



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

**Federal Council**

**Federal Conference 2014**

**Motion Update**

**April 2015**

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## **2014 Federal ICPA Conference Motion Update**

Since the 2014 Federal Conference held in Launceston 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 and the members we represent and hope that this update will be helpful as you prepare your motions for the 2015 federal conference.

Following is a summary by portfolio area of developments since the 2014 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**

Ten motions were carried at Federal Conference. Nine motions were supported by members from right across Australia expressing concern about the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Boarding Allowance and its failure to reflect current increases in boarding fees. Boarding school fees continue to rise at a far greater rate than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) Education sub-index figures used to calculate educational costs in 2013, which indicated an increase of 5.6 per cent, while the seasonally adjusted CPI for the same period was 2.6 per cent. With annual increases in boarding fees being between 6-8 per cent, the gap between the cost of boarding a child and the AIC is widening exponentially.

In 2014 average boarding fees throughout Australia ranged from \$17-20,000 per year per child. The AIC Basic Boarding Allowance was \$7,667 last year with an additional annual means tested payment of \$1,466. These figures highlight the substantial gap between the real cost to families for boarding and the allowance.

Council sent the Hon Kevin Andrews MP, Minister for Social Services a letter requesting an urgent, significant increase. This letter was also sent to the Minister for Education, the Hon Christopher Pyne MP and copied to 36 Members of Parliament whose electorates are in the rural sector. While the reply from Minister Andrews stated that boarding allowances are not intended to cover the entire costs associated with accessing education, the responses received from the rural MPs were very favourable. One responder wrote a letter of support to Minister Andrews and others raised the matter in media interviews. This was extremely encouraging and we shall keep up our work in making our voice heard whenever we can.

After Conference Federal Council had a good response from media, which also assisted in raising the profile of this lobby. The end of December found us dealing with a new Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP. Earlier this month we were contacted by the Minister's office to discuss our concerns and we have passed our motion letters onto the new minister.

A floor motion came forward at Conference asking Federal Council to lobby for the introduction of an online or phone claiming application process for AIC. A letter was written to Senator the Hon Marise Payne, Minister for Human Services with our request. As at the time of writing this update there has been no reply from Ms Payne so another letter has been forwarded to her office.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

There were eight communications motions presented at Conference in 2014. We are still having discussions with Telstra Country Wide (TCW) regarding motions A20 & A21. These motions specifically dealt with 3G data and mobile services. There has been some progress in these matters and a big thank you to Jeff Little, Queensland ICPA ICT advisor for his knowledge and assistance.

Federal Council have been in touch with NBN Co and the Minister for Communications requesting that Distance Education students in remote locations are guaranteed a connection to the NBN satellite, (A11) and prioritised for connections, (A13 & A14). The key criteria for access to the Long Term Satellite Service (LTSS) are based on geographic location and it is expected that all eligible applicants will be catered for. If a household is within satellite coverage, an LTS service may be ordered. NBN Co will move users across as quickly as possible in a staged approach for the LTSS. The NBN Co Satellite Support Scheme (NSS) was launched on 1 August 2014 to provide services to additional end users. The take up on this offer has been encouraging and there are in excess of several hundred users already with it installed.

We are currently in discussions with the Department of Communications regarding how the NBN Co can best address the needs of isolated students to make sure that the LTSS is aligned to what they need to access their education. NBN Co is working with their partners to ensure that sufficient capacity is in place to support the demand for the LTSS service, (A15).

Federal Council followed up on the request that an “expert panel be established to examine the design and traffic projections for the NBN Long Term Satellite Solution (LTSS),” (A17). The LTSS has been the subject of consultation with industry and consequently, the proposed product construct has been scrutinised by the full span of retail service providers. We have also been assured that NBN Co routinely engages the services of subject matter experts to ensure the integrity of its services.

The NBN Co gave us operating parameters in response to our query, (A18), regarding the guaranteed performance envelope for satellite, (Permanent Sat) and wireless internet services supplied by the NBN. When the system is launched, the LTS service is supposed to have two access speed tiers - downstream Peak Information Rate, (PIR), speeds of 12/1 Mbps and upstream PIR speeds of 25/5 Mbps respectively. This is the best information we are able to obtain at the moment.

