

# Recruiting your colleagues 101

VANESSA KALAMISTRAKIS, AEU's Recruitment, Training and Campaigns manager, dishes up her tips on how to talk to your colleagues about joining the Union.

**A**s a Union, we are only ever as strong as our membership base, and right now we need all the people-powered change we can muster. As we are about to start bargaining for new TAFE and Schools Agreements, it's the perfect time to be talking to your colleagues about their pay and conditions, and the Union's role in improving them!

We are continuing the good fight to protect jobs, and ultimately, the viability of our precious public TAFE system by lobbying the State Government to limit its subsidisation of private providers.

And with a Federal Election on the horizon, we are working hard to ensure that voters enter that booth fully informed that the Turnbull Government does not support Gonski, and will not commit to funding our most vulnerable students according to their needs.

These reasons are, of course, just the tip of the iceberg and the chances are, if you're reading this article, I'm preaching to the converted. You know why you're in your Union – the question is, how do you convey that to your colleagues?

"Isn't recruitment the job of the Rep?" you may ask.

Well yes, but actually, not entirely. Every single member can have a frank and honest conversation with their colleagues about why they're in the Union – and we've found that these 1:1 exchanges can be just as powerful as the more formal, organised recruitment drives.

There's no tricky script. It's just a conversation. It's about thinking about your own values and your own reasons for joining up, and sharing that. It's also about thinking of all the surprising things Union membership has given you – those things you might never have anticipated when you first signed up. It could be new friendships, high-quality PD opportunities, perfectly-timed advice on an industrial problem – or it could just be the particularly excellent member magazine. (The editor made me put that in.)

Here are a few pointers to help guide the conversation.

## Make it about them

Start the conversation by finding out what things are important to your colleague about their own life and work. Maybe you'll discover that they are keen to go on family leave at some point, or they are hoping to move from contract to permanent work. Perhaps you'll find out that they are worried about the fact that a special needs child in their class is not getting the support they need. You'll often discover that many of the things they care about, or the career goals they have, will directly relate to being a member of the AEU.

## Share how you've personally benefited

Talk about your experience of being a member. Share how being in the Union has made a real, tangible difference in your own life.

## Give them the bigger picture

A lot of people are confused and, let's be honest, a bit in the dark when it comes to what unions are about – let alone what the AEU in particular is about. Without wanting to bang them over the head with a wet fish (when really they probably just wanted to have a Scotch finger, drink some tea and read the paper), you could give them a potted version of some of the AEU's finest moments.

For example, you could artfully weave into the conversation the fact that it was the public education union that won the right for women to achieve equal pay to men; won 14 weeks of paid maternity leave, and successfully fought for the introduction of permanent status for part-time workers. Not to mention, of course, for the schools sector, that the fact your colleague does not need to pay for their laptop out of their own salary is because AEU fought for that right in court. (And if you managed to weave all those fun facts into the course of a single conversation, know that we have Recruitment Project Officer positions coming up mid-year and you should really apply...)

## Show them how to join

It may just be that they previously didn't know anything about the AEU, or that they just hadn't got around to joining. Show them the sign-up page ([aeuvic.asn.au](http://aeuvic.asn.au)), or hand them a membership form.

Regardless of whether they sign up, you've planted the seed and at the very least, you've perhaps made them think a little more about the fact that their own wages and conditions haven't just magically been gifted to them – they've been fought for by generations of Union members in times gone by. (It might be a bit heavy to actually say that out loud, but that's the subtext!) ●

Recruitment is everyone's responsibility! Do yourself and your students a favour by having a conversation with your colleagues about the fantastic benefits of AEU. [aeuvic.asn.au/join](http://aeuvic.asn.au/join)



## 5 responses to get your colleagues on board

### 1 "I don't feel exploited or underpaid. I'm quite happy in my job."

Yes! And the Union played a big part in achieving your current level of job satisfaction. The more members we have, the more we can do for you. That means offering high-quality PD, great 1:1 support and advice, and strong advocacy for better pay and conditions. Union membership is about supporting you throughout your whole career. Almost everybody at some time in their working life will have an industrial issue of some sort.

