

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT**

**Alana Moller**

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate and support its distance education members by emphasising wherever possible the distinctive nature of distance education and the major issues affecting its success. This year in the Distance Education Portfolio, six motions were raised at the Federal Conference in Alice Springs, four of which pertained to the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA), with two others referring to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance and Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (VISE).

### **Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)**

The longstanding lobby for a DETA has certainly not taken a back seat for Federal Council. On the back of the immense campaigning and publicity undertaken over the past several years, ICPA Federal Council continues to lobby the government for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) at every opportunity. The topic was raised in a motion letter sent to Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training and other relevant ministers and rural senators and members with an interest in rural and remote education. The topic was also comprehensively raised in the submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education which was completed following the 2017 Federal Conference. Although the inception of a DETA was not actually acknowledged in Professor Halsey's report, one of his recommendations was "to formally recognise using Recognition of Prior Learning processes or similar the expertise and contributions of distance education home tutors." Federal Council has, in several other submissions highlighted the extensive and essential role the distance education tutor plays in achieving distance education success.

Federal Council will continue to advocate for and pursue the DETA through delegations and submissions, along with endeavouring to action further measures to raise the profile of the role of the distance education tutor. Since Federal Council compiled the Distance Education video offering an insight into the commitment and dedication of families undertaking distance education, it has been widely shown and has proven to provide a greater understanding of this mode of education and in particular the role of the tasks required by the home tutor. The momentum from the DE video and other actions must be continued and built upon. I urge all distance education home tutors to take every effort to highlight to whomever will listen, just how big your job is and what you have to do every day in your schoolroom. Until ICPA is able to get the message across just how immense the job is, Distance Education Tutors will continue to miss out on the support and recognition they deserve.

### **Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE)/ VISE**

Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE) is now up and running and Federal Council congratulates Lyn French and Aussie Helpers for getting this program off the ground. With the announcement of the wind down of the Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (VISE) program, disappointment was shared across Australia. AHVISE offering a lifeline to the many families who have benefited over the years from the program is a tremendous outcome. Although the program operates slightly differently to the old program, AHVISE will continue to bring valued support to distance education families. ICPA has offered any assistance and support we can to AHVISE, both now and into the future and will continue to pass on any further developments/information to members.

### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance**

The issue of streamlining the AIC DE allowance application process was raised in a motion letter to the Minister for Human Services early this year. The topic has also been discussed in conversations with the Department of Human Services. Federal Council has been given some positive feedback on the future of this lobby and believes that it is likely there may be some changes seen in the future. Further to this, in order to highlight the many difficulties faced by those in receipt of AIC (DE/Boarding/Second Home Allowance), Federal Council recently conducted a survey to gauge the experiences of those who receive AIC. The findings of this survey highlighted a range of issues both with the initial application process for AIC and ongoing issues with AIC renewal each year. These findings and relevant case studies were discussed with the Department of Human Services. The Department appreciated the case studies and the direct insight from past, present and potentially future AIC recipients and will use the data to find opportunities to improve the AIC application/renewal process.

### **Other work in the DE Portfolio**

- Late in 2017, the DE Portfolio put together a 'Go-to' fact sheet for families who may be new to DE with information surrounding how to access a DE tutor/governess. Often when families begin distance education and are searching for a tutor/governess it can be difficult to know where to turn for assistance or information. This document also aims to assist those who may wish to be a home tutor/governess to find the correct avenues for seeking a position. <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/76/distance-education-tutoring-document>
- The Federal DE Portfolio is working with the State DE portfolios to put together a snapshot of distance education across Australia and specifically geographically isolated student numbers. The aim of this is to provide federal and state councils with information to assist in advocacy around distance education resourcing, funding and other factors.
- Few members would not have heard about the situation in WA when the State Government announced a decision to close Schools of the Air (SOTA) in the state and centralise distance education services from a single metropolitan facility. Off the back of this announcement, Federal Council supported the WA ICPA team and other interested parties through a huge initiative and campaign against the closures which resonated across the country. Fortunately, the WA decision was reversed. Federal Council congratulates WA ICPA on their tireless efforts to gain this outcome for their School of the Air families. This situation arising has highlighted the importance of ICPA advocating for the SOTA and DE schools to remain in regional and rural communities. Federal Council is committed to ensuring this occurs.
- Federal Council keenly observed the multicast trials with nbn Sky Muster in the Northern Territory and will be interested in the outcomes of the report into these trials to be released in the near future.
- We are currently working with Central Station around a series of blogs focussed on DE/SOTA families and situations. The aim would be to raise the profile of our DE/SOTA families and their unique educational experience. It will give families the chance to highlight the distinctive nature of geographically isolated DE/SOTA and further emphasise the role of the distance education tutor. Watch this space later in the year.

It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to be involved in Federal Council this year and I have especially appreciated the chance to work in the Distance Education Portfolio. We need to build upon past momentum around the major issues faced in the distance education community, by continuing to highlight the unique way in which we have to educate our children and how this needs to be supported and maintained.