

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.
"Access to Education"**



Federal Conference 2018

Motion Update

March 2019

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Following the ICPA Federal Conference held in Canberra on 1-2 Aug 2018, Federal Council began actioning the 89 motions that were passed at the conference.

There have been some developments within a number of portfolios and updated information on the progress of the conference motions is as follows:

BOARDING SCHOOLS/ SCHOOL TERM HOSTELS

Following on from motions at The “Country Kids in Capitals” 2018 Federal Conference in Canberra, ICPA (Aust) has written to the Prime Minister of Australia, Minister for Human Services and Minister for Families and Social Services with copies to the Minister for Education, Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources as well as shadow Ministers and Greens representatives outlining the concerns raised in the 2018 boarding schools/school term hostels motions.

Rural Hardship Education Fund

Federal Council have spoken extensively on the need for a permanent program to assist rural and remote families with education costs in times of rural hardship, whether this is through fire, flood, industry impacts or drought.

ICPA (Aust) received a reply from The Hon Scott Morrison MP in response to the request for the establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund, outlining the outcomes from the National Drought Summit held on the 26 October 2018 along with the quote, ‘As a Federal Government it’s our job to look after families, individuals and communities to ensure that there is food on the table, kids can keep going to school and that the towns and regions remain viable.’

ICPA (Aust) has had representation at meetings with the Joint Agencies Drought Taskforce and raising the need for the implementation of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) as well as highlighting the excessive educational costs faced by our rural families in accessing schooling for their children.

Mental Health for Boarders

Mental wellbeing, particularly for students who live away from home for schooling, has been a focus in our boarding discussions. Federal Council has been involved in several conversations with various organisations interested in the creation of resources designed specifically for rural and remote students and their families which will help address the unique challenges they face whether they are boarding away from home, in a small rural school setting or distance education classroom. A Floor Motion at last year’s conference requested that boarding school/hostel staff have Youth Mental Health First Aid training. Options are being explored to take this motion forward with boarding schools and boarding school associations.

ICPA (Aust) also assisted UNICEF in coordinating a trip out to rural NSW areas to talk with children to assess the impact the drought is having on them and Federal Council welcomed their [report](#) which contained very upfront comment and was released on Mon 18 Feb.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC)

Motions requesting an increase to the AIC and adjustment to the different components of the allowance have been raised through letters written to government, delegations and meetings with the Departments of Education and Training, Human Services and Social Services. While a sympathetic ear is often afforded, ICPA (Aust) is still working on trying to see these changes come to fruition.

At the 2018 Federal Conference, ICPA members supported a motion asking ICPA (Aust) to seek the undertaking of a review of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and Federal Council raised this at our delegations in November. Interest in an AIC review was expressed by a number of government representatives and Federal Council were encouraged to hear that one Minister planned to formally request such a review. At this time, Federal Council are still waiting to hear of progress on the possibility of a review.

Over the Christmas break, Federal Council supported ICPA members who received AIC payment duplications and cancellation letters. Federal Council also held discussions with the Department of Human Services regarding solutions for these situations and the effect these multiple payments and cancellation letters have on families. These issues further strengthen ICPA (Aust)'s call for online renewal and processing. ICPA (Aust) will continue to pursue an AIC online renewal process along with other concerns associated with the AIC application, approval and implementation process.

The second, third and fourth instalment of AIC payments in 2019 will be paid on the dates published on the ICPA website which can be found [here](#). At the time of writing this Motion Update the Department of Human Services (DHS) is still working on the best way for the double up payments to be refunded to the Government. Federal Council will keep members informed as soon as it is known what process will be undertaken.

Fringe Benefit Tax

ICPA (Aust) continues to raise in delegations with the federal government the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) incurred by employers who assist employees living in rural and remote locations with the huge out-of-pocket costs associated with boarding children away from home for their schooling.

