

COVID-19 Update. TIASA News

Emergency Zoom, 17 August 2021

Kia ora ano everyone

These brief Notes summarise the education sector peak bodies Emergency Zoom run this evening by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and TEC. Last year there were many such Zoom meetings for the education sector's peak organisations, of which TIASA is one. I and/or Peter Joseph attended these for TIASA. These Zooms were invaluable in ensuring everyone across the sector had to most up to date information, at the same time.

Following this afternoon's announcement of a community case of Covid in Auckland, an emergency management Zoom of peak education sector organisations. was held at 7 p.m. tonight. I attended this, below FYI are my notes of the information and other matters discussed.

An official tertiary education sector Covid newsletter from the MoE/TEC is also expected to be received shortly. We will send you that also as soon as we receive it. I hope the information below may be helpful in the meantime, everyone.

Please note that is critically important that NO ONE should be required to go onsite at all - not to issue students with laptops, sort out IT issues, or anything else, other than the very limited urgent needs given below. This is vitally important if we are to beat Covid. The rules are much more strict this time as the Delta variant is so much more dangerous.

Do NOT go out - See info. below re NO site access and if there are any issues at all at your TEO/branch/for members please urgently let us know so we can follow up.

Thank you for being there for TIASA and allied staff – and your communities – and, all of us! We got through this before, while this time it's much more serious (!!) we can do it again. We just all need to look after each other and if we all follow the rules, we will get through OK.

Take good care of yourselves and your whanau, everyone, and, stay safe!

Kia kaha,

Shelley Weir
National President
TIASA Te Hononga

Shelley's Notes from tonight's Zoom emergency management meeting of peak education sector organisations.

There were 32 people on the Zoom from a range of organisations across the sector, including various student associations. Katrina Sutich and Guy Somerset from the Ministry of Ed (Katrina is Acting Group Manager, Tertiary Education at Ministry of Education (MoE) and Guy is the Communications Manager at Universities New Zealand) and my own CE Leon de wet Fourie (who I THINK was there representing ITP's) plus Stephen Town Te Pukenga CE, were on the call. Sandra Grey from our sister union the TEU was on the call, plus various other people, many of whom were on the same sort of emergency peak body Zooms last year, were also on it, i.e. it was a pretty good cross section.

Here's a summary of what was covered. Katrina and Guy reported what is known so far:

1. This is a much stricter lockdown than last year's L4. Delta is a lot worse and it's expected that the infected person probably does have Delta. So how it will be dealt with this time is also different and much more strict than before.
2. Remote learning - tertiary education organisations (TEO's) need to ensure connectedness and delivery for students. Last year there were significant issues with this, and they (MoE and probably also TEC) want to hear from us of any problems this time around.
3. Safety of students and learners - especially in tertiary accommodation, what plans to do TEO's have to support these students if they can't get home before lockdown, to support and ensure their wellbeing?
4. Processes for exams, assessments and workshops - Also MoE/TEC interested in hearing from us what plans providers have for these e.g. change deadlines etc.
5. Site access must only be for absolutely essential work requirements. NOT to distribute devices, IT systems operation etc. It was really stressed that activities which were seen as essential last time, now absolutely are NOT. While the MoE etc. don't yet know what any essential work requirements may be this time, Katrina asked all present to start thinking about that now. This was probably really mean for those management reps, CE's etc. who are in charge of such decisions. Everyone responsible was asked to really think how many staff i.e., the absolute bare minimum of services that require staff to be outside their home environments. If we can succeed in getting on top of this if it is Delta, then we might return to normal fairly quickly. But to be effective there needs to be the absolute minimum level possible to have people outside their home, and not continue with any services that aren't essential.
6. This time there will be a very, very restricted set of activities, not everything will be spelt out in the rules that will be issued, so they want TEO managers to think about this and not have people onsite or outside their homes. The only site access permitted is what's in the tertiary sector guidance and in national-level frameworks for employers and workers i.e. the nationwide official info. that either is already out there or expected to be released shortly. Only site access for welfare of animals, people and security of property are permitted (unless something is covered by exemptions that will be in the info. to be issued shortly).

For us it means NO ONE should be required to be site, not even IT people or for distributing laptops etc. to students for remote learning. There will be more detail re this in the Health order that will come out later tonight. If there are urgent needs then we are to contact Katrina/Guy/Gillian, they will try to help solve problems. The next 48-72 hours should make things clearer.

7. A student rep asked would there be extensions etc. for assignments, exams etc? The answer was, that this is for TEO's themselves to decide but it's expected TEC and/or MoE will be issuing further guidance on this shortly also.

8. Gillian Dudgeon (Gillian is Gillian Dudgeon, Deputy Chief Executive, Delivery Directorate) noted it's an evolving situation, and asked all on the call to come to the TEC through the normal contact protocols we used last year, if we have questions, expect to have more information overnight and in the morning. If TEC have the information they will give it to us.

Various questions were then asked by some on the Zoom. The answers to these are as below:

- Someone has students around NZ on their site right now for a hui and can't get them home before 11.59 p.m. Katrina answered that while MoE etc. can't say yet, they are expecting there will be a 48-hour window (e.g. for flights etc.) so that people could safely travel back to their homes. Apparently the PM also stated this tonight (I didn't hear what the PM said as I had to go onto this Zoom) i.e. make sure there is a safe way to get home.

Guy said there would be national level guidance, these will set a lot of travel restrictions. TEO's are encouraged to help them (students /others needing to get home) make their own arrangements. If can't get a booking e.g. for a return flight home then TEO's have to think re what they do to help anyone who ends up having to stay onsite at the TEO as they couldn't get home. If a TEO hasn't got accommodation available, will need to stay connected with the MoE to sort out how best to handle this.

- Someone asked would there be an education sector spot on the Unite Covid site like there was last time. The answer was, the best place for info right now is on the MoE website. There will be a Bulletin tonight from the MoE that will have a link to the MoE education sector Covid info. (This Bulletin was sent to us all last time, it was very helpful in us getting accurate info. out to you all, very rapidly). So we will expect this to come thru sometime later tonight or in the early a.m. and will get it out to you all then).
- A student rep asked about financial/hardship support, and why wasn't this available now, this time? Guy responded this is because this lockout is different (i.e. much more strict – this had been made really clear to us all right at the start too). Katrina added we need to see what the Health Order (that's what is issued under the emergency legislation that now applies to Covid) will say about this Alert Level.

Other questions were about student hardship monies and special grants availability (this happened last time via TEC); a technology access fund (also was available last time via TEC). Gillian D said these funds had already been extended and brought together. Info. will come out from TEC clarifying how and they can be accessed and used, shortly. There was a question re disabled students, and a request that info/comms to students be clear and brief so students don't get confused or bogged down with too much info/detail. Chris Whelan from Universities NZ wanted contact details that we could send info etc. This will be to Tom Worters (Policy analyst, MoE) - He will collate any q's from the sector (i.e., us) and try to provide answers ASAP.

That's it! This was a helpful briefing with as much info. as is known yet. We will meet again by Zoom tomorrow, TEC/MoE will send us the invite. Things will move quickly.