

our TAFE our TAFE

Customer Service Staff relocation Work, Health and Safety issues and PSA response

Following the relocation of South Western Sydney Institute (SWSI) Customer Service staff to the library area, members have reported serious WHS issues to the PSA.

Many of these issues were raised by the PSA before staff had moved, and SWSI gave assurances that the risks associated with the move had been thoroughly assessed and strategies to mitigate these risks implemented.

Unfortunately, despite these assurances, the PSA received reports of an assault occurring at Miller College as well as other instances of concern.

In response, the PSA notified management of concerns with their work environment. The PSA informed them that until the library areas at Miller and Macquarie Fields were made safe, we were advising members to report for work at a safe location for suitable alternative duties.

Division 6, Part 84 of the WHS act 2011 states:

“a worker may cease, or refuse to carry out, work if the worker has a reasonable concern that to carry out the work would expose the worker to a serious risk to the workers health and safety, emanating from an immediate or imminent exposure to a hazard”.

Members who wished to follow this clause and refuse to work in an environment they did not feel safe in have been supported by the PSA.

Management response

As a direct response to this action, management sought a meeting with the PSA to discuss members' concerns and temporary changes were made at Miller College.

The PSA met with management at Miller on Wednesday 27 May 2015 to discuss the issues and make it clear to management that WHS issues needed to be addressed.

At that meeting, management provided the following information:

- Inappropriate work stations – Miller College set up a new temporary desk and workstations which has created a barrier between staff and students and also freed up space in the back area.
- Electrical hazards – the EFTPOS machines creating the hazard have been moved.
- Noise issues – management stated partitions between desks would not be installed.
- Tiny front workstations – management believe staff were still getting used to using the front areas as intended and too many unnecessary items were being stored on desks. They reiterated staff needed to alter their work practices to accommodate changes. However, management did confirm they were investigating the purchase of new furniture, which would address these concerns.
- Intimidating work environment – management believe that there is no requirement to have any barrier between staff and students. SWSI remains committed to this principle, calling it a side-by-side model. However, until a risk assessment is completed on the new areas, a temporary installation of a barrier at Miller would be implemented to accommodate the increased traffic during enrolment periods.

- Risk assessment timeframe – due to a staffing issue, they were unable to provide a definitive timeline on when the completed risk assessments would be ready. However, they did give an indication they would get back to the PSA with a timeframe.

Member meetings

Following the meeting with management, the PSA met with staff at both Miller and Macquarie Fields to provide this feedback, and to speak further about their concerns.

Members remain concerned about the following:

- Noise issues – these have not been resolved and the overcrowding of the back office area remains an issue. There also remains no space for private or confidential conversations to occur.
- Front workstations – the lack of separation between staff and students means multiple people may have access to the private information of individuals. Software in use by staff is not designed for use in public areas and confidential information is visible on screen during routine processes.
- Intimidating work environment – staff remain concerned about the ability of students (especially when attending the hub in groups) to crowd around members of staff performing their duties at the front desks.
- Library staff – it was noted that little consultation had occurred with library staff and the affect these changes had on their work environment. It was noted that, to date, only the professionalism of local management and staff had allowed the change to have worked as well as it had to date.
- Student culture – members believed that nothing had been done to educate the

student body on expectations when dealing with staff. No signage had been provided to assist in this education process.

- Cultural change in management – members were concerned that despite their good faith in attempting to implement the new customer service model, management didn't seem to consider their concerns as legitimate.

Bankstown and Campbelltown hubs

Due to the different setup of the hubs, concerns may be different at each college. The PSA plans to organise meetings at the Bankstown and Campbelltown Customer Service hubs shortly to speak to members at these locations. To request a meeting at your college, and to express any issues you may have, please contact the PSA (contact details below).

What you can do?

1. Document any problems that arise.
2. Talk with other members to see if they share your concerns.
3. Talk to non-members about joining, as the more members at a site, the stronger your PSA is.

The PSA awaits the finalisation of the promised risk assessments and will consult with members following their release to discuss how the risks to staff can be minimised. In the interim, members should remain aware of their rights under WHS legislation and report any incidents appropriately to their management, the PSA and external bodies where appropriate.

It is vital that staff keep us updated on the issues affecting the Customer Service hubs, please contact us at dsmith@psa.asn.au or nbradshaw@psa.asn.au, or contact the Member Support Centre on:

1300 772 679

Join the PSA

membership.psa.asn.au/join

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