



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

Federal Council

Federal Conference 2016

Motion Update

March 2017

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ICPA Federal Conference Motion Update 2016

Since the 2016 Federal Conference held in Perth, 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 2017 federal conference.

Following is a summary by portfolio area of developments since the 2016 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: It is no surprise that a significant percentage of motions presented at the ICPA (Aust) 2016 Federal Conference have requested substantial increases to Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme (AIC) boarding allowances due to the disparity between boarding allowances and the actual cost of boarding continuing to grow.

Last year's election bought about the largest financial commitment to rural families in order to overcome the inequities they face when accessing education for many, many years. [Click here](#) to see what Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce announced on June 22, 2016. Federal Council sees this is a huge win for ICPA families and acknowledges the commitment of the Coalition Government to "ensuring that families and students living in rural and remote communities have the same access to education as those living in urban Australia."

Increasing the means tested component of the boarding school allowance by 50% has been welcomed by ICPA and the families who have qualified for this increase. The increase has been implemented in time for the 2017 school year (for a period of four years). With the increase in the maximum rate of Additional Boarding Allowance to \$2 322 per annum per student, the 'Upper Income Limit' (i.e. parental income cut-off) to receive some of this allowance has also increased. <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/parental-means-test-assistance-isolated-children-scheme>

However, accessibility and affordability of compulsory school education continues to be two of the most significant factors that are placing enormous financial and emotional burden on our families with considerable impact on children.

The majority of families who qualify for the Basic Boarding Allowance have not been eligible for the Additional Boarding Allowance, meaning that the increases implemented to date have not reached most AIC families. Federal Council has been advocating strongly in both face to face meetings and in regular correspondence with relevant government representatives, for additional funding to be allocated specifically to geographically isolated families with increases to the remaining AIC components.

The Boarding School Access Research for Geographically Isolated Students compiled by ICPA (Aust) in 2016 continues to be a significant and valuable document that supports Federal Council in its lobby

for AIC increases and has been cited during delegation and correspondence with effect. [Click here](#) to access the survey. The feedback from the 1 034 members who responded is once again acknowledged. Your contributions have resonated with many throughout delegations and provide a very clear picture of the financial and emotional anguish faced by our member families to access a compulsory education.

Drought Education Fund: ICPA (Aust) continues to raise awareness of the obstacles encountered by families who are impacted by the ramifications of drought. The introduction of an education subsidy component to drought reform was once again voted for unanimously by delegates at conference, and ICPA has called for safeguards to be put in place as a matter of urgency to ensure educational continuity for families. To support this lobby, ICPA (Aust) has prepared a Rural Hardship Education Fund Issues paper. To date, no response has been received from our correspondence.

FBT: ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for the removal of unfair taxes that are adding to the high costs of educating students from rural and remote areas. The Fringe Benefits Tax, (FBT) that is applied to essential boarding staff in large cities and to the financial contributions of employers to staff for educational expenses has been raised with government representatives, and is an issue that has been shared with similarly focused organisations.

Living Away from Home Allowances: ICPA (Aust) has approached the Education Council to consider a national, unified approach towards the financial support provided by states, for families of students who must live away from home to access an education. Inconsistencies amongst states and territories for funding eligibility and the impact that this has upon the small number of students whose most accessible school is interstate, have been raised. The Education Council reiterated that this is a state issue, and that the states determine how their funding is allocated.

COMMUNICATIONS

From a communications perspective, it seems that there is no greater issue in regional Australia than telecommunications. No matter where you live, you should have access to affordable, reliable internet and voice services.

There were 32 communications motions presented at Federal Conference in Perth last year –mainly concerning **nbn** services, the Mobile Black Spot Program and Telstra faults and services. These have been actioned in our delegations to Canberra, through submissions and letters as well as through the many communications groups that ICPA (Aust) is a part.

