



2013 Federal ICPA Conference Motion Update

Since the 2013 Federal Conference held in Adelaide 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 to non-government organisations, 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. Federal Council continues to be frustrated by the inadequate replies, results and outcomes to our three major lobby issues in particular, but we also acknowledge that ICPA has had several smaller 'wins' along the way. We remain committed to lobbying for ICPA and the members we represent and hope that this update will be helpful as you prepare your motions for the 2014 federal conference.

Following is a summary by portfolio area of developments since the 2013 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.

BOARDING SCHOOLS & SCHOOL TERM HOSTELS

A number of motions were presented with reference to an increase in the AIC Boarding Allowance to more closely reflect the real increases in the costs of educating isolated students. A letter was forwarded to the Minister for Social Services, Kevin Andrews, who is now responsible for AIC. An official response has yet to be received so at this stage the status quo remains with no changes to the amounts available under the AIC Boarding Allowance.

There is however, a little light at the end of the tunnel for some, by way of an interim measure to assist in qualifying to receive the allowance. Due to the impact of drought conditions on many families, Federal Council wrote again to the government, this time to the Minister for Agriculture Barnaby Joyce, pointing out the problems many rural and remote families are facing as the drought continues, particularly with paying school fees. Council received a supportive reply from Minister Joyce with resulting action. Under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme, recipients of the Interim Farm Household Allowance (or Farm Household Allowance from July 2014) who are already eligible for the Basic Boarding Allowance will have the parental income test waived when applying for the Additional Boarding Allowance. Council will continue to raise the issue of the need to increase the AIC allowance to ensure that the Federal Government fully understands the financial issues facing rural and remote families as they endeavour to provide education for their children.

The portfolio has actioned the motion which requested that general information be included in publications from time to time, on details for parents to consider when choosing a suitable boarding facility. Late last year a Federal Branch Bulletin contained some helpful ideas and this information will reappear a number of times throughout this year in the BB. Check the April 2014 BB edition for the latest article.

A floor motion requested the government to acknowledge the financial burden that various taxes on the boarding school fees have on families from rural and remote Australia. These are families who have to pay for education when they have no option but to send their children away to board for secondary school.

The taxes are levied on the day to day living and employment expenses that boarding schools incur and come on top of already significant costs that families must meet. The response received indicated that the taxes are aimed at maintaining the fairness and integrity of the Australian taxation system with no indication of any changes to be made to the current position. This response is the same as has been received in the past when the matters of Fringe Benefit Tax and Goods and Services Tax have been raised. Council will continue to monitor the situation to ensure that the impact on families is not increased.

COMMUNICATIONS

There were six communications motions presented at Conference in 2013. We have received responses to most of them; however at this stage we are still waiting on a written response from Telstra Country Wide regarding some matters.

Member concerns in regard to the Interim Satellite Service (ISS) and the Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS) for families living in rural and remote areas, whose children have no other option than to complete their schooling via Schools of Distance Education (SODE), were covered in letters sent to the Minister for Communications, The Hon Malcolm Turnbull last November. The Minister responded advising that the government are committed to completing the construction of NBN and in doing so will ensure that all Australians, including those in rural and remote areas, have access to very fast broadband as soon as is cost-effective and as affordably as possible.

Federal Council are pleased with recent announcements from government which indicate that they have heard members' concerns. The government is now working on plans to provide an additional 8000 to 9000 places for people who had not been able to access the ISS before it reached capacity and has indicated that they will also address the slow speeds many consumers have been experiencing. Council has again written to the Minister highlighting the urgency to resolve these issues as it is critical for families educating their children in rural and remote Australia.

In regards to the motion requesting a special classification within the NBN (National Broadband Network) Interim Satellite Service and the Long Term Satellite Service, for students of distance education schools, we have been advised that, to establish a special classification for SODE families, NBN Co would have to access data from the administrators of the AIC Distance Education Allowance, the Department of Human Services. As this would not adhere to strict privacy requirements, NBN Co is unable to access this data.

Members of Federal Council met with the Executive Director of Telstra Country Wide, Mr Andrew Coull and General Manager, Telstra Country Wide Retail, Strategy and Planning Mr Chris Doody in February. Andrew has come out from England and was keen to learn more

about our organisation and more importantly members - where we live and our issues - so as to gain a better understanding of TCW's customer base. We spoke about the Next G wireless broadband Internet service and members' request that Telstra make available better packages that provide a reliable equitably priced internet service with data allowances that meet the needs of our members who have no other option than to use this service. He has promised to look at our request and get back to us.