To resolve capacity restraints, NBN Co has introduced a Fair Use Policy (FUP) which enables Retail Service Providers (RSPs) to limit their supply to high volume users to no more than 50GB download per month. In December 2014, NBN Co asked all service providers of an ISS

to begin enforcing the FUP, with NBN Co to begin enforcing it on their behalf from February 2015. As a result, the majority of ISS users will experience improved peak period network performance and will be able to carry out tasks like email, internet banking and voice over internet protocol services, such as Skype, at any time of the day.

The 10 ground stations for the LTSS have been completed and launch of the first Satellite is due later this year. Fingers crossed it will solve many of the problems that our members are currently experiencing.

Federal Council has continued to follow up on the Mobile Black Spot Programme, (A22 & A23). The formal competitive selection process has commenced and announcements of selected locations should occur in the first half of 2015.

### **CURRICULUM**

The curriculum motion carried at conference last year was in response to the Review into the Australian Curriculum, conducted during 2014. Members requested any changes to the content of Key Learning Areas in the Australian Curriculum be accompanied by funding to the states, enabling the development of independent learning course materials for distance education students.

Our concerns were raised with the Minister for Education, outlining the dependency distance education tutors and students have on materials already developed for teaching which are drawn from the current national curriculum. The changes in the content of the Key Learning Areas necessitate the rewriting of these to ensure lessons address the curriculum of the time. This comes as an added cost to the states. The Education Minister acknowledged our concerns about the impact of curriculum changes on learning materials used by isolated families.

The Australian Government's response to the final report of the Review of the Australian Curriculum focuses on addressing the overcrowding in the current curriculum and rebalancing it to ensure that what children learn in school reflects a range of views.

The Minister will soon ask all education ministers to consider the final report and its recommendations and following this, the Government will be working closely with the states, territories and non-government schools sector to implement any changes to the curriculum. As a result, any changes made to the Australian Curriculum will be agreed by all state and territory education ministers and implementation decisions will reflect state and territory perspectives.

While the development of the Australian Curriculum is the responsibility of all Australian governments, the implementation of the Australian Curriculum is the responsibility of the states, territories and non-government schools sectors. This includes decisions that relate to the provision of resources that complement the teaching of the Australian Curriculum.

Federal Council will continue to raise this matter at every opportunity to ensure Federal Government has a good understanding about the uniqueness, and the additional

considerations that need to be deliberated for students studying through distance education and we encourage members to raise this issue with your State Councils.

### **DISTANCE EDUCATION**

Similar to 2013, last year's federal conference saw one passionately held distance education issue, strengthening the urgency of our members' need for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). The DE portfolio continues to work on practical measures by which the government can recognise this constant cry to support and recognise the vital work distance education tutors do.

Much consideration and research was undertaken to source an appropriate Ambassador for our DETA lobby. We were seeking someone passionate about the needs of parents in isolated areas, with a presence in the media and political arenas. Catherine Marriott, a rural based dynamo who is a highly regarded advocate for agriculture in Australia, has accepted our invitation to undertake this role and will use any opportunity to raise the awareness of the DETA issue.

The portfolio action plan has focused on new publicity and media material and researching the means to develop a promotional CD and YouTube clip to enhance awareness of our members' needs. Currently we are sourcing funding and negotiating with media teams to create a story to be used as a promotional tool for politicians, media and support networks.

DE student numbers have been updated and we have also worked closely, once again, with the Communications portfolio and State Councils on the problems involved in doing distance education using the National Broadband Network's Interim Satellite Service. Federal Council appreciates the time and work that State Councils and members devote to this.

The need for a DETA was included in our response to the Education Issues Paper for the Reform of Federation White Paper. This paper seeks to clarify the roles and responsibilities of states and territories and to eliminate duplication of roles within different levels of government.

Members also raised concerns about programs that are extremely beneficial in allowing Schools of the Air (SOTA) to facilitate additional teacher-student contact in remote settings. Federal Council has followed closely the new school funding model over the last eighteen months or so, to ensure that many of the programs that we value in rural and remote areas are not lost. Federal Council has written a number of submissions, attended Public Hearings and Stakeholders meetings over this time. We have welcomed direct contact with the Branch Manager for School Funding in the Australian Government Department of Education.

