



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc)

Federal Council

Federal Conference 2015

Motion Update

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2015 Federal ICPA Conference Motion Update

Since the 2015 Federal Conference held in Brisbane Federal Council has undertaken a variety of actions to pursue the issues that were raised through members' motions. These included letters to politicians, government departments and organisations as well as submissions, media releases and face to face meetings.

We have had responses to the majority of the motions and have continued to follow up on those where no response has been received. We remain committed to lobbying for ICPA members and hope that this update will be helpful as you prepare your motions for the 2016 federal conference.

Following is a summary by portfolio area of developments since the 2015 conference. Portfolio leaders' contact details can be found on the ICPA website, please do not hesitate to contact them if you have questions regarding either the issues outlined in this document or in relation to formulating motions for the upcoming Federal Conference. Updates regarding our various lobbies and other related issues are posted on our [facebook](#) page.

BOARDING SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TERM HOSTELS

AIC Increase

At last year's Federal Conference in Brisbane there were 17 motions directed to the Boarding Schools Portfolio. Ten of these motions were seeking an urgent increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC). We have similar motions brought to conference every year and Federal Council writes letters, attend meetings and make a lot of noise urging for an AIC increase. The 2016 figures brought an increase of only 1.5% in the basic Boarding Allowance further widening the gap between the cost of boarding and the AIC basic Boarding allowance which made us rethink our strategy. We needed to come up with another plan and go about our lobby differently.

After much discussion, Federal Council launched a campaign to really bring these motions to the fore. We are requesting that educational costs for our rural and remote families are addressed urgently. This should include a significant increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children Boarding Allowance and short term assistance when experiencing financial hardship in the form of a Drought Education Fund. At the beginning of the 2016 school year, the ICPA (Aust) Boarding Schools Survey was distributed via Survey Monkey and the response has been an unprecedented success. The comments and data that have been collated are incredibly valuable and we are now armed with some concrete information that we will take forth and circulate to our Federal Parliamentarians and Department Officials. The report will be distributed to members once all the data has been collated.

A media release was distributed and picked up by radio, newspapers and we even have a television spot. The media release can be read [here](#). ICPA (Aust) followed up the launch of the campaign and media interest with delegations to Canberra, speaking with those in government with the ability to make a change to assist rural and remote families.

Drought Education Fund

Our campaign is strengthened with ICPA (Aust)'s Drought Education Fund Briefing Paper which calls on the Federal Government to introduce a Drought Education Fund to address the grave concerns of many families in drought stricken areas who simply cannot afford to educate their children. Download and read ICPA's [Drought Education Fund Briefing Paper](#).

Fringe Benefits Tax on Employer Education Contributions

In correspondence received in relation to the easing of Fringe Benefits Tax for employers who contribute to education costs, Treasury have assured us that all ideas will be considered as part of the Tax White Paper process and final policies released for consideration prior to the election. ICPA has spoken to similarly focused organisations regarding this issue to also seek their support.

Rural and Remote Student Recognition

Following on from the floor motion passed at the 2015 Federal Conference, which requested that a category of disadvantage for rural and remote students be recognised by government for the purpose of accessing funding to address educational deficits. ICPA (Aust) have raised the concern that all disadvantaged student groups including geographically isolated students need to be supported in government programs and initiatives. There have been many meetings where we have asked that geographically isolated children be considered as a special category of disadvantage in school funding and future plans.

COMMUNICATIONS

2015 Conference floor saw a huge increase in Communications motions, mainly surrounding **nbn**, mobile coverage and Telstra. Not only a hot topic at conference, it continues to be a Federal Council focus.

