

Federal President's Report Conference 2016

Senator Bridget McKenzie, Mr. Scott Buchholz MP, ICPA Federal Life Member Jane Gloster, members and guests...

I present to you my first report as your Federal President with an amount of excitement and pride. My first year has been a whirlwind to say the least and I have really appreciated the immense support I have received from our Federal Council and in particular Immediate Past President Judy Sinclair-Newton and Federal Secretary, Jane Morton who have helped me find my way through many things this past year. It is wonderful to be part of such a dynamic, enthusiastic and cohesive team. Everyone on Federal Council has put in a tremendous amount of work this past year and we've seen results with a few rewards. Despite a government leadership change soon after last year's Federal Conference, two Cabinet reshuffles and recently an extended federal election all within the last twelve months, we've been able to keep ICPA out in front of those in government and our issues talked about. Federal Council continues to work closely with those in government and strives to keep building relationships so that we are able to put forward our issues and explain the challenges our rural and remote students and their families face.

After forty-five years, ICPA is still asking to have the cost of educating geographically isolated children fully addressed. Equity of access to education is as hard fought for now as it was at the time ICPA was founded. While there have been many developments, improvements and changes over the years, we still continue to have numerous hurdles to overcome:

- The failure of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance to keep pace with the true cost of boarding;
- the enormous impact that lack of affordable and adequate internet is having on families and distance education;
- the exclusion from the AIC of four year olds who are beginning their formal education by distance education;
- lack of recognition of the work and commitment of distance education tutors in home schoolrooms across Australia
- and...the absence of a Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA), which could improve rural students' participation in tertiary studies

among other points, all remain prevalent issues for our members. ICPA continues to take up the challenge of ensuring that the voices of families living outside the cities are heard.

And on some matters, we are being heard.

Federal Councilors were very excited to be in Canberra when the passage of the *Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015* was announced last November. This was a huge win as all levels of ICPA - Federal, State, Branch

and members have been advocating for these changes for many years and worked together to achieve this outcome.

The acknowledgement from the Federal Government of the problems that rural and remote students face when accessing tertiary education, saw the establishment of the Interdepartmental Committee on Access to Tertiary Education for Rural and Remote Students, and we hope to hear more on this here at our conference from Senator McKenzie.

In the area of Communications, the launch of the **nbn** satellite “Sky Muster”, raised rural and remote families’ hopes that internet services will soon improve. The Sky Muster service has now begun implementation and many families are eagerly awaiting their installation dates.

With the needs of rural and remote students in mind, **nbn** are offering a separate education port on the Sky Muster Satellite service for distance education students and Telstra Country Wide have unmetered 38 key educational websites used by distance education students on both Telstra and Bigpond mobile broadband with more sites being considered.

Many rural and remote students must live away from home in order to access appropriate compulsory schooling. The gap is widening exponentially between the costs of education and the support received by these rural and remote families. It is not only affecting their financial security but is having a significant effect on the mental health of these families and in turn the sustainability and resilience of rural communities.

Earlier this year, Federal Council launched a campaign asking the government to urgently address the educational expenses incurred by our rural and remote families and seeking a significant increase in the Assistance for Isolated Children Boarding Allowance as well as short term assistance when experiencing financial hardship in the form of a Drought Education Fund. A Boarding Schools Survey was distributed to members and the response was exceptional, with over 1000 families completing the survey.

A small group of Federal Councilors took the Boarding Schools Research Survey results to Parliamentary Representatives and Senators in Canberra in early May and spoke on the urgent need to address this cost for families.

On June 22, in the lead up to the election, ICPA welcomed Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce’s announcement that if re-elected, the Coalition would commit to:

- an increase of the Assistance for Isolated Children’s (AIC) Additional Boarding Allowance by 50% to provide support to low-income families whose geographically isolated child boards away from their family home.
- Reduce the period students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria from 18mths to 14mths under Youth Allowance & ABSTUDY living allowance for regional & remote students
- establish 1200 new Rural & Regional Enterprise scholarships for undergraduate, postgraduate & vocational education students to undertake STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) studies

It has been very encouraging to see geographically isolated students supported in this way and in addition, ICPA looks forward to working with stakeholders in the newly announced independent Review Into Equity of Educational Access for Rural and Regional Students to bridge the divide.

In the past year, there has been genuine interest in the struggles that geographically isolated children endure in accessing education. I'd like to encourage all of us in ICPA to hold on to the motto: With great people doing great things, together we can achieve great results. Let's keep the momentum going forward.

ICPA is made up of great people- members, branches and councils that are all passionate about our children and their education.

ICPA (Aust) works with some great people who also want to improve rural and remote education. We have a good working relationship with many government leaders, departments, and other organisations- you can see some of the groups we work with on the screen. (slide was shown) A lot can be achieved when many of us join together seeking solutions to the problems that exist.