Nbn

ICPA (Aust) has regular meetings with **nbn** as part of the satellite stakeholder roundtable and enjoys a good working relationship with them. The education port is in use in Queensland, SA and WA. Currently Western Australia is the only state that has their **nbn** internet connection paid through their Department of Education. Trials are taking place to further improve the delivery of educational materials over Sky Muster.

Many members have been concerned about the Qantas Wi-Fi trial that is about to commence. **nbn** have assured us that this is a trial, designed not to have an impact on Sky Muster users and they are 100% committed to ensuring that regional and remote Australia remains their top priority. The trial with QANTAS and ViaSat should help fast track technology that could support a similar service for the Royal Flying Doctor Service so their planes can communicate with specialists on the ground. The software developed in the trial will open the door to the development of products to support mobile satellite units for emergency services to use when there is a natural disaster.

As the number of users on Sky Muster has increased so have the bugs in the software, and network failures have started to appear. **Nbn** are working hard to address these issues, however the Sky Muster satellite service will never be as reliable as the service many people receive in metropolitan areas. The satellite is susceptible to rain fade, so when there is heavy rain the service goes out. Bill Morrow, CEO of Nbn Co has stated that “There is only going to be so much we can do, but we will make sure that at least it can perform at the best possible according to that design.”

Mobile Black Spot Program

The third round of the government Mobile Black Spot Program will commence its competitive process to allocate funding in 2017. Hopefully our lobbying efforts have not fallen on deaf ears as we advocate for more rural and remote areas to be covered by the program.

Telstra

ICPA (Aust) has worked with Telstra since conference to address members’ concerns. It is important that motions are accompanied by specific examples and customer reports. Telstra are working on ways to improve the speed in which they identify issues and arrange repairs. Many of the motions dealt with issues that were included in our response to the Draft Productivity Commission Report into the Telecommunications Universal Service Obligation. The final report is due to be released in April 2017.

The adding of unmetered educational sites for NSW & NT has been fully completed. Telstra offers unmetered access to a number of key Education websites for all BigPond and Telstra Mobile Broadband users.

Submissions

Over the months since conference Federal Council has had input into the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) discussion papers on Broadband Speed Claims and the Domestic Mobile Roaming Declaration Inquiry.

We contributed to the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) Review in November and we have presented submissions to the Productivity Commission’s Draft Report into the Universal Service Obligation and the Telecommunications Reform Package. Judy Sinclair-Newton and Joanna Gibson presented in person at the Productivity Commission Public Hearings that took place ensuring our members’ voices were heard.

ICPA (Aust) is also part of the Rural, Regional and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) whose purpose is to bring together like-minded groups that are concerned about a lack of connectivity in the bush. Together with organisations such as National Farmers Federation, ACCAN, CWA Australia, AgForce, WA Farmers, GrainGrowers and the BIRRR group our collective voices are being heard across the country. There are many vital issues being debated in 2017 that will shape the future of telecommunications in the bush and it is important to ensure the voice of non-metropolitan end-users is heard.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Distance Education Teaching Allowance

ICPA Federal Council continued to lobby the government at every given opportunity for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). The topic was raised in delegations, letters and discussions with government representatives including the Ministers for Education and Training, Social Services and Women. In 2016, it was decided to increase the amount requested for the allowance to the amount of \$6 000 per distance education family per annum indexed to the CPI to better reflect the essential work that distance education tutors perform.

Some fresh ideas were incorporated in the DETA lobby during the 2016 Federal Conference. Hundreds of DETA postcards were printed showing on the cover main statistics and facts that had been gathered from the ICPA Aust DETA Survey. The postcards were addressed to the Minister for Education and Training, Minister for Social Services and Minister of Women and given to delegates and guests at the Federal Conference who were asked to sign them and list where they were from. The cards were then posted to Canberra from the conference. More postcards were included with the Pedals magazine asking members to sign and post these cards to add to the number arriving at Parliament House. Federal Council wishes to express our appreciation to Hughenden Branch for contributing a donation to cover the cost of printing the DETA postcards. The tsunami of DETA postcards was certainly noticed and mention was made of them when Federal Council had their November delegations.