At the Brisbane conference we were invited to represent ICPA on the Distance Education and Broadband Working Group, consisting of the Federal Department of Communications and the Department of Education and Training, executives from **nbn**'s satellite team and State and Territory Education Departments. This group is focused solely on satellite broadband and improving the outcomes for DE classrooms that will rely on the Sky Muster service. Small schools that rely on satellite are also included under this umbrella. **Nbn** has worked hard to progress our concerns and they are now offering a separate education port on the Sky Muster Satellite service of 50GB per student (up to 150GB) - the various education departments are still working out how they will be delivering this service. Also we are still waiting on absolute confirmation that kindy (those in a 4-year-old program) will be included in this service. It is great to have input into this process and put our members' views forward. The Sky Muster service is scheduled to launch in the second quarter of 2016.

With regards to the current slow speeds being experienced by ISS – **nbn** are certainly aware of the issue and are working with us to investigate it. However, Council doesn't have any firm answers yet. Following on from the conference we sought members' expressions of interest re installing a probe at their homestead to gauge exactly how the internet was performing. Some members were chosen from the list we provided and are currently assisting **nbn** to gather information.

When the Sky Muster service begins, users will have a choice about keeping their existing phone and internet, or switching over completely to the **nbn** (the satellite will carry voice over IP via a provisioned traffic class). Alternatively, end-users may choose to keep their phone service with Telstra (copper- or radio-based) and take only the broadband service over the **nbn**.

We wrote to Andrew Coull, Executive Director, Telstra Country Wide thanking him for the unmetering of education sites announced at the conference in Brisbane. We have been working closely with Telstra staff to ensure that the sites used widely by distance education classrooms are included. Hopefully by now our members are seeing the effects of this. This should address to some extent the unequitable pricing and download capabilities.

Telstra continues to closely monitor their mobile network and I must stress that their Area General Managers are very approachable, they have provided ICPA with their mobile contact numbers. Telstra have also been made aware that some Distance Education students rely heavily on the telephone as well as internet for their lessons.

We have been in regular contact with the Department of Communications, Minister Fifield's office and the **nbn**. Whilst in Canberra for delegations in November councillors raised the communication issues time and again- both mobile broadband issues and those concerning the **nbn**. We have been assured that the government is committed to investing in telecommunications infrastructure and the Mobile Blackspot Programme Round 2 has just closed, with 10,600 locations reported Australia wide. Successful applicants and locations will be announced in the second half of 2016. We have also raised the issues regarding the use of Mass Service Disruptions (MSDs) and illegal boosters. We continue to put forward the concerns of our members in our discussions.

Thank you for continuing to keep communications issues on our agenda. The launch of the Sky Muster satellite and the imminent rollout of services should help some members to access much improved internet.

CURRICULUM

NAPLAN online from 2017. Work is well underway. There are various options for schools to pick up the test, should they have connectivity problems. From the middle of this year there will be a small demonstrator test that can be taken by schools. There are a number of studies to be conducted, which are essential to moving from paper to online. The trialling study makes sure the new and traditional item types translate to the online environment. The device study makes sure the test is fair, regardless of the device used. The autoscoring study will test if scoring by the computer can work as well as people marking the writing test. Students typing their answer to the writing test has not been a problem in trialling studies and other comparable assessment programs.

Members have raised concerns about expectations in the Australian Curriculum that 'students will use software, including word processing programs with growing speed and efficiency to construct and edit texts'. The speed and efficiency is not specific and does not clearly define words per minute or accuracy. The skill of using word processing programs is still very broad, however writing skills are very definite in the expectation.

Federal Council is working with the Australian Curriculum and Report Authority (ACARA) regarding the year three NAPLAN writing task being implemented in a way that is age and skill appropriate for that cohort. Results from studies being carried out with this year group indicate that the results are comparable between written and typed responses. The amount of text Year 3 students are asked to produce is relatively small.

ACARA will work with state and territory curriculum authorities on readiness and factors which could cause them to take up/not take up NAPLAN in 2017. In some places state and territory departments and sectors, and in some places schools, will make a decision about when to move online. Students who complete the online test will get their results in 2-3 weeks, significantly faster than those who take a paper-based test.

