



2012 Federal ICPA Conference Motion Update

Since the 2012 Federal Conference held in Griffith, Federal Councillors have written letters and taken other action to lobby for the issues that were raised through members' motions. We have had responses to the majority of our letters and have continued to follow up on those we have not had satisfactory responses to. Federal Council continues to be frustrated by the inadequate replies, results and outcomes; however we remain committed to lobbying for ICPA and the members we represent.

Following is a summary by portfolio area of developments since the 2012 conference.

BOARDING SCHOOLS & SCHOOL TERM HOSTELS

The request for an increase in the AIC payments was requested via a letter to Minister Garrett, who responded as follows:

The government recognises that rural and regional families face barriers to education. The Commonwealth funds that have been invested in schools over the last 3 years will continue to increase when compared to previous funding periods. This investment supports rural and regional schools as well and the development of e-learning, which has the capacity to drive improvement in distance education.

While the AIC is intended to assist with costs of boarding, it is not intended to meet the entire cost associated with boarding. The AIC will continue to be indexed annually in line with the consumer price index.

COMMUNICATIONS

There were a number of motions presented at conference in August concerned with the increased dependence on internet service provision for Distance Education (DE) families and the increased bandwidth required to access digital resources. These motions were framed primarily in the contexts of the efficiency of internet service provision/future service provision and the cost of internet service provision, incorporating financial penalties for rural and remotes services.

ICPA has been advised that whilst all stakeholders acknowledge the limitations of current technology being delivered into regional Australia, in particular how these issues impact on DE families, there will be significant improvements with the introduction of the Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS). The LTSS (the majority of ICPA membership being outside the NBN fibre and wireless footprints) will see two next generation satellites, designed specifically for internet service delivery, launched in 2015. Along with new roof mounted satellite dishes (VSATs) and internal network termination devices, the LTSS will enable greater bandwidth and faster upload/download speeds to rural and remote end users (depending on quality of end user equipment quality, software, broadband plan etc). The hardware will provide the basis for the new rural and remote LTSS services to be more efficient and upgradable into the future as relevant technology becomes available.

ICPA has been advised that the wholesale prices for all three NBN Co technologies (fibre, wireless and satellite) will be the same throughout Australia. It must be noted that NBN Co is a 'wholesale only' company, selling to telephone and internet service providers (ISP) who then set their own prices that are charged to the end user.

Two motions were raised concerning Telstra activity. These motions concerned the reduction of operational hours and staff numbers at the RRADIO Call Centre and the lack of Call Centre staff in 24/7 Telstra Customer Call Centres, who are familiar with the various communication systems in rural areas. Responses to these two issues were received at a face-to-face meeting ICPA Federal Council had with Telstra in February 2013.

ICPA has been advised that customers living in remote areas using fixed telephone services supplied via Customer Access Network (CAN) radio and USO satellite technology will continue to have access to a dedicated number 1800 RRADIO (1800 772 346) for any fault-related queries.

ICPA has been advised that any fault related enquiries to Telstra will continue to be answered by staff with specialist knowledge about products specifically designed for customers in remote locations.

Since Federal Conference 2012 Federal Council has completed two submissions. They were a response to Telstra's 'Regional and Rural Presence Plan 2012–2015' and a submission to the Coalition's 'Online Higher Education Working Group'.

CURRICULUM

Two curriculum motions were carried at conference last year. The first asked Federal Council to liaise with the Australian Curriculum Assessment and reporting Authority (ACARA) with regards to the implementation of the National Curriculum for isolated rural students who have no other option but to study through schools of distance education.

Advice received from ACARA outlined that while state and territory authorities are responsible for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, ACARA is taking a coordinated role to support collaboration between jurisdictions as they plan for implementation. ICPA's concerns have been noted and ACARA will be following up with all authorities to seek specific information on the support being provided to distance education students. Further to that, ACARA will hold teleconferences every few months with key stakeholders, in which ICPA have been included, to keep everyone updated on the latest development and allow for discussion on areas of concern.

The second motion relates to implementing a uniform school starting age across Australia. This subject has been brought forward a few times over the years and seems timely as we move towards a national curriculum.