Bank Accounts and Boarding Students

At the 2018 Conference, a motion was tabled requesting ICPA (Aust) raise awareness with banks regarding young students and their need to have access to bank accounts and cash withdrawal cards from an early age as a result of some students 11 years old and younger being away from home for schooling. This resulted in an article being published in the January 2019 edition of Pedals magazine and a document being created as a resource for the ICPA (Aust) website. This document offers boarding parents some suggestions for consideration when discussing their students' banking needs including possible questions to ask when seeking to open an independent bank account for students. Follow this [link](#) to view the Banking and Boarding Students document on our website.

COMMUNICATIONS

ICPA (Aust) continues to work closely with the Federal Government, telecommunications companies and other like-minded stakeholders to seek the maintenance and development of adequate, affordable and reliable communications services for families in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly for the purpose of educational outcomes.

ICPA (Aust) continues to be a member of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition ([RRRCC](#)) and our members' issues are often discussed within the RRRCC forums. ICPA (Aust) also participates in the RRRCC delegations to speak with those in government and this affords opportunity to raise concerns in an additional capacity.

Internet

Once again at the 2018 ICPA Federal Conference, members brought forward numerous motions seeking an improved internet experience. Of major concern to our members was expansion of the

Education Port to include all rural students especially those studying at the tertiary level. The announcement of [Skymuster Plus](#) will go some way to relieving these concerns for members. ICPA (Aust) media release can be found [here](#). ICPA (Aust) has discussed and continues to raise these issues by email, phone, written submissions and in meetings with the Minister for Regional Services, other members of government, Telstra and nbn. Members are encouraged to contact either their State Council or Federal Council if they are having trouble resolving their internet issues.

Telephone

Many motions this year were concerning the faults and restoration of telephone services. This was also highlighted in the [RTIRC Report](#). Members also raised concerns around the retention of landline services in rural and remote areas. Federal Council have been assured by the Minister for Communication's office that all landlines are to remain in place and will not be replaced by VoIP services. Landline services will continue to be maintained until another means of reliable, affordable and appropriate voice service is available. New technology and devices are currently being investigated to replace existing ageing services.

Faults and Universal Obligation

As already mentioned, there were a number of motions this year referring to faults and restoration times. Stakeholders are aware of these issues and there are actions coming into play to improve consumer's experiences with this. Acknowledgement was made by the Minister for Communication's office with a [Regulation Impact Statement Update](#) and [Universal Service Obligation](#) assurance.

Telstra has rolled out its regional call centre that it has created to specifically deal with rural, regional and remote customers. If a residential (not Business) customer calls 132 200 and their account is listed as an address 100+km from a Telstra Store they will be diverted to the Regional Call Centre team. Hours of operation are: 7.30am-9.00pm Monday-Friday, 7.30am-7.30pm Sat, and 7.30am-5.00pm Sun. If outside these hours or if all the team are on calls, the customer's phone call overflows to other teams to be answered.

ICPA continues to advocate that these guidelines and services be adhered to, and penalties to apply when breached. Federal Council placed a submission with the [Review into Consumer Safeguards – Part B Reliability of Services](#) which highlighted concerns raised by members.

Mobiles

Mobile black spot programs, priority for small schools and booster/sat phone subsidies and fault restoration times are all topics ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby for with the relevant stakeholders. In the latest round of black spot funding small schools were given priority in the areas that were highlighted by local councils. These schools will gain a small cell tower which will ensure mobile service for the school where there previously was none. ICPA (Aust) has received feedback from Government stating that they will not provide subsidies for satellite phones.

CURRICULUM

There was one Curriculum motion at the 2018 Federal Conference which asked that Primary Production be included as a compulsory component in the national curriculum. "Agriculture" is currently included in the national curriculum however, Primary Production specifically is being sought as "Agriculture" has been open to interpretation by schools and teachers. Members wish to see the actual process of growing Australian food and fibre taught in schools to create an awareness of where food and fibre come from as well as the process required in providing it. Federal Council have had discussions with Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia ([PIEFA](#)) to discuss their web portal "Primezone" and ways to extend its use. Federal Council has also asked ACARA to discuss the inclusion of Primary Production at one of the Peak Parent Bodies Stakeholder meetings that ICPA

(Aust) attends. The importance of having Primary Production specifically taught to all children was raised with the Minister for Education, Minister for Agriculture and Shadow Minister for Agriculture.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

With a focus on the value of Distance Education Home Tutors and of DE/SOTA schools based in rural and remote locations, the 2018 Federal Conference saw two motions presented and passed in relation to Distance Education.

Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

A request for Federal Council to continue its lobby for a [DETA](#) became the first conjoined motion in Federal Conference history, with 5 branches collaborating to present this motion. Following on from Federal Conference, ICPA Federal Council continues its long-term lobby for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). The topic was raised in a standalone motion letter sent to the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan and other relevant ministers and rural senators and members with an interest in rural and remote education. Notably, this year we also sent this letter to the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP, Minister for Women, with the view that this matter is one which affects the wellbeing of women in geographically isolated communities. We have as yet received no replies on this lobby. The call for a DETA to be established was also included in Federal Council delegation Briefing Papers and raised at every opportunity during delegation meetings. The issue was comprehensively covered in Federal Council's submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education which was completed following the 2017 Federal Conference. Unfortunately mention of a DETA was not included in Professor Halsey's report, however he did allude to recognition of the role the home tutor plays in distance education. Federal Council will continue to advocate for and pursue the DETA by utilising every opportunity through submissions, meetings, delegations and other avenues, along with the opportunity taken within these to raise the profile of the distance education tutor and the extensive and essential role they play in achieving distance education success.

Location of Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

Though later retracted, the 2017 decision by the Western Australian Government to close regional schools of the air and to instead provide a single service from a central Perth (metropolitan) facility highlighted a lack of broader understanding and appreciation of why Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education are so important to rural and remote communities. ICPA (Aust) media release can be read [here](#). On the back of this, a motion presented at the 2018 Federal Conference requested that ICPA (Aust) advocates the importance, value and critical need of Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education being based in and part of their respective rural and remote communities.

ICPA Federal Council have been strongly advocating, at every possible opportunity, that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities. We thoroughly understand the importance of this and provided steadfast support of the Western Australia State Council when the issue of the closure of SOTAs in their State was announced. We were grateful and relieved when this decision was overturned, however recognise that this was a situation which we do not wish to be repeated. While decisions of this nature are principally state-based, Federal Council will support and advocate along with the States to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities. We are also prepared to use every possible opportunity to highlight and promote the features of educating children via distance education in a

geographically isolated situation, such as hosting a recent Central Station blog week focussed entirely on Schools of the Air and Distance Education experiences.

Federal Council encourages all ICPA members to actively highlight the valuable role of the distance education tutor and to participate in opportunities to raise the profile of the nature of geographically isolated distance education and the importance and value of schools being based in rural and remote communities.

Other points of interest

Assistance for Isolated Children – Distance Education (AIC - DE)

Although not included in the Distance Education motions in 2018, Federal Council have continued to work on issues associated with Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC), off the back of boarding school portfolio motions. At meetings with the Department of Human Services, ICPA (Aust) raised issues with the AIC application, approval and implementation process, specifically requesting an online application process. At this stage however, no commitment has been made for this to occur. Also, in a motion letter to the Hon Paul Fletcher, Minister for Families and Social Services and other relevant ministers and rural senators and members with an interest in rural and remote education, ICPA (Aust) requested an increase in the AIC, in line with the costs associated with educating geographically isolated children.

Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (AHVISE)

After the demise of the former Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (VISE) program and concerns raised by our members around this, ICPA (Aust) are pleased to report that the Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education ([AHVISE](#)) educational support program is now in operation. It has successfully taken the place of the former program, with additional support services being offered, including a virtual classroom where volunteers who cannot travel have the ability to tutor bush kids online.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

ICPA (Aust) is working very hard to ensure rural and remote families can and will access high quality, affordable early childhood learning and child care; whether this is through Preschool, Mobile Early Childhood Services including Mobile Playgroups or In Home Care (IHC).

AIC Distance Education Allowance for Four-Year-Olds and Universal Access to Early Childhood Education

ICPA (Aust) will continue to promote both the extension of the AIC Distance Education allowance to 4-year-olds and increased access to preschool in rural and remote areas when we can, particularly as the Federal Government has provided \$440 million to states and territories for preschool in 2019 under the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. All states have now signed up for this and the media release can be found [here](#).