A Distance Education Resource video was also released at the Federal Conference. This video, filmed at the homes and schoolrooms of two ICPA members, received a phenomenal number of views on Facebook and our ICPA website within the first few days of its launch. The video aims to show the daily role of a distance education tutor and how a distance education home schoolroom operates, one schoolroom with the mother as the distance education tutor and one schoolroom with a governess. This resource video was intended to be used to help increase an understanding of how distance education classrooms function and the role the tutors play. The link to the video has been shared with all of those in government that ICPA (Aust) met with at delegations and the video has been shown wherever possible. Boarding schools have also found the video useful to help show the educational background some rural come from as they begin their boarding journey. The DE resource video will continue to be shown at other upcoming speaking opportunities.

Increase to AIC Distance Education Allowance

Federal Council has expressed the need for the AIC Distance Education Allowance to be increased to better reflect the out of pocket costs incurred by geographically isolated families undertaking distance education. This issue was raised at the delegations in Canberra in November 2016. With the government's election promise of \$44.7 million to be directed to isolated families, ICPA (Aust) has put forward a suggestion to the federal government that a portion of this funding should be allocated to increase the AIC Distance Education component. Another election promise was the implementation of an independent, comprehensive review into regional, rural and remote education and equity of access to which ICPA will be placing a submission, part of which will reiterate the need for an increase in the AIC Distance Education Allowance.

Inclusion of non-government Distance Education Students

ICPA (Aust) was directed by members to include geographically isolated non-government distance education students when dealing with all levels of and advocating for equity to education for rural and remote students. ICPA (Aust) has been ensuring that when references are made to distance education students, that it is understood that both government school as well as non-government school distance education students are recognised in the eligibility criteria of the AIC Distance Education allowance as geographically isolated distance education students.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Early Learning

The Assistance for Isolated Children- Distance Education Allowance (AIC – DE) component for 4 year olds taking part in early learning distance education programs the year prior to starting school.

To date these motions have been included in many of our lobbies. This issue was raised with politicians during our delegations in August and again in November. Federal Council lodged a submission with the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee in September 2016.

We have had some decisive action in relation to the AIC by the Federal Government and Federal Council is currently working closely with the Government as to the allocation of this extra funding as per a pre-election commitment made to us last year. Some of this has already been introduced for this year and the remainder of this funding will be allocated after the Federal Government has conducted a review into rural and regional education issues in the middle of this year. The AIC for pre-compulsory students has no funding commitment at this stage unfortunately; the review will be an opportunity to further push for funding for this cohort.

Child Care

Nanny Pilot Programme

ICPA (Aust) has been lobbying the relevant ministers and authorities to ensure the Review of the Nanny Pilot Programme (NPP) considers the following criteria to ensure the NPP and the incoming replacement program can meet the needs of families living in rural and remote Australia:

1. That the Nanny Pilot Programme is affordable.
2. Flexible criteria that allows the Nanny to assist in the distance education classroom.
3. Providers do not insist that Nannies employed under the scheme have Cert III qualifications and pass on the costs.”

Federal Council is pleased that government has responded to our concerns regarding affordability and have increased the rebate, as none of our member families are taking part in the trial, citing it as unaffordable. We have been advised that the current guidelines for the Program will not change till the completion of the Pilot. We continue to raise this problem and the many other issues with the Nanny Pilot Programme with the Federal Government and relevant stakeholders at every opportunity and will continue to do so.

In Home Care Scheme

Due to the Nanny Pilot Programme being unable to meet the needs of rural and remote families for child care, there were many motions at our Federal Conference in relation to the In Home Care Scheme.

Members have requested that:

- 1) The In Home Care Scheme is retained and maintained to run alongside the Nanny Pilot Programme into the future.
- 2) In Home Care places for rural and remote families be increased and reallocate existing places where places are not required in order to meet shortages elsewhere.