Federal Council would like to encourage everyone to ask their school when and how they plan to rollover to NAPLAN online.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Similar to 2013 and 2014, last year's federal conference saw one passionately held distance education issue, strengthening the urgency of our members' need for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). The DE portfolio continues to work on practical measures by which the government can recognise this constant cry to support and recognise the vital work distance education tutors do.

The DETA lobby has recently been reviewed by Federal Council and it was resolved that in order to meet the needs of families who are seriously restricted in participating in the workforce, or are required to employ staff to fill the void, the annual allowance we are seeking should increase from \$4 000 to \$6 000 per family per year (the breakdown equates to \$150 per week over the 40 week school year).

The Distance Education portfolio has worked closely with the Communications portfolio and State Councils on the issues faced with doing distance education using the National Broadband Network's Interim Satellite Service. This led to a short video being produced during conference around the challenges experienced by families. This resource has been shared amongst politicians, members and all of our Distance Education related bodies, hoping to raise awareness of this issue. This video has been circulated on social media and the response has been astounding, demonstrating the interest Australia has in this unique mode of education. We received a citation from SPERA (Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia) and will continue to use this video in our lobby to gain financial recognition of the time the home tutor devotes to educating children via Distance Education.

Catherine Marriott, our ambassador for 2015 has proved a tremendous asset for our lobby for DETA, entertaining and inspiring us at the conference and featured prominently in our Communication / DETA video. (Click DETA for link)

To support the DETA lobby, ICPA (Aust) conducted a survey to determine and examine the key factors that impact rural and remote families who do not have daily access to face to face schooling. The aim of the survey was to provide sound anecdotal evidence from members about the need for financial assistance for families who must provide a tutor to educate their

children via distance education. The statistical data and comments collected in the survey, support what ICPA has been saying and strengthen our lobby for the DETA. Please find a copy of this on our website. [DETA Survey Results](#) (Click for link)

The Distance Education portfolio is currently working on a video, funded by the Department of Education and Training. The focus will be a short, high quality film demonstrating life in a distance education classroom and the role, and hence necessity, of the distance education tutor at home where the program is being delivered. It will portray authentic stories about two rural families who teach their children in modern, technology filled home classrooms. The vision will prove a valuable resource for politicians and policy makers in better understanding the role of the distance education tutor in delivering education programs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE UPDATE

At the 2015 conference there were 14 motions in this portfolio with half being to do with In Home Care (IHC) and the Nanny Pilot Programme (NPP). At our November and February delegations and also in correspondence, we have again been stressing the importance of extending the AIC to 4 year olds. We have also asked that consideration be given to providing targeted funding to allow the rural preschools to operate when students are present in the community and to apply a 95% target for access of rural and remote children to pre-school programs so as to ensure that state governments focus on creating similar access regardless of geographic area. Similarly, we asked that geographical isolation be included as a category of disadvantage under the National Partnership Agreement for early childhood education, thus providing the impetus to focus on this group. As yet we have had no reply to these requests.

IHC and NPP

(A63/64/66) Minister Birmingham's reply acknowledges the importance of IHC but states that no decision has been made to change the way the IHC programme is currently administered- there will be no increase to the number of places nor another allocation round prior to the introduction of the new system in 2017 but IHC will continue to run parallel to the NPP.

(A70) With regards to using IHC educators for DE supervision Minister Birmingham has noted that DE students are regarded as school children for the purposes of the family assistance law so families are only eligible for Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate when a child is in care for periods outside those of the home-school programme. Funding for primary and secondary education is a state and territory government responsibility which is why CCB cannot be paid for children in this situation.

(A65) In response our queries regarding service providers claiming that families are ineligible due to remoteness, Minister Birmingham has stated that while the Government cannot compel approved providers to provide care in any particular circumstance, his department would be happy to investigate any situations where it appears services are not delivering care in accordance with the intent of the IHC programme. Please contact [Tracie](#) for further information.