Federal Council wrote to relevant ministers requesting easily obtained waivers to enable qualified teachers or Diploma qualified educators be employed to fill a vacant position when qualified Early Childhood teachers are not available in rural and remote areas, especially in small part-time rural and remote Child Care Centres. This would prevent some children missing out on preschool/kindergarten altogether. If children do not receive learning opportunities at this early stage, they will definitely not be school-ready and lag further behind their peers when they start school.

Mobile Early Childhood Services

A new [Community Child Care Funding](#) (CCCF) Round 2 has just opened for Mobile Early Child Care Services in disadvantaged communities to improve access to early learning opportunities for vulnerable children and families. This may also be used for In Home Care Services.

ICPA (Aust) is hoping extra funding provided through the CCCF this year might help fund Mobile Playgroups (partially funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) whose funding ceases later this year) as the (IAS) has now been transferred to the Department of Social Services. "From 1 January 2019, up to an additional \$2 million in the first year and up to an additional \$4 million per year after that will be available following the transfer of specified IAS services to the department."

In Home Care (IHC)

Federal Council has received many complaints and concerns from member families since the new In Home Care model was implemented on 2 July 2018. Numerous letters have been written to the Minister for Education, rural politicians and the Department of Education and Training and we have followed up with this on delegations and whenever the opportunity arose.

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the announcement that the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for IHC families has recently been increased from \$25.48/hour/family from 2 July 2018 to \$32.00/hour/family and up to \$38.40/hour/family for Additional CCS from 1 January 2019 as per the later version of the IHC National Guidelines which can be found [here](#).

Families are encouraged to review their incomes to make sure they are receiving the correct percentage of CCS.

200 more IHC places, an increase to the 3000 existing places, have been made available, particularly for families in Qld.

The Department of Education and Training has informed IHC services in rural and regional areas that they can apply for a once-off Special Circumstances grant under the Community Child Care Fund to address any current viability or national disaster issues such as drought, the NW Qld floods, Tasmanian bushfires etc. By clicking on the link - [CCCF Special Circumstances Funding](#) will give further information about the program including Guidelines, a Fact Sheet and Application form are available. Funding to some IHC service providers was reduced in July 2018 and these services then charged additional levies which were passed on to families. The CCCF Special Circumstances Funding and an increase in the CCS should make IHC more affordable to families. ICPA has heard though that since 1 January some IHC service providers have increased their fees and have not removed those levies. ICPA (Aust) would like to hear how IHC families are now experiencing IHC, is it cheaper or more expensive than previously? Are there any other resulting issues? Comment from members on the IHC program are most welcome and can be emailed to Jane Morton [here](#).

IHC educators are required to have at the minimum, a Certificate III in ECEC or be working towards same from January 2020. There are 2 transitional provisions for IHC educators prior to that:

- An IHC educator providing services in a remote or a very remote area will meet the qualification requirements for IHC educators if the IHC educator has access to, and utilises the expertise of, an educator with at least a Certificate III in early childhood education and care for at least 20 per cent of the time care is provided to a family. This may be by means of information and communications technology (ICT).
- An educator, who has been continuously working in a remote or very remote area for at least 15 years is exempt from the qualification requirements until 1 January 2020.

Skills IQ are updating Certificate III and Diploma for ECEC training packages with submissions now being accepted until 29 March 2019. All employers and educators are encouraged to add their feedback. Note that students have to gain their Cert III in ECEC before applying for Diploma training in ECEC and that work placements for Cert III in ECEC have been increased from 120 hours to 160 hours, of which 120 hours must be in a regulated ECEC service (40 hours can be in the family workplace). This means an IHC student in a rural/remote area would have to be released for at least 3 weeks to undertake work placement in a regulated ECEC Service; a costly exercise for the student and leaving the family without their IHC educator. This makes it very hard for IHC students and IHC families to release the student (educator) for so long to go so far away. Follow this [link](#) for the submission process details.