ICPA Federal Council has raised the above issues in a number of different forums since Federal Conference, they are:

- a) A Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Proposed Child Care Changes Sept 2016.
- b) At the Mini Delegation of Federal Council to Canberra in late August 16 where we met with specific ministers, MPs and Senators.
- c) In the full Council Delegation to Canberra in November 2016.
- d) These issues will also be raised in the upcoming Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Rural and Remote Early Childhood Services

It was identified from the amount of motions that were put at our Federal Conference that ICPA needs to lend their support to mobile resource units who are currently in negotiations with mobile children's service associations and the Department of Education and Training. These groups are endeavouring to negotiate the best outcomes possible for families within their regions. The problem stems from the changeover from the Federally funded Budget Based Funding program (which supports services in locations where it is not a viable option to run a profitable mainstream service) to the new system,

the Jobs for Families Childcare Package, due to be implemented by July 2018. The Jobs for Families Childcare Package caters for Child Care Programs and as it currently stands excludes mobile children's services such as playgroups because they are not technically child care.

Federal Council has raised this issue with the Federal Government in the following ways:

- a) In the Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Proposed Child Care Changes Sept 2016.
- b) At the Mini-Delegation of Federal Council to Canberra in late August 16 where we met with specific ministers, MPs and Senators.
- c) At the full Council Delegation to Canberra in November 2016.
- d) Federal Council has sent a number of Media Releases in relation to this issue.
- e) We have combined forces with a number of key stakeholders (e.g. NAMS, Contact Inc and SNAICC) to increase the publicity around this issue.
- f) This issue will also be raised in the upcoming Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

Federal Council acknowledges this is a very important issue for our members and related services and we are pleased to report that we have had many letters and communications with the Federal Government to reassure us that these services will be facilitated for and they will also be assisted in the transition process. The mentorship process has been slow and there have been delays in services receiving follow up information, but we are confident that no rural and remote services should be forced to close by the transition to this new funding model. Most politicians from rural electorates were aware of this issue because of the lobbying of local ICPA branches and other organisations. ICPA has been assured on many levels that the government will find a way of continuing support after June 2018 for mobile playgroups in rural and remote areas but that support may not be through the Jobs for Families Childcare Package. In the meantime, the government has contracted Price WaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to review all affected groups and report back.

ICPA Federal Council would urge you though, if you do have any information about any service that is not being supported to this level, please contact me at FedAssistSecretary@icpa.com.au as we need to know this information to help with our lobby.

Working with Children Certification

The current state-specific 'Working with Children' Check (WWC) requirements hamper timely employment or act as a deterrent, further increasing the difficulty already experienced in sourcing such employees in remote areas. Federal Council has lobbied for the WWC to be a national certification in a number of ways, they are:

- a) In the Submission to the Senate Inquiry on Proposed Child Care Changes Sept 2016.
- b) At the full Council Delegation to Canberra in November 2016.
- c) Federal Council sent a letter to the Minister and Shadow Minister for Justice.
- d) This issue will also be raised in the upcoming Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

The Federal Attorney General responded to our letter in relation to the Working with Children Certification and he referred to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses for Children Sexual Abuse (<https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/7ecd3db9-0b17-483e-9a0e-8fb247140f3e/Working-with-Children-Checks-Report>) and he also acknowledged the difficulties families faced in getting staff to work in rural and remote areas. He said the Commonwealth supports an approach that ensures greater consistency of WWC (working with children checks) between states and territories. The Federal Government, however, currently face a range of significant legal, technical and resourcing issues to make this happen as he said, "The development of national information

sharing infrastructure is a complex task that requires extensive work to secure agreement and establish the infrastructure.”

ICPA Federal Council will continue to lobby for this certification at a national level but if you could please send us any further developments or information you may have, as this will keep the dialogue happening with State and Federal Governments in relation to this motion.