(A68-69) The purpose of the two year NPP is to determine whether a more sustainable programme can be affordably put in place for in-home care nanny services. Throughout the

pilot programme, an independent evaluation will be undertaken. This will help determine what worked and what did not, how to improve the programme and determine regulatory requirements, so that longer term policy decisions are based on real evidence.

A recent meeting with the Department of Education and Training revealed that while a number of remote families did sign up for the NPP, many have since resigned, citing it as unaffordable. Very few of our members have remained in the programme. It is very disappointing that at such an early stage the new NPP is not sustainable for families in remote areas. Unfortunately, many of the service providers are insisting that nannies have a Cert III in early childhood, which is adding to the cost of the service. The Department will be reminding service providers, that this is not in line with policy objectives. Federal Council encourages any participants and anyone who intended to take part in the NPP to contact [Tracie](#), so we can collect information to send to the Department and politicians during the trialling of this programme and hopefully lead to some early modifications.

RURAL SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TRAVEL

ICPA (Aust) Federal Conference 2015 had two school travel motions presented and passed. Both motions requested ICPA to lobby the relevant and major airlines to offer concessional rates for students travelling to attend educational facilities. In 2014, similar motions were passed and Federal Council contacted all major airlines requesting the concessional fares for students along with presenting information to support the need for this consideration. All replies were fairly standard, basically stating: “we are not able to provide concessional fares for students, however families should watch for our special fares when making plans”. Preliminary inquiries this year indicated that the same responses would be received. In order to gain some traction on this issue, Federal Council has been working with the State Councils and members to gather information on what is available in each state to assist students with their travel to and from school as well as inquiring about what local programs are in place that offer reduced fares for residents or students. ICPA (Aust) has been investigating further the ways in which local reduced fare programs operate and the possibility of these programs being expanded or implemented in other rural and remote areas. We have also gathered information on specialised programs such as Skytrans’ “Bush to Boarding”. Even though this particular program has recently ceased we have suggested reduced fare programs be considered by other airlines.

SPECIFIC LEARNING NEEDS

Provision of Medicare Rebate for Telehealth Services.

There continues to be a disparity in allied health services in rural and remote areas with residents in these areas having access to significantly fewer allied health professionals than their urban counterparts. Students in rural and remote locations have limited access to services provided by speech pathologists, physiotherapists or psychologists due to geographical location. Visits by allied health professionals to rural schools are infrequent, which compromises educational outcomes for many students.

The provision of a Medicare rebate for services provided by telehealth clinicians to rural and remote families with children experiencing developmental delays was a topic of debate at ICPA (Aust) conference. An ICPA (Aust) submission to the Australian Government Department of Health for the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce consultation was forwarded

in November. In this submission ICPA (Aust) has recommended that an equivalent Medicare rebate be provided to families in rural and remote locations who need to use telehealth clinicians for children with developmental difficulties under the 'Chronic Diseases Management Scheme' and similar item numbers, to those who have in-person consultations. ICPA (Aust) has also raised this recommendation with the Minister for Health and with other relevant authorities, including National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) of which ICPA (Aust) is a member. NRHA has also raised this issue.

Access to Improved Learning Opportunities for Students in Rural and Remote Locations with Dyslexia and other Specific Learning Needs.

ICPA (Aust) has written to the Minister for Education and Training asking that teachers in rural and remote schools, including distance education teachers and distance education supervisors are provided training to recognise and cater for specific learning needs. ICPA (Aust) acknowledges the "Good to Great Schools" initiative and that that the piloted Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools program is seeking to improve literacy outcomes through the introduction of explicit teaching approaches. The development of professional learning resources to support teachers working with students with dyslexia released earlier this year is also acknowledged. However, for distance education students who have no daily face to face access to appropriately qualified teachers and are reliant on often untrained distance education tutors, it is essential that professional development and support opportunities are provided to ensure that specific learning needs are catered for.