The change in government last year added to the confusion around what the new model would look like. However, the new school funding model has been bedded down since the latest Federal Budget was delivered in May. The National Partnership Funding has been rolled in to the Schooling Resource Standard funding. This funding will be calculated and distributed to each State Government in a lump sum. There is no compulsion to use exactly the funding attracted to a state or school as the Commonwealth has calculated. The Commonwealth can only calculate the funding that a student may attract to a school (or

state) and not what the school may actually spend on any particular student. It is up to the school (or state) to choose how to use that funding.

In light of the school funding model now having been bedded down, the best way forward is to encourage members to take this issue up with your school, through parent groups and with ICPA State Councils. All ICPA State Councils are aware of how the new model will impact on funding and we will be encouraging members to be alert to any changes in programs being delivered. Federal Council is more than happy to assist your Branch with additional information on the school funding model if required.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

There were 15 ECEC motions carried at the 2014 conference covering five different areas. Although the Productivity Commission (PC) has now completed its inquiry and the report has been presented to government, Minister Ley has noted that future decisions will be made following consideration of the PC Report, National Quality Framework (NQF) Review and the Federation White Paper. Inclusion of the latter suggests that this will be long term reform. Due a reshuffle in the ministry in last December, Minister Ley was replaced by Minister Birmingham and the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Scott Morrison MP.

### **AIC eligibility for 4 year olds**

Council have continued to pursue access to AIC for 4 year olds taking part in early childhood programs and this issue remains a focus when lobbying government. Federal Council continues to raise awareness of the inequity families' face when accessing early learning programs via distance education. As with every other early childhood program for four year olds, these distance education lessons are designed to help the children's transition from home to school. The children need a designated learning space in which to learn school behaviours, such as the ability to sit at a desk for enough time to complete a task, to use the technology required for Distance Education, to appropriately interact digitally with their peers and their teacher and to understand the formal concept of school, yet these families are funding the program and not able to access the AIC Distance Education allowance, Child Care Benefit or Rebate to assist with out of pocket expenses.

### **Funding for preschools where there are none**

Minister Ley responded that the Federal Government provides funding to State and Territory governments who are responsible for provision of preschool programs and determining the best mix of programs. The Federal Government expects funding to be allocated to all services irrespective of whether they are Long Day Care (LDC), stand-alone preschool or in school preschool. She has gone on to suggest we contact State and Territory Ministers for further information.

### **Funding for ECEC programs**

The response from Minister Ley indicated that although she is aware of the difficulties we are facing, change to the current system is not likely to happen soon. She has reiterated the government's commitment to funding for 2015 for universal access and also notes funding has been allocated for long day care professional development programs to allow LDC educators to meet qualification requirements under NQF.

## **In Home Care**

We used some case studies in our recent response to the draft PC report to highlight IHC difficulties faced by families and stress that further requirements on qualifications for IHC carers will make the process even more inaccessible. Minister Ley has indicated that the number of places is currently capped to provide care for those most in need. With regards to changing the guidelines she has noted that children in DE are regarded as school children for the purposes of Family Assistance Law – but no benefit is payable as what is being provided is tutoring or teaching not child care.

## **Working With Children Checks**

The Minister for Justice, The Hon Michael Keenan MP, responded that although it is complex trying to get a national WWCC scheme, the government is involved in trying to improve consistency of practices and processes involved. A national scheme (ECHIPWC –Exchange of Information for People Working with Children) has been agreed to, which will allow states and territories to exchange information. This in turn should assist screening agencies with their decisions regarding suitability of applicants.

The Minister has also noted that the government is involved in the work to try to get consistency in the checks being done (National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020) and has also put in a submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse which is researching the current checks and the possibility of a national scheme.

## **RURAL SCHOOLS & TRAVEL**

Federal Council approached the Minister for Education regarding students in very remote areas being able to access AIC (Assistance for Isolated Children) when bypassing the local schools. Allowing families to access the AIC has been accepted by the Australian Government only where the state and territory education departments deem the school eligible for bypassing.

Federal Council approached the major airlines requesting that they consider offering concessional airfares for students travelling to and from boarding schools. No airline would commit to this but indicated that fares are kept to a competitive minimum; booking well ahead usually results in lower fares and that families with boarders should take advantage of any specials the airlines offer intermittently.