Working Holiday Visas

Foreign travellers gain a second year holiday working visa by participating in rural work, but working as a governess or as a child carer is not deemed to be rural work under current Working Visa Criteria. It would be very beneficial for the education of rural and remote children, if child care was recognised as rural work, so travellers could subsequently qualify for the second year of the holiday working visa. Federal Council has been working on the Working Holiday Visa Motions in the following ways:

- a) In the Submission to the Working Holiday Maker Visa Review in September, 2016.
- b) At the full Council Delegation to Canberra in November 2016.
- c) This issue will also be raised in the upcoming Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

The report from the Submission we made in September was mostly centred around fair pay and treatment for the Visa Holder, however a need was identified to extend the categories for Specified Work as well as the time frames, which gives us some hope of a consideration for rural and remote families needing child care and governesses and this will address the workforce shortages in this field. We will continue to lobby for this issue, particularly in the upcoming Review where Federal Council will have representation in all areas.

RURAL SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TRAVEL

Two rural schools’ motions were presented at the 2016 Federal Conference.

Application for AIC under Special Needs Criteria

The issue seeking that the government address the inequities faced by families who live in or near rural and remote communities, where secondary schools are not able to meet the educational needs of individual students by allowing them to access the Assistance for Isolated Children’s Boarding Allowance or the Second Home allowance was discussed with the Department of Human Services and with the Minister for Education and Training. ICPA has requested the Department of Human Services provide a list of the application process for students applying for AIC under the special needs category so that it can be considered, reviewed and further comment made.

An independent comprehensive review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education and in particular access to this education has been announced jointly by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Education and Training. ICPA has been in discussions with the government leading up to the announcement of this review and we will be taking every opportunity to put forward the issues and challenges facing our rural and remote students. The difficulty in applying for special consideration for eligibility of the AIC will be one of the points we will raise in our submission to the review.

Recent conversations with some educational institutions has provided support around the issue of eligibility criteria of the AIC in order for students to access an appropriate education with a growing number of students being unable to attend schools that offer specific programs due to the high cost of boarding and their not being able to receive the AIC. Federal Council will continue to try to develop these conversations in order to strengthen the case being put before the government in their

consideration of students who have a need to live away from home in order to meet their educational needs for inclusion of the AIC allowance.

Sporting Schools Program

Federal Council wrote to then Minister for Sport, Sussan Ley, following the Federal Conference, requesting that modifications be made to the Schools Sports Program to allow suitable volunteers, not just qualified teachers or endorsed national sporting organisation coaches, to run sports where coaches are not available in rural areas. We have not had a reply from the Minister for Sport's office and Federal Council are now following this up with the new Minister for Sport, the Hon Greg Hunt MP.

SPECIFIC LEARNING NEEDS

Medicare rebate item number attached to relevant Telehealth providers

ICPA (Aust) has lobbied the Minister for Health and Aged Care and the Treasurer by correspondence and this motion was discussed with Members of Parliament where possible on delegation. ICPA (Aust) has also been in discussions with health professionals who also have concerns about access to Medicare rebates for telehealth consultations for mental health services, other Allied health services and chronic disease management (for example).

In late 2015, ICPA (Aust) raised this matter with Assistant Minister Nash (as she was at that time) and lodged a submission regarding the Medicare rebate being made available for appropriate teleconference consultations to the MBS Taskforce Consultation. In September 2016, the MBS Taskforce released several reports.

In response to correspondence from ICPA (Aust) in late 2016, the Hon Dr David Gillespie MP (Assistant Minister for Rural Health) anticipates the Mental Health Services Clinical Committee will be established in 2017 and wrote "MBS Items that may be reviewed by this Committee will include psychiatry, speech pathology, GP mental health and psychology items."

ICPA (Aust) is also represented on the National Rural Health Alliance Council providing another conduit for progressing telehealth related lobbies.

