Frequently Asked Questions

Teacher and School Administrative and Support Staff Exchanges

Q. What does an “exchange” entail?
Participants swap teaching or work positions for the duration of the exchange (generally twelve months from January to December, but July to July is also an option). Salary is not swapped; the participants continue to be paid their salary by their home employing authorities.

Accommodation and vehicle exchanges and arrangements are entirely the responsibility of exchange participants. Accommodation is swapped or provision is otherwise arranged as suitable to both exchangees. The swapping of vehicles is not recommended.

Should potential applicants wish to obtain specific details from a teacher who has previously been on exchange, Exchange Programs officers may be able to provide an appropriate contact. The NSW Exchange Teachers League may also assist (etlnsw@yahoo.com.au).

Q. What are my professional responsibilities regarding exchange?
You should expect to fulfil your duties as you would in your NSW workplace, including any specific responsibilities (eg, sport, band) that were allocated to your exchange counterpart in their home school.

Participants need to be flexible and adaptable in order to teach in different education systems, with a range of structures, routines, curriculum, assessment, staff and students. Educational institutions will vary, as they reflect the philosophy of individual administrators, schools, communities, the VET sector and the location or the background of students enrolled.

An additional requirement for NSW exchange participants is to gather information for the completion of a two-page research brief, to be delivered shortly after their exchange concludes.

In September an orientation conference is held for successful exchange applicants to assist in preparing for their exchange. However, exchange participants are ultimately responsible for their professional and personal organisation. In making professional arrangements, successful applicants must ensure that they:
- correspond with their exchange partner and obtain information on the foreign education system and the professional requirements of their exchange position;
- correspond with the overseas or interstate principal or VET educational manager;
- nominate a school or college sponsor and community or industry sponsor;
- prepare units of work and resources for the first part of the exchange, prepare the classroom and provide curriculum documents; and
- inform and prepare the students, staff and parents for the arrival of the incoming exchange participant, making them aware of the implications and benefits of the exchange situation.

Q. What are my personal responsibilities regarding the exchange?
The Department cannot accept responsibility for personal aspects of an exchange. Success of an exchange relies on the integrity and sense of responsibility of both exchange partners, in the professional sphere and with respect to accommodation, vehicles and appliances. A positive attitude, careful planning and continuous honest correspondence will be required to avoid both professional and personal misunderstandings.

Exchangees are personally responsible for:
- Arranging to exchange accommodation or otherwise provide suitable accommodation for their exchange counterpart for the duration of the exchange, and completing written agreements to this end
- Providing evidence of satisfactory health prior to exchange and funding all health and medical expenses and any insurance required for self and accompanying dependents
• Organising and funding all exchange travel arrangements and associated costs for self and accompanying dependents
• Complying with registration requirements of the host authority and with normal immigration and entry requirements of the host country.

Exchange participants and their families must be able to adapt to a new environment, accommodation and community and to accept cultural differences. Adjustments might include:
• a different climate (eg, a cold winter may present limitations and adjustments and needs);
• a new country and society (laws, communication, customs, road rules);
• a different educational environment (students, curriculum, structure, administration and responsibilities);
• a new house and neighbourhood (orientation, making friends, budgeting and buying for household needs);
• the exchange participant’s own expectations (cost of living, life at school and home, availability of “free” time and opportunity for travel); and
• family life (stress of the new job, settling the children and a non-working partner).

Q. When can I apply for an exchange position?
Programs are advertised approximately 15 months prior to the January exchange commencement date. For example, the 2011 program will be advertised in Term 3, 2009, with applications due in December 2009. See Section 1 of the Application Form for details on the application process.

You are required to have 5 years’ teaching or SASS experience by the time you depart for your exchange. This means that you can apply at the end of your 4th year and then complete your 5th year while the preparation for the exchange occurs.

Q. What are some potential benefits of exchange?
Participants have the opportunity to work in different education systems, exchange ideas and knowledge and observe different teaching practices while living in other cultural contexts. They share the experiences and knowledge gained while on exchange, and again in their workplace and in their region or Institute on their return. This includes reporting on their nominated research or learning projects to school, college and other Department personnel.

Students benefit from being taught by visiting overseas or interstate teachers who bring to the classroom new ideas and experiences from different educational systems and cultures.

New South Wales colleagues have access to new ideas and teaching methods by working closely with visiting exchange participants from other countries or states and education systems. Visiting participants provide valuable input into curriculum and teaching and learning practices by contributing knowledge and asking questions about education in New South Wales.

Q. What are some financial considerations of undertaking an exchange?
Applicants should give careful consideration to finance. Additional savings are a necessity. Sufficient funds should be allowed to cover preparation expenses, travel and settling into a new country. Considerations include:
• Living costs may be higher (or lower) in the exchange destination.
• Salaries of NSW participants and exchange counterparts may not be equivalent.
• Currency exchange rates may vary
• Spouses/partners of exchangees may not earn income during the exchange if work opportunities are not available. Some exchange locations do not allow de facto partners to legally work. Even where spouses are legally able to pursue work, participants must consider that work may not be readily available. Exchange participants should therefore be financially prepared for their spouse to remain unemployed.

