NSW universities – COVID-19 update

Everything is moving very quickly at the moment, with staff and students at various campuses being diagnosed with COVID-19. Some universities – even those with no reported cases – have stopped face-to-face lectures for a period of time. Some have performed full or partial cleans, or cleans that are just inadequate. Below is a brief summary of what has occurred across the sector.

Southern Cross University

On Wednesday 11 March 2020 Gold Coast and Lismore campuses were shut down after a visiting staff member tested positive to COVID-19. Forty-seven staff and students who had close contact with this person were quarantined, but none tested positive. SCU agreed to pay all staff, including casuals, their rostered hours if scheduled to work that day.

However, when staff returned to work the following day they found a forensic clean had not been performed. Toilets had not been cleaned and some desks not wiped down. The CPSU NSW wrote to the Vice Chancellor stating that the clean did not meet Department Health standards and that a forensic clean needed to be done. This did not occur.

SCU has agreed to convene weekly meetings of the Joint Consultative Forum. This is a forum that includes both management and union representatives where we can raise issues on your behalf.

University of NSW

The UNSW now has three cases. However, it has been reported that none of these people were on campus while infectious. UNSW did conduct deep cleans on 15 and 16 March and has tested people who worked around the positive cases. Staff also have access to up to two weeks' special/isolation leave If they cannot work from home.

University of Sydney

On Sunday 15 March 2020 six locations at the University of Sydney were intensively cleaned after a student tested positive to COVID-19, with 80 students placed in quarantine

The university remained open. However, on 17 March 2020, the Vice Chancelllor announced that from 23 March 2020 all face-to-face teaching would be suspended and classes were to go online. The university is encouraging as many staff as possible to work from home. The provisions your union has successfully negotiated so far include:

- 10 days' special COVID-19 leave available to all staff including casuals for self-isolation, illness or campus closure.

- If you are required to self-isolate and continue to work from home (with prior approval), you can claim reimbursement for use of personal internet data and personal mobile phone.

- More intensive deep cleaning on common workspaces and hand sanitiser in common areas.

- Social distancing to be implemented across the university.

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UTS

On 16 March 2020 UTS announced it is implementing a number of social distance initiatives, including pausing all coursework teaching commencing from 17 March 2020 for one week. At the time of the announcement, there had been no cases of COVID-19. However, on 17 March 2020, UTS announced that a student had tested positive to the virus, and that a clean had occurred in accordance with NSW Health standards.

Macquarie University

On 17 March 2020 Macquarie University announced a student had tested positive. Locations on campus have been intensively cleaned overnight. NSW Health has been involved, and advises that with the cleaning and social distancing measures, the rest of campus is safe to operate as normal. However, face-to-face coursework is suspended for 10 days until 30 March. This notice also outlines that consistent with social isolation, staff are to work from home, or if they cannot some sections may roster half staff on/half off. If that cannot work, staff can go on leave.

Western Sydney University

Western Sydney University announced on 16 March 2020 how it will move to remote delivery.

Australian Catholic University

There has been one reported case of COVID-19 at the Strathfield campus. ACU is increasingly moving its classes online, with a COVID-19 factsheet released to all staff on 19 March

advising of this. If staff are required to self-isolate and their work cannot be done from home, they will need to take Personal Sick Leave until cleared to return to work. If staff are required to self-isolate, are not unwell and are required to work from home they will be paid as normal.

NSW Health Factsheet: Advice for Universities

Primarily this factsheet advises the following steps universities should take to help slow the spread of COVID-19:

- encourage staff who can work effectively from home to do so

- hold as many university business meetings as possible by video link or other remote means

- cancel as many non-essential events as feasible

- encourage students to access videoed lectures remotely and participate in as many other classes as possible by video link or other remote means.

Join the CPSU NSW

If you're not a member, join up today at HERE.

Share this with your colleagues and encourage them to join too – the stronger the union, the more we win!

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Contact the CPSU NSW

If you have any questions or concerns about your flex-time rights, please reach out to your CPSU NSW delegate, or the CPSU NSW Member Support Centre on 1300 772 679.

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