



26 August 2016

# Department of Education General Assistants' Advisory Group

The *General Assistants' Advisory Group* (GAAG) and PSA staff members work well together to secure positive outcomes for members employed by the Department of Education (DoE) in schools. Below is an update on the PSA activities undertaken relevant to General Assistants (GAs).

## Performance management

There have been enquiries from PSA members relating to GAs being placed on informal and formal performance management programs. As a result, the PSA has been assisting a number of GAs in this situation. Recent examples include:

- A GA was terminated due to allegations of poor performance. The GA claims that in fact he had been bullied and harassed for an extended period of time at the school. When the PSA was approached for support by the GA, we concluded that the GA's termination was unfair, unreasonable and unjust. The PSA then lodged an application for unfair dismissal with the NSW Industrial Relations Commission (NSWIRC). This action by the PSA resulted in an outcome the GA was happy with.
- As part of this individual matter, the transport of dangerous goods by the GA in his private vehicle was a serious consideration for the PSA. As the matter did not proceed to arbitration, the PSA staff and GA representatives have taken the transportation of dangerous goods to the DoE Schools Joint Consultative Committee. The PSA will continue to push the issue until a resolution which considers the WHS requirements and protects the rights and health of GAs has been secured. Members are advised to please disregard any reports of outcomes or alleged wins on this matter from unauthorised reports.
- A GA was subject to a formal performance management program. This GA has a disability, which was disclosed throughout his long and

unblemished career in schools. Previous Principals have made allowance for his disability. His latest Principal has recommended the GA be terminated and placed on the *Not to Be Employed* register. The PSA is working hard for the member to secure a return to his job in the school.

- An allegation has been raised about a GA who has been accused of attempting to run down students with a ride-on lawn mower. The PSA is supporting this member who strongly disputes the allegation.

## Standard operating procedures – residual current device and circuit breakers

Delegates to the GAAG with strong and effective support from PSA Organiser Greg Adnum and Industrial Advocate Anthony Wright have had discussions with the Department about a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for resetting circuit breakers. The development of the SOP was initiated by the PSA GAAG.

The PSA feedback has been provided to the Department for consideration. This has been a long and detailed process.

Once the SOP has been finalised, the PSA will provide an update to all GA members.

## Statement of duties

There have been a number of enquiries relating to the GA's statement of duties mainly around **item 11**:

*"Other related duties of the role, within the skills and competencies of the General Assistant, as directed by the Principal."*

The PSA advises all GA members that when Principals direct you in relation to this item, the duty or task being requested **must be related to the previous 10 duties contained in the General Assistants Statement of Duties.**

If the duty or task being requested is covered by contractors:

- it does not fall within the parameters of **item 11**; and,
- GAs should refer the Principal to the **Principals A – Z Guide to school maintenance and cleaning 2011 – 2016**.

Remember, the range of duties performed by a GA is also dependent on the time allocation, skills, and competencies of the individual GA.

## Supervision of General Assistants

The PSA advises GA members that the School Principal is your day to day line Manager. The Principal may delegate this responsibility to another school executive member. Business Managers and the School Administrative Manager [SAM] **do not** automatically have this delegated authority.

There have been a number of Principals requesting GA's perform work outside their statement of duties and then using the work as an excuse to put the GA on an performance management program.

If you believe you are being asked or pressured to do something that does not sit within your statement of duties, contact the PSA's Member Support Centre.

## Use of private vehicles on school business

The PSA has received a number of enquiries from GAs about the use of their private vehicle for school purposes.

The PSA reminds GAs that:

- Use of a GA's private vehicle on school business requires payment of the appropriate allowances under the Award.
- GAs cannot be directed to use their private vehicles to perform any school tasks.
- It is not a condition of employment for GAs to hold a current driver's licence or obtain a driver's licence.
- If you use your car on school business please take into account WH&S and insurance implications.

GAs using their private vehicles for school business is voluntary. GAs should discuss the payment of the appropriate allowances with the Principal **before** they agree to use their private vehicle.

If you are unwilling to use your own car on school business and are being pressured to do so, please email Greg Adnum at [gadnum@psa.asn.au](mailto:gadnum@psa.asn.au).

## GA pay leave simplification

Recently the DoE proposed pay and leave simplification for SAS Staff. A similar proposal has been made relating to GAs.

The PSA has provided the GAAG with initial information on this matter. It appears that difficulties will arise on the proposal based on preliminary consultation via GAAG Delegates.

The PSA is about to commence a wider consultation with the GA membership on pay/leave simplification. The difficulty with this is that GAs have inconsistent access to computers making an online survey problematic.

Clearly, it is important that the PSA seeks high response rates in this consultation to cover the breadth of concerns GA members will seek to raise.

The PSA will keep members posted on the wider consultation once a decision has been made re the format of this consultation.

## Did you know?

Previously GAs who were PSA members had to rely on expressing their views as a very small minority on the *Schools Departmental Committee* or through a group that had only "Working Party" status within the PSA. In 2013 the PSA arranged for General Assistants to have their own voice and platform within the PSA by establishing the General Assistants Advisory Group.