In his reply, Minister Garrett outlined that while the Australian Government plays a collaborative role in education, under constitutional arrangements, the management and

delivery of school education, including setting a minimum starting age, is the responsibility of state and territory governments and non-government education authorities.

State and Territory Ministers are not, at this point, considering introducing a common school starting age across Australia. The Minister then goes on to refer to students moving between states: *“Nevertheless, it has been agreed that states and territory policies and practices would ensure that no child moving interstate would be disadvantaged. The issue of student mobility will continue to be addressed through national processes, including the Interstate Student Data Transfer Note and protocol that facilitates the transfer of student’s information between schools when a child moves from one state to another.”*

This issue has been brought to Federal Council’s attention a number of times since the introduction of NAPLAN testing and the national curriculum and we have followed it with much interest. Our research indicates that eventually all states will move towards aligning the minimum school starting age. The process has been slow to allow for the development of infrastructure in some states where there have been huge changes. As Federal Council understands it, 2013 will see all students in Year 5 doing their 6th year of education and by 2015 all students in Year 7 will be in their 8th year of schooling and all will be in high school.

However, it must be recognised that there will always be up to 12 months difference in the age of students within each cohort. The reason for that is to allow for school readiness and to allow parents to make the decision whether or not they consider their child ready for school. Often there is confusion around the minimum starting age as in some states the first year of formal schooling is not compulsory.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Federal Council has continued to lobby hard for the establishment of an allowance for the Home Tutor who teaches Distance Education students.

After much discussion Federal Council has changed the name of the allowance to - Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) for families receiving the AIC Distance Education Allowance. While we acknowledge that the home tutor is not a teacher, they are teaching the DE programs and this name change was the best way we could clarify the work and importance of the home tutor and avoid the confusion in the media and by politicians with references to home schooling. We wanted to continue with the work already in progress on this allowance and minimise any change to the name for the best outcome. We have also produced a poster which we are using with our lobby and it has proved to be a real success. Council has included a copy of the poster with an article in Pedals magazine.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

At federal conference in 2012 four Early Childhood issues were raised through motions. The first two are currently ‘resolved’ in that nothing further can be done until the processes are complete but we would still welcome any feedback from members.

1. In Home care places: at this stage the places that have been reallocated and the new places offered are in the process of being rolled out. We are currently not aware of extended waiting times or of families being unable to access a carer.

2. Working with Children Checks (WWCC): we have had verification from Minister Julie Collins, Minister for Family Services, that the Ministers have agreed to endorse the process for national exemptions to WWCC for up to 30 days for paid employees and volunteers who are required to cross state or territory borders for work related purposes. These exemptions will be available for people with a valid check in their home state to work in another state without additional checks. Minister Collins also noted that these processes should all be implemented by the end of March 2013.

3. Flexible arrangements for 4 year olds with regards to the Universal Access Program: E-kindy appears to be a huge success in Queensland and is set to continue. We are members of the ACECQA (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority) consultative forum and from the first meeting it appears that a big challenge is the new ratings. The terms now used sound as if the service has decreased in quality even when no change has occurred. The issue of the cost of employing higher qualified staff appears to have been addressed by the announcement on 19 March 2013 of the Early Years Quality Fund (EYQF) to help support the implementation of the National Quality Framework (NQF). Grants will be provided to services in order to offset the cost and ensure quality education and care is being delivered while maintaining affordability for parents.

4. Extending AIC to 4 year olds: A submission to the Budget Based Funding review was sent in September 2012 and this issue was discussed at our delegation to Canberra in October. Although Ministers were supportive and felt that the funding was not exorbitant, they also stressed that there is no money available. Following advice from these meetings a submission was made to the budget process. Federal Council also issued a press release on 27 November 2012 following the government's announcement of providing another \$1.1billion to preschool children, pointing out that none of this was reaching the children who must access the 4 year old program through distance education.

RURAL SCHOOLS

For information on progress in this policy area since our 2012 federal conference please contact Mrs Ros Lindsay on 03 6248 9412 or email johnrosalynlindsay1@bigpond.com

TERTIARY

Once again we had many motions regarding equity of access to tertiary institutions for our rural and remote students. During Federal Council's delegation to Canberra in October, this issue was one of the three main items that were raised. The National Party currently has a \$10,000 Tertiary Access Allowance written into its policy. The party, along with politicians from various other parties, is well aware of the access problem.

