When they do teachers have an important role in maintaining student engagement and learning but it will not be “business as usual” because of digital inequities and teacher workload.
- Events unfolding: PPTA is providing support for those schools who have had students or staff closely affected by Covid-19.
- The PPTA's continuity plan: PPTA will be able to continue to offer core services in the event of wide reaching closures.

6. Health and Safety at Work Act

The Health and Safety at Work Act is relevant, as it essentially gives workers the right to stop work if they feel unsafe.

That said, and as a union, a collective response is best rather being forced with a situation where individual members and branches are walking off the job.

Leadership and communication are the two key elements here.

The relevant section from the Act is as follows:

83 *Right of worker to cease or refuse to carry out unsafe work*

- (1) *A worker may cease, or refuse to carry out, work if the worker believes that carrying out the work would expose the worker, or any other person, to a serious risk to the worker's or other person's health or safety arising from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.*
- (2) *A worker may continue to refuse to carry out the work if—*
 - (a) *the worker attempts to resolve the matter with the PCBU as soon as practicable after first refusing to do the work; and*
 - (b) *the matter is not resolved; and*
 - (c) *the worker believes on reasonable grounds that carrying out the work would expose the worker or any other person to a serious risk to the worker's or other person's health or safety arising from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.*
- (3) *Without limiting subsection (2)(c), **reasonable grounds** exist if a health and safety representative has advised the worker that carrying out the work would expose the worker or any other person to a serious risk to the worker's or other person's health or safety arising from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard.*
- (4) *A worker who ceases work under subsection (1) must, as soon as practicable, notify the PCBU that the worker has ceased work.*
- (5) *Subsection (1) does not authorise a worker to refuse to do work that, because of its nature, inherently or usually carries an understood risk to the worker's health and safety, unless that risk has materially increased beyond the understood risk.*
- (6) *To avoid doubt, nothing in this section limits or affects an employee's right to refuse to do work under any other enactment or the general law.*

Compare: 1992 No 96 [s 28A](#); Model Work Health and Safety Act (Aust) ss 84, 86

7. Ministry meetings and updates

- Anthony Neyland and Adele Scott have represented the Association at Ministry of Education school closure meetings and have published External

Meeting Reports. Neyland and Scott report the meetings are frustrating with Ministry silos developing.

- The Ministry is publishing daily COVID-19 bulletins and PPTA advice summarises the key pieces of this information. The bulletins are also posted in the *Bring Out the Best* Facebook Group.

8. Further operations, including implementation of duty officer system and VPN



PPTA pandemic
preparedness plan18l

9. When schools are open for instruction and when are they not?

An Executive member has asked the question, “What if teachers are at school delivering on-line learning but students are at home”? In this situation the school is open for instruction. Curriculum is being delivered and the definition of “open for instruction” does not require that instruction occurs on a specific physical site.

10. Executive role in supporting Association social media

Executive members continue to play a crucial role by moderating and calming their fellow members on social media. This is especially relevant in the *Bring Out the Best* Facebook Group with messages of “don’t panic” and posting links back to official PPTA advice when the debate goes wayward. We appreciate the Executive’s continued support in PPTA social media spaces.