Federal Council have also been working very closely on several issues with all of the state councils and we thank the states for their support and efforts in our collaborations. I'd also like to thank our members for their contact and contributions, case studies and response to our surveys. Inclusion of members, branches and all councils and their participation in the surveys, requests for information and support has been a tremendous help and gives us widespread feedback standing us in good stead when speaking with others and putting forward our issues.

Federal Council would also like express thanks for the tremendous financial support we've been given by the Department of Education and Training and also Telstra Country Wide in sponsorship towards the running of this conference. Their continued major sponsorship of our annual event is greatly appreciated and allows us to come together each year to discuss issues and share information.

Federal Council have not only been working with a lot of great people, but we've also been doing quite a few things, and you will be hearing more about some of our ICPA Projects as we present our portfolio summaries over conference. Because of this, I will only mention a few of the ways Federal Council have been actioning motions and our lobbies

Over the past year, Federal Council have responded to numerous calls for submissions and a list of the submissions we've undertaken is listed here:

List of ICPA Submissions 2015-2016 Council Year

- Submission into Senate Inquiry into Students with Disability August 2015
- Submission into Senate Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (More Generous Means Testing for Youth Payments) Bill 2015- Oct 2015
- Submission into Senate Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Family Payments Structural Reform and Participation Measures) Bill 2015- Nov 2015
- Submission into Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Taskforce Nov 2015

- Submission into Senate Inquiry into Family Assistance Legislation Amendment (Jobs for Families Child Care Package) Bill 2015 -Jan 2016
- Pre-Budget Submission 2016-17 -Jan 2016
- Submission into Senate Inquiry into School Funding Investment -March 2016
- Submission into Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes-May 2016
- Submission into the Redesigning of the VET FEE-HELP Discussion Paper -June 2016
- Submission to the Productivity Commission's Telecommunications USO Public Inquiry -July 2016

Following on from our promotional video filmed at last year's conference which emphasized the significance of the Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) lobby and was shared with many politicians, education and communication stakeholder groups, recent funding from the Department of Education and Training, has allowed us to produce a second video, showcasing a typical day in the life of a distance education tutor. Filming took place in early February, with Immediate Past President Judy Sinclair Newton and the film crew battling Wet Season storms, rising creek crossings and crocodiles to gather the footage needed. The newest video will support the DE research undertaken at the end of last year, with the Distance Education Teaching Survey.

ICPA was very pleased to receive a Citation Award from the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) for our project around distance education resource videos

Some of the other projects we've undertaken have been the Boarding School Survey and a collection of communications and tertiary case studies which have enhanced our lobbies and highlighted the individual impact of our members.

In May, we created an election strategy designed around a calculator and urged federal candidates to "Do the Maths" in the lead up to the federal election.

Another project you will hear more about later are our new DETA postcards which you will all receive.

Over the course of the year, we have taken the ICPA message forward in numerous meetings, two Canberra delegations as well as two mini delegations and many interviews and articles with media.

We continue to strive to find new ways to get our message out there and we are also evolving as an organization. Federal Council has looked at new ways to keep members and those interested in the work of ICPA informed. Federal Council now has a new website, Facebook page, Twitter account, QR code and a Conference App.

One of our next steps into the future we hope will be being able to offer an online membership option to meet the needs of members and facilitate joining or renewing memberships.

I would like to thank everyone on Federal Council for making my first year in the President's role a great experience- your hard work, dedication, enthusiasm, passion and resilience shone

through time and time again this year as we tried some new things and continued to advocate for our children. Three councilors will be stepping down at the end of conference and they will be sorely missed, as each has been an integral part of our team. Our appreciation must also go to those who help our council with so many things- Sue Shotton our ICPA Website Manager; Jennie Shrimpton the Federal Webmaster; Raelene Hall, Pedals Magazine Editor, Julia Materne our archivist, Carmel Elliot who helps with the official minutes and Jane Gloster who acted as the Conference Liaison Person this year. You all help keep various parts of ICPA running smoothly, thank you.

A reminder to members that we will have a number of vacant positions on Council. Please give this some thought and speak to councillors over the breaks if you have questions regarding nominating for Federal Council, as nominations need to be in at the close of afternoon teatime. A full council ensures we can continue to work effectively in our lobbies.

I'd like to close with a quote from Lyndon B Johnson, 36th President of the United States, "Education is not a problem. Education is an opportunity." Accessing an appropriate education is often an immense challenge for our rural and remote students.

By working together, and continuing to have great people doing great things, I am sure we can create the waves of change necessary so that every child has the opportunity of an education regardless of where they live.

Wendy Hick

August 10 2016