## **SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS**

The Specific Education Needs portfolio has had a busy year with many changes taking place due to the new school funding model for students with disabilities and recommendations put forward by the National Dyslexia Working Party. Four motions were presented and carried at last year's conference.

Concerns were raised about the current funding model acting as a disincentive for boarding schools to accept enrolments of children with additional needs. As boarding schools are exempt from the Antidiscrimination Act if they are unable to provide the necessary support to students it leaves rural students with additional needs with very few options for schooling, particularly in high school. We have had a favourable response from the Hon

Christopher Pyne MP concerning funding for students with additional needs from rural and remote areas who require access to boarding schools.

The Coalition government has reinstated \$1.2 billion to ensure all jurisdictions are funded by a national needs-based model and all students are given the same educational opportunities. This extra funding to cover student disadvantage includes the introduction in 2014 of a funding loading for students with a disability. The loading applies to eligible students with disability and learning difficulties as determined by the state or territory in which they live and whether they are in a government or non-government school. Minister Pyne stated that the 2014-15 Budget has outlined \$4.8 billion funding for students with a disability over the next four years, which is more than has ever been allocated before.

In the letter sent by Federal Council we did point out that boarding schools are exempt from the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. The Department of Education has since approached the Australian Human Rights Commission for clarification on this matter. The Commission has indicated there is indeed some ambiguity about the application of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 to the boarding facilities of boarding schools although this has not yet been tested. Specific cases of discrimination have been asked to be referred to the Commission at [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au).

Three motions were carried in relation to the work being done in the area of students with dyslexia, with the following requests being made:

- 1) That ICPA be invited to participate in future policy roundtable discussions on meeting the needs of dyslexic students in our schools
- 2) That all education ministers work collaboratively to ensure that multi-sensory programs and strategies are included in daily teaching practices to better support students with dyslexia and
- 3) When implementing any of the recommendations made by the National Dyslexia Working Party, provisions are made for students studying by distance education.

We are pleased to have assurance from Minister Pyne that ICPA will be invited to any future policy roundtables. Information on outcomes from the roundtables is available on the *Students First* website at [www.studentsfirst.gov.au](http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au)

Minister Pyne acknowledges the unique challenges isolated families face in educating their students. He has assured us that the Australian Government is committed to improving education outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities and learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. The Federal Government provides substantial funding for all schools and works collaboratively with states and territories in developing national priorities for education. It does not, however, have a direct role in the administration or operation of schools and we have been encouraged to contact state education authorities to discuss the disability funding model.

Over the next four years the Government will provide a \$22 million grant to the Good to Great Schools Australia for the Flexible Literacy Learning for Remote Primary Schools program. This program aims to reduce the disparity in student literacy outcomes between metropolitan and remote children through the Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct

Instruction teaching approaches. Remote primary school teachers will receive professional development and support to gain the specific knowledge and skills they need to use these alphabetic code breaking teaching approaches with their students.

Federal Council would be interested to hear if any Distance Education School teachers are accessing this training.

### **TERTIARY MOTION UPDATE**

The Tertiary Portfolio has been busy addressing issues raised at the Federal Conference in August 2014. We have made a number of submissions, written briefs and attended meetings and roundtables in response to the Federal Government's *Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014*, the *Welfare Review, 2014* and the *Reform of Federation White Paper – Education*. Whilst these reforms have not yet been resolved, we continue to raise the profile of our members' issues through many forums and to date Federal Council has made some progress. Federal Council will have a delegation to Canberra in late May where we are aiming to meet with Minister Pyne to discuss the TAA, Higher Education Reform and issues relating to the plight of our rural and remote tertiary students. Following is an update on actions taken to advance the 2014 tertiary motions.

#### **Tertiary Access Allowance**

There were 10 motions relating to the Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA) and this issue remains one of our highest priorities when lobbying Federal Government. Through the passage of the *Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014* and the *Discussion Paper to the Reform of Federation White Paper* we have had numerous opportunities to highlight that the TAA is the ideal solution to address the issue of inequity for our members when accessing university.

Federal Council has changed the TAA amount we are lobbying for, to align it with the Relocation Scholarship: 1st year - \$4,145; 2nd or 3rd year - \$2,073; 4th or subsequent years - \$1,036.

