

UNION FACT SHEET 5

Pre-Shift Checks and Unpaid Work – Know Your Rights

*Queensland Ambulance Service Employees***What the Law / Agreement Says**

- Queensland Employment Standards (QES):
Under Part 3, Chapter 2 of the *Industrial Relations Act 2016 (Qld)*, all work performed at the direction or for the benefit of the employer must be paid.
Tasks such as vehicle, drug, and equipment checks are considered *work* and must be completed during paid time.
- Industrial Relations Act 2016 (ss.136–137):
Employers cannot require or permit employees to perform unpaid work that exceeds reasonable additional hours.
When assessing what is reasonable, factors include:
 - Health and safety (including fatigue)
 - Family and personal responsibilities
 - The employer’s operational needs
 - Whether the time is paid or compensated
- QAS Certified Agreement 2025:
The Agreement adopts the QES and confirms that officers are not required to start early. During bargaining, the Union sought paid pre-shift time, but QAS refused the claim, stating that pre-shift checks are not required outside rostered hours.
Any direction to work early must be treated as paid overtime.

What This Means in Practice

- You are not required to arrive early to complete vehicle or drug checks.
- These duties are part of your paid shift time, not voluntary pre-work.
- If you are directed to start early, that time must be paid at the appropriate overtime rate.
- Management cannot discipline or penalise you for starting work at your rostered commencement time.

Common Issues

- A long-standing “culture” exists in some stations of crews arriving 30 minutes early to complete checks.
- This practice is not supported by law, policy, or the Certified Agreement.
- QAS benefits from this unpaid labour while claiming it’s voluntary. If you turn 15 minutes early for every shift, that equates to approximately 40 hours of unpaid labour per year.

- Performing unpaid work contributes to fatigue risk and breaches minimum employment standards.

Your Rights

- Your shift begins at your rostered start time.
- All pre-shift checks and readiness tasks should occur in paid time.
- You can refuse to perform unpaid work before your rostered start.
- If directed to start early, you are entitled to claim overtime.
- You cannot be disciplined for complying with the Agreement.

What To Do If Your Rights Are Breached

1. Record what happened – date, time, direction, and who instructed you.
2. Politely state that you will begin checks once your paid shift commences.
3. If directed to start early, note the time and claim the period as overtime.
4. Raise the issue through the grievance process if payment is refused.
5. Contact your UWU delegate if you are pressured or disadvantaged for complying with your start time.

Professional Obligations – AHPRA / Paramedicine Board

- The *Paramedicine Board of Australia – Code of Conduct* requires practitioners to take reasonable steps to ensure equipment and drugs are safe and functional.
- This requirement applies within rostered, paid work hours, using QAS-approved systems and checklists.
- AHPRA does not require unpaid pre-shift work.
- Performing unpaid checks may contribute to fatigue, which itself could breach professional safety obligations.

Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Qld)

QAS must provide a safe system of work.

This includes:

- Scheduling sufficient paid time for vehicle and drug checks;
- Avoiding expectations of unpaid work; and
- Managing fatigue through proper rostering and workload planning.

Union Tip

If QAS can't get you home on time, they can't expect you to turn up early for free. Professionalism means working safely, lawfully, and with integrity — not giving away unpaid time.

Process to Follow:

- Log on at shift commencement time. Ie: 0600 Rostered Start, Logon via local work procedures at 0600
- Advise Opcen that commencing Vehicle checks
- Complete mission critical checks first
 - Sign out PRK and associated drugs
 - Defib, Airway and O2 Checks
 - Vehicle Roadworthy
 - Other checks as required
- If dispatched prior to completion of checks advise Opcen of status of checks and ask direction on whether to complete checks or proceed on case. If directed to proceed do not decline or delay response.
- Once checks completed in full advice Opcen of full operational status.

If QAS wants you to work before your rostered start time, they must pay you.

UNION MYTH BUSTER

Pre-Shift Checks and Unpaid Work: Queensland Ambulance Service Employees

MYTH 1:

“You have to start early to be professional.”

FACT:

Professionalism means doing checks properly and safely — **on paid time**.

There is **no requirement** under the *Industrial Relations Act 2016 (Qld)* or *QAS Certified Agreement 2025* to arrive early unpaid.

QAS confirmed that pre-shift checks are **not required** outside rostered hours

MYTH 2:

“You’ll lose your registration if you don’t check early.”

FACT:

False.

The *Paramedicine Board of Australia – Code of Conduct* requires that equipment be safe and functional, but this occurs **within paid work hours**.

AHPRA does **not** require unpaid pre-shift work.

MYTH 3:

“Everyone does it — it’s just part of the job.”

FACT:

Unpaid pre-shift work breaches the *Queensland Employment Standards*.

All work performed **for the benefit or at the direction of QAS** must be paid.

If you are directed to start early, it must be paid at the **appropriate overtime rate**.

THE BOTTOM LINE

- Your shift starts when you are rostered — not before.
- Unpaid pre-shift checks are **not a requirement** and may breach employment law.
- If directed to start early, it's **overtime**, not “initiative.”
- Professionalism doesn't mean unpaid labour — it means safe, lawful practice.

If QAS wants you to work before start time, they must pay you.

These fact sheets are provided to assist UWU members in understanding their new and existing rights and entitlements.

For any further questions or clarification, please contact a UWU Official at qldambulance@unitedworkers.org.au or speak with your local UWU State Council Delegate.