Workshops for parents of gifted children

ICPA (Aust) has lobbied the Minister for Education and Training, by correspondence and this motion was discussed with Members of Parliament where possible on delegation.

In response, the Minister suggested the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, commencing in early 2017, will provide an opportunity to make submissions around our motions, such as this one.

Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) at the University of New South Wales has been contacted regarding the potential for delivering workshops. A change in their School Manager of Education has led to a delay in furthering these discussions. Indications from GERRIC are that our request is in keeping with their policy position.

Going forward, ICPA (Aust) anticipates making a submission to the Review above, negotiations with GERRIC about the provision of parent workshops and subsequent exploration of funding solutions if necessary. The engagement of other organisations apart from GERRIC may be explored.

All rural and remote students have access to identification and intervention for learning difficulties

ICPA (Aust) has lobbied Minister Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training, by correspondence and this motion was discussed with Members of Parliament where possible on delegation.

In response, the Minister suggested the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education, commencing in early 2017, will provide an opportunity to make submissions around our motions, such as this one.

According to a media report on Jan 29, 2017, the Federal Government is considering introducing mandatory phonics, maths and literacy testing for Year One students. The Education Minister says the compulsory tests are not going to be "confronting" but an assessment that lets parents, teachers and students know if early intervention is needed. An expert panel will draw up a series of "light" classroom assessments to help identify children falling behind in basic skills. "This is about identifying where there are younger students developing their literacy and numeracy skills effectively and appropriately, and if they're not, ensuring that early interventions can take place so that they don't fall further and further behind," he said.

Through submissions and further correspondence, ICPA will continue to lobby for screening of phonological awareness by teachers to identify at risk students to be done in their first term at school and to stress that the single most important factor and predictor of successful literacy acquisition is phonological awareness.

TERTIARY

The 2016 Federal Conference again heard a large number of tertiary motions, highlighting the issues that our tertiary cohort face when accessing higher education. The Tertiary Portfolio has progressed motions via submissions, meetings, delegation, letters and upcoming reviews.

Tertiary Access Allowance and Youth Allowance: On June 22, 2016, the Hon Barnaby Joyce made an election announcement which included aspects relevant to our tertiary cohort:

- A reduction in the period regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria from 18 months to 14 months to qualify for Youth Allowance (YA) and ABSTUDY living allowance. This criteria will commence January 2018 and is another big win for our tertiary cohort.
- An independent comprehensive review into equity of education access for rural and regional students which includes higher education students. The submission and consultation process will allow ICPA (Aust) to include and address many of the motions from our last Federal Conference. Federal Council plans to include the following aspects in this Review: Introduction of a Tertiary Access Allowance, changes in Relocation Scholarship and Youth Allowance qualifying criteria, removing the Independent YA parental income limit criteria, reviewing dependent YA parental income limits and age criteria for automatic independent YA and financial assistance for relocation costs to complete compulsory work experience. All these are barriers to our rural and remote students accessing a tertiary education. While dates have not been finalised, we are expecting submissions to be called for around April to June 2017 and we look forward to the inclusion of tertiary motion issues in this review.
- **Centrelink:** ICPA (Aust) has continued corresponding with Department of Human Services in regards to issues around applying for YA. The Department reinforced that individual application problems should be addressed via the 13 24 90 helpline or by visiting a service centre. Efficiency measures are constantly being reviewed and improvements to the application platform are being monitored and implemented. We addressed members' issues and experiences in a submission to the *Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) Performance Audits of the Administration of the Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY Payment Schemes* (view here) including issues around the 13 24 90 support line, documentation requirements, service centres, online applications and communication difficulties, processing and approval times and YA website suggestions. An

overview of Youth Allowance was compiled by ICPA with advice from Dept. of Human Services and was updated in 2017. It can be viewed on the ICPA website - Youth Allowance Overview. Centrelink and Youth Allowance application issues were addressed during meetings with the Department of Human Services while on delegation in November 2016.