Federal Councillors Roxanne Morrissey and Carmel Elliott attended an ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) forum in Sydney recently and were invited by ACCAN to sit on the consumer group panel. The aim of the forum was to assist in identifying opportunities for collaboration between communities in rural regional and remote Australia, the government and the telecommunication industry in the roll out of the Federal Government's mobile network expansion and black spots policy and beyond. As a result Federal Council were able to have input into the consultation paper on the Coalition's mobile expansion and black spot policy where we have highlighted Clare School (NSW), along with a number of other areas, as locations for the expansion of the mobile coverage footprint. Federal Council has also completed a submission to the Department of Communications' Mobile Coverage Programme.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum motion carried at conference last year requested the Minister for Education to provide more support to the states in the transition to the new Australian Curriculum and provide further funding to address the urgent need for the development of distance education materials.

We wrote to The Hon Christopher Pyne, Minister for Education, expressing the urgent need for financial support to the states and territories in the transition to the new Australian Curriculum. The response was basically that, while the government provides a significant amount of funding to the states and territories for school education, implementation of the Australian Curriculum is the responsibility of the states and territories. Federal Council has therefore advised the branch to contact their States Council with this matter.

Federal Council will continue to raise this matter at every opportunity to ensure the Federal Government has a good understanding about the uniqueness and additional considerations that need attention for students studying through distance education.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Last year's federal conference saw one distance education motion, which was about the need for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) to support and recognise the vital work distance education tutors do. This issue has been incorporated into our distance education portfolio action plan for some time, and this year we have taken the opportunity to update and refresh the action plan and incorporate up-to-date figures and numbers. New publicity and media material has been developed and our DETA poster has been modernised and updated. Information has been sought and received around the number of DE students and we have also worked closely with the communications portfolio

and State Councils on the problems involved in doing distance education using the NBN's ISS. Federal Council would like to thank State Councils and members for their help with this.

The issue of the need for a DETA was included in our pre-budget submission to the Federal Government and has also been the subject of quite a bit of media attention so far in 2014. Additionally, work is being carried out to attempt to get the DETA onto the agenda of the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (the SCSEEC), where State and Federal Education Ministers meet to discuss various issues.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

2013 saw seven ECEC motions at federal conference. Unfortunately there has been one common response in many of the return letters we have had, and this has been that there is a Productivity Commission Inquiry into Child Care and Early Childhood Learning and we should make a submission to this inquiry. This Inquiry will look into future options for child care and early childhood learning with a focus on developing a system that delivers flexible, accessible and affordable quality child care for parents in diverse circumstances.

The issues raised last year were:

1. AIC for four year olds taking part in early childhood program via DE: the Hon Kevin Andrews, Minister for Social Services, has noted the above Inquiry and stated that he recognises the particular barriers to education ICPA members face and that our suggestion will be taken into account in any future review of the AIC scheme.

2. In Home Care: requests were about both raising the number of In Home Care places and asking for a review of In Home Care system guidelines and revising them to include the provision of distance education educators. The replies to these requests noted the above Inquiry.

3. Visa changes to allow nannying and governessing to be eligible work for second year visa applicants: the Shadow Minister for Immigration, the Hon Richard Marles, has stated that ICPA has raised valid concerns about the difficulties faced by our rural and remote Australians and he appreciates the Working Holiday visa suggestions. The Hon Scott Morrison, Minister for Immigration, in his reply concluded that any expansion to the second year Working Holiday visa initiative (to include nannying and DE employment) could potentially dissipate the valuable support provided to the industries currently supported and would need to be 'carefully considered. As with many issues that require a different line of thinking it often means long term lobbying in order for government to understand the need for change. Federal Council will continue to raise this matter at every opportunity.

4. Concerns regarding enrolment targets set to achieve universal access to early childhood education that are not being achieved in rural areas: The Hon Sussan Ley, Assistant Education Minister, has responded that the government agrees that, under the previous National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, some jurisdictions did not meet their enrolment targets. There is now a new National Partnership Agreement and funding will only be paid if performance benchmarks are achieved.

5. Concerns regarding the inclusion of 'rural and remote' as an exemption to the Child Care Benefit Scheme policy: the reply noted the Productivity Commission Inquiry and stressed that it would not be prudent to change policies before completion of the inquiry and has also noted that family assistance law prohibits the payment of CCB for care where care is provided as part of compulsory education.

6. Long term funding for ECE programs: there will also be a review of the National Partnership which will assess the degree to which objectives and outcomes have been achieved. Arrangements following the end of the National Partnership (i.e. after Dec 31 2014) will take into account the findings of the review and whether the investment of \$1.6 billion has been maximised. Unfortunately no dates for this review were given.