#### **Youth Allowance**

Federal Council has written a number of submissions and letters to the Federal Government to request aspects of Youth Allowance be addressed as below;

- (a) *Independence Criteria* - We continue to lobby the Federal Government to have students who are isolated from tertiary education due to location and those who have to relocate in order to access the most appropriate tertiary course for their needs and aspirations, be recognised as a separate disadvantaged group and be considered financially independent of their parents for the purpose of accessing financial assistance on course enrolment.
- (b) *\$150,000 parental income limit* - The Parental Income Threshold Limit of \$150,000 continues to be an issue for rural and remote students, when qualifying for Independent Youth Allowance. No changes to this limit have been achieved.
- (c) *Asset Limit* - Similarly, we have not been successful in achieving change to the maximum limit of assets (discounted limit of \$642,000) allowed under the Family Assets Test in order for students to be eligible for the dependent rate of Youth Allowance.
- (d) *Rent Assistance* - Rent assistance remains a concern for rural students as rental prices continue to rise significantly and current rent assistance fails to maintain its value. We

have written to the Minister for Social Services requesting a substantial increase to rent assistance to rural and remote students receiving Youth Allowance, to closer reflect the real cost of living and the actual rental market.

- (e) *Relocation Scholarship* - There is continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided to help with the set up costs for rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance when compared to assistance to dependent Youth Allowance recipients. ICPA 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.
- (f) *Relocation for Student Practicums* - Council has requested the Minister for Education to provide financial assistance for tertiary students who must relocate to complete compulsory work experience in their selected course.
- (g) *College Accommodation* - Council has also written to the University Colleges Australia (UCA) and the Australasian Association of Colleges and University Housing Officers Inc. (AACUHO) requesting that they investigate the possibility of introducing an early entry scheme for metropolitan college accommodation. This would ensure remote students would be granted a place as soon as they are accepted into a university course. Some colleges are already taking on board this request.

### **Start-up Scholarships**

- (a) *HECS/HELP Loan* - In the last Budget, it was proposed that the Start-up Scholarships become an income contingent loan for new recipients of student payments in higher education. This legislation has not yet passed and Federal Council continues to oppose this change and lobbies for this scholarship not to convert to a HECS/HELP loan.
- (b) *Grandfathering of Existing Students* - Existing students must have their loans Grandfathered to retain the Start-up Scholarship for the duration of their course. We have addressed the Start-up Scholarship issue in two submissions: the inquiry into the Government's Budget Cuts and the Higher Education Reform. The Higher Education and Research Reform Amendment Bill has not been resolved and is still being debated in parliament. The issue was included in correspondence to the Education Minister, with copies to Higher Education ministers, Shadow Ministers and relevant state party leaders. In return communication from the Education Minister, our concerns were not alleviated.

### **Commonwealth Scholarships Scheme**

Since the announcement of the *Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014*, Federal Council has been lobbying the Federal Government to ensure that students from rural and remote areas are assisted through the proposed Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme whereby distance from university is recognised as a criterion of disadvantage. We have made submissions relating to aspects of the Higher Education Reform; we sent a brief to Country MPs from across Australia prior to their meeting with Minister Pyne and Minister Morrison in February. The Education Minister wishes to meet with Federal Council to discuss some of the issues related to rural and remote students and the new reform. A meeting is planned for Council's next delegation to Canberra.

### **HECS/HELP Loan Scheme**

Concerns have been expressed about the proposed reform of the HECS/HELP Loan Scheme accruing real time interest. This combined with fee deregulation could make some university

degrees unattainable, particularly for rural and remote students who have the added burden of moving, travel, accommodation and set up costs to attend university. ICPA Federal Council has lobbied for the reintroduction of the 20% discount for paying HECS fees upfront to alleviate the burden of expected high costs of future university degrees and high interest rates on student loans. ICPA membership has also requested a voluntary student loan scheme as an adjunct to income support for rural and remote tertiary students. This loan would be administered through the HECS/HELP Loan Scheme to address the growing group of students who have no financial support and are disadvantaged by this.

As at the end of March, the Education Minister has made some concessions in relation to the above, to expedite the Higher Education and Research Reform Bill 2014, but the reform is still unresolved.