

# EB25 Information Pack for Principals

## Introduction

The Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA) and Catholic school employers appreciate the enterprise bargaining period can be challenging for principals who are not directly involved in negotiations but may face staff questions. We want to support you through this process and reassure you that employers and employees share the same vision. We all want the Common Good. We all want fair wages and conditions for staff in a thriving Catholic education system. We want staff to feel valued, respected and committed to their school communities and we recognise that meaningful changes to wages and conditions are required to support that outcome. Our goal is to complete negotiations in 2025, ensuring higher pay for all staff from January 2026, and providing the budget clarity employers need to plan for the new school year.

This pack includes information on different aspects of the bargaining process to assist you to understand VCEA and Catholic school employers' aims and approach.

If you have questions or ideas for further support, please contact your Employee Relations Diocesan Representative or VCEA Employee Relations on [eb@vcea.catholic.edu.au](mailto:eb@vcea.catholic.edu.au).

## About enterprise bargaining and VCEA

- There are currently three enterprise agreements covering most Catholic education employees in Victoria. These agreements expire on 31 December 2025, which means a new agreement can start as early as 1 January 2026.
- VCEA has been authorised to bargain on behalf of 34 Catholic school employers for the next enterprise agreement.
- VCEA aims to negotiate one cooperative, consistent and portable agreement across 34 Catholic school employers and VCEA.

## Aim of negotiation

- VCEA and Catholic employers are entering the negotiations fully committed to wage rises, and making benefits work better for employees and employers as early as possible next year.
- The enterprise agreement is intended to:
  - Reflect and reward the significant contribution employees make to Victorian Catholic schools and school communities through improved wages and conditions.
  - Reduce current complexities to help ease where possible workload and administrative burden.
  - Support the Catholic identity and culture of schools and excellent student outcomes.
  - Promote Catholic employers as employers of choice.

### How we want to work together

- VCEA is committed to working productively and in partnership with the Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania (IEU), Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF) and other representatives to achieve a positive outcome.
- VCEA hopes to negotiate in partnership to build an offer that meets employee and employer needs, can be put to a vote, and start delivering additional pay and improved conditions as early as the start of the next school year.

### What VCEA heard from school-based consultations

- School-based consultations have helped VCEA understand experiences with the current agreement.
- The top priorities are wages and workload and VCEA has the capacity to address both of those by the start of 2026 if negotiations start now.

### Why VCEA wants to negotiate now

- There are significant benefits for all staff and employers in negotiating now and having a new agreement in place from 1 January 2026.
- Every staff member would have extra money in their pay packet from January onwards, and enhanced conditions.
- Staff have indicated extra pay is their top priority in a cost of living crisis and VCEA and Catholic employers want to deliver that as quickly as possible.
- Employers would have budget clarity to plan for the new school year, and a chance to work on any required administrative changes ahead of time.
- Having an agreement in place for the start of the school year would mean we can all focus on our core work in 2026.

### About the agreement type

- VCEA strongly believes that working productively with the IEU, ANMF and other representatives within the current cooperative workplace agreement framework is the most effective and efficient way to deliver benefits to employees as soon as possible.
- This is in keeping with the approach in 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2022 where employees, the IEU and Catholic school employers successfully made multi-enterprise agreements (cooperative agreements) covering the great majority of Catholic schools in Victoria.
- VCEA's focus is on building an offer that addresses employees' key priorities, including wages and workload, because an agreement, including a cooperative agreement, can only succeed if employees vote in favour of it.



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### Where to get information

- To help you stay informed throughout the bargaining process, a dedicated VCEA enterprise bargaining website has been set up at [www.eb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.eb.catholic.edu.au).
- You will also receive regular updates through the school, your employer and from VCEA directly.
- The union will also have opportunities to communicate with you.
- Principals with questions can contact your Employee Relations Diocesan Representative or VCEA Employee Relations on [eb@vcea.catholic.edu.au](mailto:eb@vcea.catholic.edu.au)

### Status update

- Each of you would have received letters from VCEA confirming that we have commenced bargaining and that we are ready to begin negotiations, and that the IEU has declined to meet at this stage, to bargain for a cooperative agreement.
- Further updates will be provided if there is a change but at the moment, negotiations are stalled.



## FAQs

### 1. What is VCEA?

The Victorian Catholic Education Authority (VCEA) is the peak body for Catholic school education in Victoria. VCEA exists to advance the mission of Catholic education in Victoria, in the service of students, families and the broader community.

VCEA plays a key role in the enterprise bargaining process, working to negotiate, in solidarity, fair and consistent employment conditions for employees across Catholic schools in Victoria.

VCEA has been authorised to bargain on behalf of 34 Catholic school employers for the next cooperative enterprise agreement.

### 2. What is enterprise bargaining?

Enterprise bargaining is a formal process in which employers and employee representatives, including the Independent Education Union Victoria Tasmania (IEU) and the Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation (ANMF), negotiate a new agreement on the terms and conditions of employment. This may include areas such as pay, leave, workload, hours of work, and other workplace conditions.