The Productivity Commission is expected to report to the government by the end of October 2014 but there is no indication of how long it will take to implement any of the future options. Federal Council has already lodged a submission into this inquiry but as the Commission will accept submissions over the duration of the inquiry, parents are also able to lodge a submission. If you don't wish to make a full-length submission, the Productivity Commission has incorporated the option for people to leave a brief comment via this simple online form on the website. <http://pc.gov.au/projects/inquiry/childcare/comment>

TERTIARY

Once more tertiary issues made up the majority of our 2013 federal conference motions. While we have received many responses, a number of issues raised with government and organisations have received no response. Federal Council will continue to follow these up.

1. Tertiary Access Allowance: Once again there were several motions calling for a tertiary access allowance for relocating tertiary students. Whilst we have not written to politicians this year, the issue remains part of our ongoing lobby. The tertiary portfolio has developed a comprehensive Tertiary Action Plan which guides our lobbying on this very important issue. We have highlighted the additional costs rural and remote students incur in order to further their education. Our media campaign, which was timed to coincide with the end and the start of the university year, resulted in positive feedback from media outlets. The Hon Christopher Pyne and Kevin Andrews acknowledged receipt of the 'Tertiary Access Research' report which highlights the huge cost borne by our rural and remote students. You can access the March media release at <http://www.icpa.com.au/media-releases/federal.html> and the Tertiary Access Research report at [Tertiary Access Research, ICPA May 2013](#) Federal Council will be heading to Canberra in May and the plight of our rural and remote tertiary students will form part of lobbying during this time.

Unfortunately whilst the Australian Government acknowledges that regional students are more likely to need to relocate to study and have significantly lower participation rates in higher education, it simply does not have the resources to introduce such an allowance. The government believes that all regional students required to live away from home to study and whose parental income is less than \$150,000 are already receiving concessional workforce participation arrangements to access independent Youth Allowance, which is something not available to students living close to their chosen university. The

government informed us that Relocation Scholarships are mainly available to dependent Youth Allowance recipients and currently there are 24,000 students receiving these scholarships.

The Federal Government also believes that it would be inconsistent with the broader reforms to student payments if regional students who access independent Youth Allowance through the concessional workforce participation arrangements (earning a minimum of \$22,239 in 18 months if parental annual income is less than \$150,000 (as at 5 April 2014)) were also entitled to Relocation Scholarships, that are predominantly targeted at students classified as financially dependent on their parents. Federal Council will continue to lobby on this issue.

The Federal Government maintains that student payments are designed to make a contribution towards students' living expenses and there is a long standing principle that students must share this responsibility with the government.

2. Start-Up Scholarships: On March 5th 2014 the 'Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013' was presented for the third time. There has been much conflicting information in the last few weeks regarding the Start-Up Scholarships' conversion to a loan. Importantly, it appears this legislation was opposed and the Start-Up Scholarships will remain as a scholarship for the present time. Federal Council's position is to continue to lobby the government for this grant to remain a scholarship rather than convert to a HECS type loan.

3. \$150,000 parental income limit: The Minister for Social Services, The Hon Kevin Andrews, wrote to us stating that there is no current plan to review the Youth Allowance \$150,000 parental income limit however our concerns will be taken into consideration in any future review. There is also no plan to change the rules to grant independent Youth Allowance to students who have been finished school for less than 18 months and who have to leave home to access tertiary studies.

4. Asset Limit: We have received correspondence from the government stating that in view of the current financial situation they do not have any intention of lifting the asset limit in the near future. The Federal Government explained that to maintain the real value of Youth Allowance, the payment is increased each year in line with the CPI.

5. Relocation for Student Practicums: There are currently no plans to introduce additional financial assistance for students undertaking a tertiary course which requires them to relocate for clinical placements, block releases or practicums as part of their course.

6. Clarification regarding business and personal savings for the purpose of Youth Allowance: Correspondence regarding this motion was quite complicated and it went on to explain that a 75% discount was given to the value of a person's interest in the assets of a

business, including farms, but that personal assets were not considered under this criteria and that 100% of personal assets must be included.

7. Farm Household Allowance: From 1 July 2014, individuals whose parents are in receipt of the Farm Household Allowance will have the parental income and assets test waived for Youth Allowance.

Please note - the initial online process when applying through Centrelink does not comprehensively apply the rules that relate to regional/remote students correctly in some circumstances i.e. some students who actually are eligible for Youth Allowance will fail the online assessment. These students are encouraged to immediately ask for an assessor and they may be found to be eligible. It is imperative that families do not give up on this process after initially failing the online assessment when they are in fact eligible. The following link will take you to the actual Youth Allowance claim form and information document which you can print.

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/spw/customer/forms/resources/ci004-1403en2.pdf>

The government does appreciate receiving comments and feedback from the community and will consider the ICPA's concerns when developing and evaluating options for future policy.