The Department of Education and Training has also clarified the IHC educator requirement for caring for school-aged children:

“In recognition that IHC educators may care for primary school aged children, the primary school teaching qualifications of educators registered with the state and territory education boards are also deemed as acceptable qualifications for IHC educators.” Further information can be found [here](#).

Since seeking clarity on the issue of IHC educators supervising distance education, the Education Minister has reinforced the legislation from the Family Assistance Law citing that only caring for children completing their homework and regular child care, but not supervising formal schooling, is permissible in order for the family to receive the Child Care Subsidy (CCS).

The Department of Education and Training has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those ‘formal schooling hours’ but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time.

However, if a parent is supervising children by distance education and an IHC educator is employed for out-of-school hours care for the children and/or caring for younger members of the family then the parents can claim CCS as **supervising distance education is classed as volunteering** (as long as the other parent is working).

Working with Children Check (WWCC)

ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Federal Government in the implementation of a national WWCC certification. A national working party has started work on this, but it will take some time to complete due to the different rules and regulations of states and territories. Unfortunately, we have received no further news regarding a national certification at this stage. An announcement is due and Federal Council will forward any information as it becomes available.

Working Holiday Maker Visas

The Minister for Home Affairs confirmed through his department, the Working Holiday Maker Visa news of 7 November last year. Several changes were made to employers being able to retain trained and experienced employees doing agricultural (plant and animal cultivation) work for up to 12 months, rather than the previous 6 months, with the additional provision of a third-year visa enabling working holiday makers to work for longer in regional Australia. Media release can be read [here](#).

Unfortunately, this does not apply to nannies and distance education tutors at this time, just seasonal workers, though the Minister has indicated that the government will see how these developments pan out before considering any more changes. ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for nannies and distance education tutors on Working Holiday Maker Visas in regional areas to be considered as doing ‘agricultural work’.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to work with the Federal Government and other bodies available to us to further ECEC concerns and we will share any more developments with members.

RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL

As most of you know Greyhound Australia announced after last Federal Conference 'it will no longer take children aged 15 and under being 12-14 years of age without a chaperone'. Greyhound's reasoning was safety for the children at stops which were at the forefront of their thoughts. Although their thoughts for safety are paramount, they did lack consultation with stakeholders on solutions with local communities which was a big part of the problem. This decision by Greyhound has impacted approximately 250 children nationally; this decision has brought the Queensland State Government to now fund a 'Chaperone' on certain designated routes. Although Greyhound are a national company, other States have not seen such an impact as Greyhound was not visiting a lot of areas for this to cause such a detrimental effect that is currently happening in Queensland. ICPA (Qld) is currently scheduled to meet with Greyhounds Translink representative at their delegations in Brisbane to discuss this further.

Moving on, Alice Springs Branch raised a motion in regard to improving our regional and remote roads network to a safe standard and after Federal Council raised this with the Federal Government and stakeholder groups we have received a reply from Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development – Mr Hon Michael McCormack. The minister expressed that the "strengths of our roads continue to be the Government's core focus and have a number of programs in place to provide funding to regional and remote communities to assist with ongoing road maintenance". They also stated they have a 'Roads to Recovery' funding that will be given to councils to choose which programs they will direct this funding to, according to priority of course. He was concerned with our National road toll and serious injuries as a result of and we believe this is a long time coming.

Further, the travel Inquiry has been extended to June 2019 and we are hoping for more outcomes that reflect things like fares allowances which would assist so many families. AIC is a continual area of concern and is considered on a case by case basis for families who don't qualify due to living too close to a rural school is an area that we continually work on from past years. It has been encouraging that Qantas has increased some flights which was detailed in their response and re-iterated that 'residents can book return leisure or personal flights from Cloncurry or Mt Isa airport to Brisbane or Townsville, or from Moranbah airport to Brisbane. All return travel is from eligible Western Australia ports are for leisure or personal travel to Perth only'. They also went on to say that residents from surrounding councils and neighbouring regional, rural and remote communities can apply for the discount as long as the resident is able to demonstrate that their nearest airport is one of the ten eligible ports in Queensland and Western Australia.

SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS

Travel and accommodation assistance for specific education needs appointments

ICPA (Aust) has recently written to the Ministers for Health and Education to explain the national need for rural, regional and remote families to access travel and accommodation assistance to attend appointments with qualified professionals in order to diagnose and manage specific learning needs. ICPA (Aust) has also represented this issue at meetings of the National Rural Health Alliance which has rural representation from a wide variety of health professionals' organisations.

The cost of access to services to assist with specific education needs is going to be an ongoing issue and future motions and ideas on how to further this aspiration are encouraged.

Mental health resources and bullying

While mental health resources for parents and students, especially around cyberbullying, are being developed by many organisations and government, few target geographically isolated students or boarding students specifically. ICPA (Aust) has written to the Ministers for Health and Education to garner their support for the development of such resources. The government recently launched the [Student Wellbeing Hub](#) which has resources for teachers, parents and students. Potentially, links to resources specifically for geographically isolated families might be on this site. ICPA (Aust) is exploring several lines of inquiry to find ways to develop the resources this motion is asking for.

[Mt Isa School of the Air](#) (MISOTA) has been working on a program starting with creating a “friends” program with sections on resilience. They had “[Eyes Open- Social Media Safety](#)” attend their Home Tutor Week in May 2018 to discuss cyber bullying and found they did a good job of tailoring their presentation to their ‘audience’. Eyes Open does school consultations and offers resources that MISOTA have purchased with the aim of offering these resources to every family in their school.

In Term 4 2018, MISOTA launched “Tips for Transitioning” around moving from distance education to boarding. This was the next phase of their program and also has an emphasis on cyberbullying.

Another organisation working in this space is [Dolly’s Dream Foundation](#) (associated with the [Alannah and Madeline Foundation](#)). They are currently researching what does and does not work in terms of delivering cyberbullying information and aim to develop their own resources. ICPA (Aust) is hopeful a working relationship might be established with these organisations to foster the development of resources specifically for rural and remote families.

Gifted and Talented Education

At the 2016 Federal ICPA Conference, ICPA (Aust) was asked to advocate for funding for the delivery of workshops for parents of gifted students living in rural and remote areas of Australia. The University of NSW’s Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) delivered such workshops over 10 years ago. Negotiations stalled, however, at the request of ICPA (Aust), GERRIC is currently costing the delivery of parent workshops for rural and remote families either through community visits or over webinars. Once costs have been established, ICPA (Aust) can then look to find ways to deliver on these workshops for parents of gifted and talented children.

TERTIARY

The number of tertiary motions again presented at the 2018 Federal Conference, highlights the ongoing issues that our tertiary cohort face when accessing higher education. The Tertiary Portfolio has continued to address the motions and unresolved motions from previous years, on a number of fronts; meetings, delegation, submissions and correspondence.

The tertiary motion update starts on a very positive note with the welcome change in Youth Allowance for those rural and remote students qualifying for independent Youth Allowance through part-time work or earnings. As of 1 January 2019, regional, rural and remote students applying for Youth Allowance under the *Independent through work: Part-time work or earnings for rural and remote students* criteria, the parental income cut-off increase from \$150 000 to \$160 000, plus \$10 000 for each eligible additional child in the family. There is also greater flexibility in the choice of financial year used for parental income. Visit Youth Allowance website [here](#) for further information.

Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA)

The [TAA](#) remains one of our highest priorities and ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby as opportunities present for this allowance to be introduced. The TAA amount is aligned with the Relocation

Scholarship amount: 1st year - \$4,553; 2nd or 3rd year - \$2,278; 4th or subsequent years - \$1,138. In a response from the Minister for Education, the TAA has been passed onto the Minister for Families and Social Services for future policy consideration.

The Department of Social Services has informed ICPA (Aust) that the Relocation Scholarship is primarily targeted towards dependent students on the basis that they are relocating temporarily away from home and their parents assist with support while living away from the parental home. Relocation Scholarship is not available as a stand-alone payment.

There is continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided to help with relocation costs for rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance compared to assistance to dependent Youth Allowance recipients. ICPA (Aust) see the Relocation Scholarships as a way to alleviate the burden for rural students who are moving for their tertiary education regardless of which type of Youth Allowance they qualify for. Aligning the TAA with the Relocation Scholarship amounts will benefit the youth allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students ineligible for Youth Allowance.