The AEU isn't just about advocacy for you – it's also about campaigning for the best quality education for your students. Refer to #5.

### 2 "I can't afford to join! The fees are too high!"

AEU membership rates are set according to your income and time fraction, to make it as fair and accessible as possible. That means that if you're a graduate, or if you work part-time or casually, your union fees will be lower than somebody working full-time.

Your membership fees pay in the form of job security, better wages, and improved working conditions. Some of our members might say that you can't afford *not* to be a member – you never know when you'll need our help! It's worth thinking about how much less money you'd be making if it weren't for the Union negotiating on your behalf through the collective bargaining process. Plus your Union fees are 100% tax deductible.

It's also worth noting that the Union is working behind-the-scenes all the time with employers and government to advocate for public education – not just when it comes to collective bargaining.

### 3 "I've seen the news reports! Aren't unions all corrupt?"

There's a lot we could say about the quality and focus of news that prevails in a country with a media monopoly like Australia's.

The short answer is: No, not all unions are corrupt! And here's why.

All unions are governed by a) organisational rules approved by Fair Work Australia and b) the Registered Organisations Act 2009. All our leadership team, together with branch officers, Executive, Branch Council and Sector Councils, are democratically elected every three years. The Victorian Branch Conference is held annually and all financial members are eligible to seek election to attend as a delegate.

All our elections have to be approved by Fair Work Australia and are then conducted by the Australian Electoral Commission. The AEU finances are overseen by the Finance Committee, Executive and Branch Council. Under our rules, all expenditure must be approved by the Branch Secretary who is ultimately responsible for the financial viability of the organisation.

On top of that, the AEU is independently audited every year and we have to report to Fair Work Australia on all activities throughout the year as well.

Like the majority of unions, AEU has never been implicated in or accused of corruption or any kind of fraudulent activity.

### 4 "I get along well with the principal and I don't want to rock the boat."

There's a misconception that being in a Union is about fighting with the bosses. In fact, the Union understands that working hand-in-hand with leadership is the only way we can successfully bring about improvements to pay and conditions. Consultation with leaders, as well as educators, underpins how we work day-to-day, and it's also your opportunity to have input into your working conditions.

In reality, being in the Union is about knowing your rights and what you're entitled to, and it's about campaigning for resources for your students, so you can give them the best education possible.

The AEU represents all educators in

the public system, including principals, so being in the Union doesn't automatically put you at odds with the boss. That said, not all principals are Union members. Usually, this is more reason for staff to be proactive about knowing their rights around employment and pay (through going to branch meetings, attending AEU training and conferences and/or calling us for advice) and supporting each other to do the same.

### 5 "I don't want to be in the position of letting down my students if I'm called to go on strike!"

Going on strike is only ever a last resort, and it's never something the Union would take lightly. There are strict industrial laws around when members can and can't take that kind of action, and it'd only happen in the final stages of an EBA, after months of unsuccessful negotiations. Ultimately, the decision to go on strike is about weighing up the medium to long-term conditions that could be achieved for students and staff, against the short-term inconvenience of a day off work.

AEU brings about real, positive change in the lives of our students. We are the key voice, and in some cases the only voice, advocating for public education and resources for students. Our activism in the lead-up to the last State election meant that public education became the number one election issue and we now have the only state government in Australia that has proudly called itself 'The Education State'. That's a direct result of the work of the AEU and our members.

Without our significant campaigning, there would be no Gonski agreement and no TAFE sector left to speak of! There would not be the precious 15 hours of funded kindergarten for our children, and no monitoring of the NDIS roll-out. These are just a few of the many ways that AEU is improving the lives of students and staff in public education. ●