ICPA (Aust) has completed a submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Education and Employment on the current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support. ICPA (Aust)'s recommendations for access to improved learning opportunities are included in this submission which can be accessed on the ICPA webpage: <http://www.icpa.com.au/documents/browse/131/federal-submissions-2015>

Provision of Additional Resources to Boarding Schools for Students with Disability

Distance limits the choice of schools to students in rural and remote areas, but for students with disability this choice can be further limited. The question of whether boarding facilities are well enough equipped to be able to cater for boarding students with specific needs due to a lack of resources has been raised by ICPA (Aust) members. ICPA (Aust) has corresponded with the Minister for Education and Training asking for details of any funding initiatives to support boarding facilities in the provision of additional resources for students identified on the Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (NCCD). ICPA (Aust) is advised that support provided by a boarding facility would be considered the same as a parent providing the support, and is therefore not counted as a reasonable adjustment for education purposes.

However, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which is currently operating in trial sites throughout Australia will fund support that includes personal care and support, transport to and from school, and specialist supports for transition from school education to further education, training or employment. This could also be applicable to students who need to attend boarding schools.

TERTIARY

Since the 2015 Federal Conference, the Tertiary Portfolio has addressed the tertiary motions through submissions, media releases, meetings, delegation, letters and forums.

Assets Test for Dependent Youth Allowance (YA): A big win for ICPA in 2015 was the passage of the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015* with measures including the removal of the Family Assets Test and Family Actual Means Test from January 1, 2016. This will see more rural and remote students eligible for dependent YA and subsequently qualify for relocation scholarships. Our submission can be read [here](#).

Youth Allowance (YA) - Regional Higher Education Forums/Issues Paper: Many of the motions were addressed through attending Regional Higher Education forums and the submission of an issues paper to the Interdepartmental Committee on Access to Tertiary Education for Rural and Remote Students. ICPA highlighted the complicated application process for YA, the current Family Assets Test, Family Actual Means test and Parental Income test, YA eligibility for rural and remote students, independent YA parental income limit test of \$150 000 and qualifying timeframe, relocation scholarships/assistance for all rural and remote students and compulsory practicums, Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme, accommodation availability and deregulation of university fees, as major concerns. An internal report by the committee will provide advice to Government who will consider the findings as part of student assistance reform and higher education funding arrangements in the future.

Letters were also written to the Federal Government to request that aspects of YA, including rural and remote students who have to relocate be classified as independent and eligible for the relocation scholarship and the age threshold for automatic YA eligibility be reduced, be considered. Correspondence from the Minister for Education and the Department of Social Services on behalf of the Minister for Social Services gave explanations for the current services criteria. ICPA will continue to lobby for these issues.

Colleges: Letters were sent to UCA, AACUHO and over 30 metropolitan colleges asking for consideration of rural and remote students either by providing places specific for this cohort or an early entry scheme. We had a great response from the colleges with the majority claiming to have these provisions in place.

Student Start-up Loan: From January 1, 2016, the Student Start-up Scholarship became a voluntary income contingent loan for new applicants of YA. Students already in receipt of the scholarship, will continue to receive it as a scholarship, provided they have not had a break in payment.

Centrelink: ICPA has been corresponding with Department of Human Services about YA application issues. Individual application problems should be addressed via the 132490 helpline or visiting a service centre. We are glad to report previous issues with the online application not saving have been rectified. The changes to YA has resulted in a high volume of applicants leading to delayed application approval time and lengthy waits on the helpline.

Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA): The TAA still dominates the tertiary motions and we continue to lobby this issue as opportunities present including at our delegation in November.

HECS-HELP Benefit, Upfront Discount and Voluntary Repayment Scheme: The HECS-HELP Benefit has had very limited take-up but is currently still able to be claimed. The upfront discount and voluntary payment scheme will stay in place for 2016 but removed from 2017. We will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues through the avenues available to us. We have not had responses to some issues and we will follow-up on these.