While we continue to lobby for a tertiary access allowance as opportunities present, following conference we did not send further correspondence to politicians. We have no

new information to offer at present to strengthen the case for implementation of a new access allowance. Council has therefore taken a different course of action and instigated a survey concerning tertiary access, with the aim of gathering numerical and statistical data to compliment the anecdotal data we have received from members about why rural and remote students are not accessing university. We have been unable to access this type of information from any research or government department. Council needs members to make the time to complete this survey as without the ensuing information, we will find it exceedingly difficult in the current financial climate to progress the case for this allowance.

At Federal Conference in Griffith, we also had many motions regarding Youth Allowance at the independent rate. We wrote in regard of these motions to the Minister at the time, Minister Chris Evans, and as is usual when we correspond with government on these types of issues, copies were sent to all relevant people in Opposition and the Independents. We received return correspondence from Sharon Bird, at the time the Parliamentary Secretary for Higher Education and Skills, telling us that Australia already has the most generous student support system in the world. Ms Bird did however also advise us that it would be appropriate for ICPA to raise our concerns through the Review of Student Income Support Reforms due to be held in 2014.

Motions were also presented on the conference floor regarding an extension to the Relocation Scholarships, to include for eligible, independent Youth Allowance recipients. We received a reply again on behalf of the Minister, from Parliamentary Secretary Sharon Bird. Ms Bird stated that since the introduction of the Relocation Scholarships, nearly 1,000 students from remote and very remote areas have received one and around 2,200 have received a Student Start-Up Scholarship. (The guess is that 1,200 from rural and remote areas have not received Relocation Scholarships!) Again, it was advised appropriate that ICPA raise our concerns on this issue through the Review of Student Income Support Reforms to be held in 2014.

Council wrote in regard to motions requesting removal of the parental income limit for those students who reside in Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote and Very Remote areas, who have worked for an 18-month period to establish their independence and earned the minimum amount of \$21,009. Letters concerning the assets test were written to all parties and the Independents. We sent with our correspondence the letter read out at Griffith from the mother of the boy in Queensland who was unable to access Youth Allowance because of the assets test. (The family property had been flooded out two years in a row, resulting in no income for the parents.) We received a letter back from Sharon Bird, responding on behalf of Christopher Evans, and unfortunately the government stated that the 75% discount applied up to the value of \$2.508 million gives "...substantially higher than other asset cut-off limits that apply within the social security system". The letter does not address the inability of these students to be able to access Youth Allowance. Bob Katter wrote on our behalf to Minister Peter Garrett and expressed his dismay at the lack of rural and remote students accessing a tertiary education

As can be seen, much of our lobby is a drawn-out and challenging process. Members can be assured that Federal Council will continue to progress tertiary issues and look forward to using the data generated by the tertiary access survey to intensify our lobby.

TRAINING

One motion was passed at the 2012 conference in regards to training. This was from the Monaro branch requesting the Federal Government to undertake a thorough review of training for the agricultural industry. In his reply Minister Joe Ludwig said it was a positive suggestion to help address Australia's agricultural labour and skills issues.

MISCELLANEOUS

Families living in remote areas who educate via distance education can often find it very challenging and those who have a student with a diagnosed disability often struggle to acquire the support they need due to where they live. A motion was thus put forward seeking support from the Minister for Immigration to allow trained teachers to have access to Sponsored Visas so they are able to teach and care for children in rural and remote areas.

After receiving correspondence from the department, it appears the issue in this situation would be that the employer must be involved in the same line of business as the person they are sponsoring in order to meet a number of skilled training requirements. Therefore someone running a cattle station couldn't sponsor a teacher. They did suggest that since education is a matter for state jurisdictions, ICPA may wish to petition about the needs of students with diagnosed specialist conditions and who are dependent on distance education in regional areas. The state education department may then provide advice as to the most appropriate way forward within the business structure of their organisation. It was suggested that if the department was the employer rather than an individual, it might help in this case meeting the necessary training requirements.