

Qantas executives asked to work as baggage handlers to alleviate chaos

Qantas executives are being asked to volunteer for crucial roles such as baggage handling as the airline tries to fight the chaos that has dogged many of its competitors worldwide.

Under the programme, first reported by The Australian newspaper, up to 200 management and office staff would sort and scan bags, and also drive tugs – the vehicles which tow luggage between terminals and planes.

The re-deployments would be for up to five days per week for three months, according to a note to staff from chief operating officer Colin Hughes.

The note, quoted in a report by Australian broadcaster SBS, said the airline is seeking expressions of interest for the programme.

“People who respond to the EOI will be trained and rostered into the ramp environment at Sydney and Melbourne airports,” it said.

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“These people will support our ground handling partners, who are managing the Qantas operation, over a three-month period from mid-August.”

A Qantas spokesperson told 9news.com.au: “We’ve been clear that our operational performance has not been meeting our customers’ expectations or the standards that we expect of ourselves – and that we’ve been pulling out all stops to improve our performance.

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"As we have done in the past during busy periods, around 200 head office staff have helped at airports during peak travel periods since Easter.

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“While we manage the impacts of a record flu season and ongoing COVID cases coupled with the tightest labour market in decades, we’re continuing that contingency planning across our airport operations for the next three months.”

Last month, the Australian carrier fell out of the top five rankings for the world’s best airlines.

Like many of its competitors, it has been battered by a wave of customer anger after flight cancellations, long queues at check-in, mishandled luggage and long waits when contacting call centres.

The airline was given almost \$2bn (£1.15bn) in government support during the COVID-19 pandemic but it also sacked 1,700 baggage handlers and outsourced the service to contractors.

That move was ruled unlawful by the Australian Federal Court but, facing a big compensation bill, Qantas has said it will challenge this.