

Covid got you feeling exhausted? Here's why



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Members are repeatedly reporting to Federation that they are exhausted, struggling in many cases to get their 'mojo' back in 2020 – a year of bushfires, drought, floods and a global pandemic.

Here is a small -snapshot in time as to why this might be the case, just to give you more of the context in which you were all trying to do your work: there were 46 emails from senior department executives requiring action in the period between 1 March and mid-June; 50% of these emails landed outside of school hours, often 7, 8, 9 o'clock at night, often on Sundays, as well as of course in the vacation period at the end of term 1.

Most of these communications had extremely short turnarounds, often just two or three school days. They went to all matters from hygiene and safety practices to curriculum and reporting for teachers, students and parents, HSC provisions for students, activities that are allowed or not allowed in schools, which community groups and parents could come in and then which could not, and the associated legal documentation required if they did. Border towns felt the impacts even more: they were told to check community transmission in their areas, keep on top of anyone who showed symptoms, send them home if they did, and the list just goes on and on.



Principals and teachers were required to manage an ever-changing context on remote learning and face-to-face learning, dependent upon their location, the level of community transmission and, of course, impact of positive cases that has closed many schools.

Many of the emails and the information received, which Federation notes included some detailed attachments, some with up to 15, 20 and 50 pages of information for principals, schools and teachers to process. They spoke to changes to the way in which schools were to be organised as well as just operating. They included requirements for social distancing, no gathering of adults, reducing class sizes and multiple timetables to implement according to the phase of return. Ultimately of course, schools spent hours developing various timetables which they never got to implement because the phases of proposed operation were skipped. Members were also required to respond to frequent political announcements made through the media, returning everyone to face-to-face.

The changing categories of vulnerable teachers also moved very quickly. On 7 April, 70% of our teachers were working from home. On 27 April, the first day of term 2, schools were advised by the senior executive of the department that they were to have no staff on site. By 5 May, just some eight days later, new guidelines where pregnant teachers and those who were living or caring for members in vulnerable categories were included in the working-from-home provisions. On 11 May, six days later, there was another phased return, a

significant number of teachers worked on and off site, depending on their classes. By 20 May, the categories of vulnerable workers had changed from over 65 to 70, pregnant women were now no longer included and that affected many of our female members, as you would imagine. For other teachers who had been able to work from home if they lived with someone in a vulnerable category up to that point, also saw a change in category impacting their home situations.

So, if despite having recently returned from a 'vacation' you are feeling like there is not much left in the tank, there is little wonder why. 2020 has been a year which none of us will forget and the impact and toll on our principals, teachers and students is still being widely felt.