HECS HELP discount and voluntary repayment

The 10 per cent HECS-HELP upfront payment discount and the five per cent HELP voluntary repayment bonus ceased on 1 January 2017. The Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, informed ICPA (Aust) that these bonuses proved ineffective in encouraging either upfront payment or voluntary repayments. Despite our correspondence requesting reconsideration of this decision, there has been no indication that it will be reversed or that a similar program will be implemented in the future.

Centrelink

ICPA (Aust) has continued collaborating with the Department of Human Services in relation to the issues that members are reporting when applying for Youth Allowance. In May 2018, Federal Council met with the Department of Human Services, Department of Social Services and Department of Education and Training in Canberra and many Youth Allowance issues were discussed. Federal Council presented numerous suggestions to the Department of Human Services in relation to the Youth Allowance application online process and the current website. The Department is keen to be informed of any issues as part of their quality and improvement processes and appreciate comments and advice from members.

While the Department continually reinforces that individual application problems should be addressed via the 13 24 90 helpline or by visiting a service centre, we reiterated the issues reported regarding wait times on the 13 24 90 support line. The Minister for Human Services, the Hon Michael Keenan, reported back to Federal Council that the 2017-2018 Budget had allocated resources to increase the Department's call centre operators and the 2018-2019 Budget allocated funds for the Department to target call wait times and improve service delivery. By December 2018 an additional 350 new operators had been allocated specifically to the Youth and Student enquiry line. We are assured that where a Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY or Austudy enquiry is complex, staff access further assistance from specialist staff.

The Minister referred to the online [Change Circumstance Monitor](#) as a tool to reduce an applicants need to contact the Department by enhancing the claim submission process and providing progress information relating to their claim assessment. This monitor provides graphic representation of the progress of a claim, provides notifications at strategic points throughout the claim including electronic messaging to claimants where tasks or actions remain outstanding and displays the estimated completed date of their claim. We are waiting for more information on this tool and will forward to members when available.

Youth Allowance (YA)

The Youth Allowance Overview compiled in consultation with the Dept. of Human Services was updated at the end of 2019. It can be viewed on the ICPA website [here](#).

Correspondence sent to Government about YA issues included raising parental income limit for dependent Youth Allowance, adjusting the qualifying amount for rural and remote students applying for YA as an independent under the part time work/earnings criteria and ensuring rural and remote students who do not get dependent YA but live away from home for tertiary are automatically eligible for YA as an independent at commencement of their course, but to date we have not had a response.

TRAINING

There were two training motions at the 2018 conference. Correspondence went to the Minister for Small and Family Business, Skills and Vocational Education, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash. The response reinforces the Government's commitment to promoting, supporting and funding VET and apprenticeship career pathways for those young Australians who aspire to this career pathway and reinforces that these qualifications are as valuable as a tertiary pathway.

Explanation was given on the Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA); LAFHA is a tax exempt payment and is based on "Reasonable" accommodation costs and "Reasonable" food costs as determined by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and are updated annually. No commitment was made to the request for an immediate increase to LAFHA or the annual CPI increase. No mention was made of the request for apprentices to be included in the Relocation Scholarship Scheme. The Department of Social Services indicated that the Relocation Scholarship is only available for higher education students receiving student payments and students undertaking Vocational Education and Training (VET) accredited courses are not eligible for the Relocation Scholarship.

Submissions

ICPA (Aust) responded to the [Vocational Education and Training Review 2019](#) including issues for rural and remote students accessing VET and apprenticeships. A report is due to Government in March 2019.

ICPA (Aust) also responded to the [National regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy](#) highlighting the key issues and challenges raised by ICPA members concerning access to tertiary and training education for rural and remote students. A Key Issues report is due in February 2019.

We look forward to the outcomes and recommendations of these reviews.

The Tertiary and Training Portfolio will continue to progress and raise the profile of our members' issues through all avenues available to us. Where we have not had responses to issues, we will continue to follow these up and will inform members of the outcome once this arrives.