Additional funds estimated may exceed $20,000, depending on the exchange location, exchange rates, financial commitments, lifestyle and number of dependents. Some expenses to consider are:
• Payment to solicitor, accountant, real estate agent
• Regular payments for loans or bills (eg, insurance, rates)
- Additional costs for repair and maintenance of accommodation and/or vehicle in preparing for departure, and possibly upon return
- Personal and possible family needs in advance of departure (also upon return), including legal documents, medical expenses, clothing and advance luggage
- Visas and passports (including medical exam costs, travel costs to consulates)
- Overseas (or interstate) air tickets
- Travel during the exchange year (each weekend or break may be spent travelling)
- Incidentals incurred en route and upon arrival, including excess baggage, accommodation, insurance, food and onward transport
- Permanent accommodation and the setting-up and maintenance of a new home
- Public transport and the possible purchase and maintenance of a car
- Health insurance as required (A national health scheme covers Australians in England and New Zealand, but private arrangements will be required in other countries)
- Professional needs, e.g. teaching resources and clothing (accepted attire at a more conservative school may require a teacher to wear suits or dresses).
- Family expenses, including child care, providing for a non-working spouse/partner
- Emergencies, such as an additional delay in salary coming through and/or bank being closed upon arrival and/or delays in travel.

Substantial additional costs may be incurred should exchangees make an unauthorised early return home from the exchange, (eg, payment for alternative accommodation for themselves while their exchange counterpart remains in the host accommodation, replacement teacher costs, administrative costs to the Department, implications of leave without pay).

A tax specialist may provide information regarding claimable exchange expenses and any tax obligations which may exist in the host country.

According to the Australian Taxation Office, NSW Department of Education and Training exchangees who participate in placements from January to December will be taxable in Australia (with the exception of January to December exchangees to the USA, who are taxed in the USA). A tax specialist should be consulted for individual situations.

Q. What are the workers compensation conditions for a NSW executive staff member who exchanges to a non-executive role?

The following information relates to workers' compensation claim issues for NSW teachers currently in school executive positions who:
- exchange to non-executive positions and receive a reduced salary (the maximum classroom teacher salary, Step 13); or
- exchange to an executive position not equivalent to their current position and receive the relevant reduced salary for the year of exchange.

Section numbers indicated relate to the current Workers' Compensation Act.

In the case of rehabilitation, retirement on medical grounds or death during the year of reduced salary, at what rate would benefits be paid?

A NSW teacher injured while overseas on an exchange program at a reduced salary would have any earnings related compensation calculated in the same way as if the salary of the teacher were to change for any other reason (such as promotion, demotion, change of position or the like).

In the case of death, compensation is not directly earnings-related but is based on the extent of dependency (sections 25,26) with specified lump sums (currently $290 900 for total dependency) and weekly payments for various dependants laid down in the Workers' Compensation Act 1987 (as amended).

In the case of medical retirement any effect on superannuation entitlement would depend on the terms of the superannuation deed. Separate advice might be obtained as to the operation of the relevant superannuation scheme. As to workers’ compensation entitlements, income support in the case of total incapacity is for the first 26 weeks award-
based through the “current weekly wage rate” concept in section 36. As such, it is unlikely that at least any marginal reduction in salary is likely to have any impact. Note: The maximum weekly workers’ compensation paid in respect of any period of total or partial incapacity shall not in any case exceed $1373.10 currently (section 35).

After the first 26 weeks compensation for total incapacity is reduced to the statutory formula set out in section 37 subject to a ceiling of 90% of the worker’s average weekly earnings for the twelve months prior to the injury. The reduction in salary of a teacher would, in theory, have some impact on the level of compensation after 26 weeks. However, the relatively low statutory rates indicate that this would be likely only where the teacher has suffered a very substantial drop in salary for a substantial part of the twelve months preceding the injury. In the case of partial incapacity section 40 provides that weekly compensation is to be based on the difference between what the employee would probably be earning but for the injury (but not exceeding $1,000) and what he or she is able to earn (subject to discontinuation of weekly workers compensation for partial incapacity after two years under section 52A). As such the reduced salary would be relevant to the calculation for so long as the teacher would have been expected to earn at the reduced level.

Would the teacher’s workers’ compensation payments be affected if rehabilitation extended beyond the exchange year and they resume at their higher salary?

By implication, rehabilitation compensation under section 40(4) is provided at the level of that applicable for total incapacity, i.e. based on the “current weekly wage rate” and the statutory rates discussed above in a). As such, it is unlikely that compensation entitlement would be affected by a notional resumption of the teacher’s previous salary level following the period of exchange.

If the injury were to recur in subsequent years, would a reduction in salary for the year of exchange affect the teacher’s workers’ compensation payments in subsequent years?