### 3. What does the bargaining process involve?

The typical steps include:

- Preparation and consultation
- Formal notice to commence bargaining
- Meetings and negotiation sessions
- Drafting of the new agreement
- Employee voting on the proposed agreement
- Approval by the Fair Work Commission.

### 4. What happens when the current agreements expire?

The current agreements expire on 31 December 2025. Even after the expiry date, the current agreements remain in effect until replaced. Employees will continue to work under the terms of the existing agreements until a new one is approved.

### 5. What is a cooperative workplace agreement?

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth), a cooperative workplace agreement involves at least two employers and their employees, allowing multiple employers to be covered by the same agreement.

VCEA is seeking to negotiate a cooperative workplace agreement (multi-enterprise agreement) covering all 34 Catholic school employers and VCEA with the aim of achieving unity, consistency and portability across and between Catholic school employers.

This is in keeping with the approach in 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2022 where employees, the IEU and Catholic school employers successfully made multi-enterprise agreements covering the great majority of Catholic schools in Victoria.

## **6. What is the aim of the new enterprise agreement?**

VCEA aims to negotiate a cooperative, consistent and portable agreement across 34 Catholic school employers and VCEA. This is intended to:

- Reflect and reward the significant contribution employees make to Victorian Catholic schools and school communities through improved wages and conditions.
- Reduce current complexities to help ease where possible workload and administrative burden.
- Support the Catholic identity and culture of schools and excellent student outcomes.
- Promote Catholic employers as employers of choice.

## **7. How will employees be kept informed during the process?**

VCEA and Catholic school employers are committed to keeping employees updated throughout the process via:

- A dedicated website – [www.eb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.eb.catholic.edu.au)
- Bargaining updates
- Communications shared directly by VCEA, their principal and employer

## **8. Why does VCEA want to bargain for a cooperative agreement instead of the union's preferred agreement type?**

- VCEA strongly believes that working productively with the IEU, ANMF and other representatives within the current cooperative workplace agreement framework is the most effective and efficient way to deliver benefits to employees as soon as possible.
- There is no downside to spending the next few months negotiating for a cooperative workplace agreement, but the potential benefits are significant.
- If negotiations do not progress as hoped, it would still be open to all parties to seek a different agreement type at a later time. Ultimately, an agreement can only succeed if employees vote for it.
- VCEA's focus is on building an offer that addresses employees' key priorities, including wages and workload. VCEA and Catholic employers have the capacity to address both of these areas for 2026 if negotiations start now.



**9. Why should employees support a cooperative agreement instead of the union's preferred agreement type?**

- Catholic employers have consistently shown a willingness to respond to the needs of staff. The agreement type has not prevented progress—it has enabled it. It has allowed us to negotiate improvements collectively, ensuring that no school or system is left behind.
- VCEA strongly believes that working productively with the IEU, ANMF and other representatives within the current cooperative workplace agreement framework is the most effective and efficient way to deliver benefits to employees as soon as possible.
- VCEA does not believe it is in the best interests of Catholic education staff to delay cooperative bargaining for timely wage rises.
- Different enterprise agreement types do not necessarily lead to different outcomes – the current Victorian Government schools and Catholic education agreements are different but deliver similar benefits.
- VCEA aims to negotiate in partnership to build an offer that meets employee and employer needs, can be put to a vote, and start delivering additional pay and improved conditions as early as the start of the next school year.
- Agreements made in 2008, 2013, 2018 and 2022 were overwhelmingly supported by employees, and demonstrate that Catholic school employers and the IEU have a strong history of effective enterprise bargaining, however, there were some delays in those negotiations. VCEA and Catholic school employers have heard directly from employees and principals on the importance of delivering a timely outcome ensuring that wage improvements are provided to employees as soon as possible. VCEA and Catholic school employers are committed to delivering a timely outcome in these negotiations and have been proactive in seeking to engage with the IEU and ANMF in constructive negotiations to facilitate an agreement as soon as possible.

**10. Why are the negotiations delayed?**

- VCEA has invited the unions to begin negotiations under the cooperative agreement framework, even if it's just until the end of the year to see what progress can be made. The IEU has declined to negotiate under the cooperative framework that has been used for the last four agreements.

**11. How does this process align with Catholic Social Teaching?**

- Catholic Social Teaching is a rich and interwoven framework that calls us to hold multiple ethical principles in balance and to act in the best interests of staff, our communities, and the mission of Catholic education.
- Catholic education in Victoria has long demonstrated a deep commitment to sector-wide solidarity. Despite the reality that our schools are operated by many different employers, we



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have consistently worked together to ensure, under the framework of the Common Good, that all staff receive equal rights and compensation.

- This unity across diversity is not just operationally efficient—it is ethically profound. It reflects our shared commitment to the Common Good, ensuring that no school community is left behind and that every employee is valued equally.
- VCEA and Catholic employers remain committed to fair and competitive compensation and are committed to engaging in the bargaining process with integrity, transparency, and a deep respect for staff.
- VCEA and Catholic employers will continue to listen, to collaborate, and to uphold the values that define Catholic education.