HECS-HELP Benefit: As a result of the findings of the *Review of the Demand Driven System*, (the HECS-HELP Benefit Scheme proved to be ineffective at influencing study and careers choices, had limited take-up and failed to increase demand for particular occupations), legislation passed in September 2016, to remove the HECS-HELP Benefit for work undertaken from July 2017 but it is still eligible to be claimed for work undertaken prior. Graduates have 2 years to lodge their application with the Australian Tax Office from the end of the tax year. There will be no change to eligible courses and the occupations list will remain as per the current scheme.

Tertiary access will be boosted for regional and remote students with the election announcement of 1 200 Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships for students undertaking studies in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). These scholarships are for undergraduate, post graduate and vocational education students and it is anticipated the first year of these scholarships will be awarded in 2018. The process is in the consultative stage and ICPA (Aust) has had input into the selection criteria and we are waiting for the next stage where we will be able to comment on the initial criteria.

Teacher Education: Federal Council wrote to the Minister for Education and Training, the Shadow Minister for Education, Universities Australia, NRHA, SPERA and the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) recommending the inclusion of modules such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders and offering of rural and remote education electives. ACDE responded positively, stating they would take the issue to their Board but ultimately university course content is up to the individual university and ACDE can only make recommendations. No responses have been received to date from the other letters.

Along with following up on issues we have not yet had a response to, ICPA (Aust) will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues through the avenues available to us.

TRAINING

With many changes in the Training sphere, it was pleasing to have training motions presented at the 2016 Federal Conference.

Federal Council is waiting for a reply from correspondence to the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, seeking assurance that staff in Early Childhood are provided with high quality training and have attained high standards in competencies and accreditation.

Financial assistance for compulsory work placements has been an issue for many years. Council wrote to the Minister for Social Services regarding the request for Youth Allowance during VET course compulsory work placement and received a reply on his behalf from the Branch Manager, Work and Study Payments. The response pointed out that one of the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance is a full time study load and practical components contribute to the calculation of study load depending on what weighting the educational institutions gives the practical component. If the educational institution gives this component an equivalent full time study load weighting, the hours are to be counted in the calculation of the study load. However if the institution gives the practical component no weighting at all then it cannot contribute towards the study load.

MISCELLANEOUS

National Rural and Remote Education Alliance

At the 2016 Federal Conference a motion was passed asking Federal Council to advocate for the formation of a National Rural and Remote Education Alliance. Federal Council raised this suggestion with Education and Training Minister Birmingham at our November delegations as well as writing to the minister directly after the Federal Conference. Minister Birmingham was supportive of the idea and has suggested that the concept of a National Rural and Remote Education Alliance, similar to the National Rural Health Alliance, be raised during the Regional, Rural and Remote Education Review. This review has just been announced on March 3, 2017 and ICPA (Aust) will be putting a submission in to this review with the National Rural and Remote Education Alliance being one of the points that will be raised. ICPA (Aust) has also discussed the idea of a National Rural and Remote Education Alliance wherever possible and intends to raise it with meetings that are held with other peak parent bodies.

Online Memberships

Federal Council has been investigating options for establishing online membership as an additional method for members to renew their memberships or join ICPA. Several teleconferences have been held with ICPA State Council Presidents and Treasurers and the Federal Council online membership committee (consisting of the Federal Treasurer, Membership Officer, Web Manager, President and Immediate Past President) and suggestions and feedback have been incorporated into the model that is being selected for online membership. Before online memberships can begin, state and federal constitutions require some updating to allow for the process of online membership. Federal Council has worked with state councils to word these necessary changes and states have circulated the proposed changes to ICPA members for consideration prior to their state conferences. The same will be done for the necessary federal changes. After the state and federal conferences, if the changes are accepted, work can begin to set up the online membership program and it is hoped that it will be ready to begin accepting online memberships for the 2018 membership year.