Where an injury is suffered while on a reduced salary on exchange and there is a later occurrence, when the teacher has reverted to a higher salary, the consequences would seem to be that:
- in the case of total incapacity the operative “current weekly wage rate” and statutory rates at the time of the later recurrence and period of incapacity would be applicable
- in the case of partial incapacity the later average weekly earnings would be relevant as to what the person would “probably have earned but for the injury” for the purpose of assessing the compensation under section 40.

Note: The above advice is based exclusively on NSW law and money terms specified in Australian dollars. It may be that the Department of Education and Training is a government employer covered by a government managed fund scheme to be self-insurer under section 193 of the Workplace Injury Management and Workers’ Compensation Act 1998. Nevertheless, the comments above would apply to it. Information in this section confirmed September 2004 in cooperation with GIO Australia. Individuals are advised to seek their own advice regarding their specific situation.

Q. What are the superannuation conditions for a NSW executive staff member who exchanges to a non-executive role?

The following information relates to superannuation conditions for teachers currently in executive positions who:
- exchange to non-executive positions and receive the maximum classroom teacher salary (Step 13)
- exchange to an executive position not equivalent to their current position and receive a reduced salary for the exchange year.

There are three state superannuation schemes for New South Wales teachers: State Superannuation Scheme (SSS); State Authorities Superannuation Scheme (SASS); and First State Super (FSS).

Will teachers’ fortnightly superannuation contributions be amended to coincide with the reduced salary?

Teachers who are members of SSS may choose to reduce or retain superannuation contributions. However, members of SASS generally are not able to immediately reduce their superannuation payments with the exception of hardship applications or special conditions as recognised by the trustees.
Can teachers maintain superannuation contributions at their executive salary rate during the year of exchange?

For SSS yes.

The salary used in SASS to calculate contributions is that advised at 31 December each year. If the salary advised is the lower salary then, no, they can't maintain the contributions at the higher rate. As a general rule SASS doesn't allow for contributing based on a higher salary (except in limited circumstances such as ill-health etc). Admittedly, the salary is advised at 31 December each year, so if the higher salary is advised BEFORE they go on exchange then they will be contributing at the higher salary whether they want to or not. Salaries are not amended mid-year. In that case, if a member wants to contribute less they would have to look at reducing their contribution rate, either by election or FINH. SES members have a certain amount of control over the salary nominated as superable salary so in that respect there is some choice however in the end, it still comes down to contributions being based on the salary advised.

If teachers choose to maintain superannuation contributions at the executive salary rate, would their benefit payments be calculated on the executive salary rate or reduced salary rate in the case of retirement on medical grounds, redundancy or death during the year of exchange?

For SSS, benefit payments would be calculated on the reduced salary rate unless trustees approve retention at the higher level.

SASS works based on the salary advised. If we're advised that the higher salary is their salary for the year, that is what will be used as Final Salary in the benefits calculations. They are correct in the retention of higher salary - SASS does allow for retention of higher salary in certain circumstances such as ill health, however this deals with an employee who has taken a salary reduction due to ill-health, not been medically retired or retrenched.

If teachers take a reduction in salary but elect to maintain the current contribution rate, how will the Superannuation Board be notified?

Upon acceptance of a non-executive exchange, teachers complete a form issued by the Exchange Programs Unit. This information will be sent to Pillar Customer Services (the Schemes Administrator) for recording purposes.

If teachers decide to reduce contributions, when would the reassessment of contributions occur?

Members of the State Superannuation Scheme (SSS), who elect to reduce contributions within two months of the date on which the reduced salary was first paid, will have their contribution rate reduced immediately. State Authorities Superannuation Scheme (SASS) members, unless claiming hardship, will not be eligible to reduce their contribution rate until the following 1 April.

Would a reduction in contribution for the year of exchange affect teachers' benefit payments in subsequent years?

A reduction in salary resulting from this change in employment will affect benefit payments. Please note, State Superannuation Scheme (SSS) members who choose not to contribute for the units lost as a result of the salary reduction could pay at a higher rate for any additional units gained in following years. (It should also be noted that SSS members would need to apply to the Schemes Administrator within two months of being paid at the lower salary to contribute at the reduced rate.)

State Authorities Superannuation Scheme (SASS) members pay a nominated percentage of salary each year. SASS employer-financed benefits are based on salaries (the final or final average) and benefit points accrued, and contributing at a lower rate will affect the member's personal account balance.

Are teachers able to defer contribution payments?

While a member is employed and receiving salary payment there is no provision for the deferral of contributions (with the exception of SASS which allows hardship applications or special conditions as recognised by the trustees).

Note: The above information confirmed December 2006 in cooperation with Pillar Customer Services. Additional information may be obtained from Pillar Customer Services: SSS: 1300 130096; SASS: 1300 130095; FSS: 1300 650873 Individuals are advised to seek their own advice regarding their specific situation.