

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE REPORT

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I am pleased to be able to deliver my first Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio Report here at our Federal Conference in Canberra. It has been a busy year, with the New Child Care Package commencing on 2 July which includes In Home Care and the previously Budget Based Funded (BBF) Mobile Early Childhood Services transitioning to either accessing funding from the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF), Department of Social Services or through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).

Early Learning

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 4-year-olds

One of Professor Halsey's recommendations in his Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) report states, "Ensure Regional, Rural and Remote children start school with a strong foundation for learning." Participation in preschool enables this to happen and in order to assist the small number of students, of which there are only 189 at present who engage in preschool by distance education, the AIC Distance Education (DE) allowance must be extended to include this cohort. We included this extension to the AIC DE allowance in the breakdown of the Election Funding Commitment AIC proposal that we presented as a response to the announcement that the former Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce gave on 22 June 2016 and we will continue to advocate for this. We have received positive comments from those in government around this, but it has yet to occur. In seeking an extension of the AIC for 4-year-olds, ICPA (Aust) has consulted with the states to clarify the number of preschoolers studying via a distance education program to update federal politicians.

Universal Access to Early Childhood Education and the National Partnership Agreement

Universal access ensures that a quality preschool program is available for all children in the year before fulltime schooling. States and Territories are responsible for the provision of preschool with the Commonwealth funding a 'top-up' contribution to these arrangements.

On 3 February 2018, the Federal Government announced a further \$440 million for preschool education in 2019, in order to help provide 15 hours per week or 600 hours per year for a quality preschool program for all children in the year before full-time formal schooling. This is in addition to the Government's \$428 million investment for preschool in 2018. This will benefit over an estimated 348,000 children in 2019 across all preschool settings and brings the total Commonwealth investment in preschool to \$3.7 billion since 2008. Importantly, it will provide funding certainty for preschools and long day care centres as the government implements school and child care reforms this year.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to highlight the need for increased access to preschool in rural and remote areas where we can, especially as preschool is seen to be such a vital part of a child's education with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and the recent Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program becoming parts of it. If our children miss out at this early stage, they will definitely not be school-ready and lag further behind their urban peers when they start school. We have also emphasised the need and support for play-based learning during the preschool year.

National Quality Standard

The Australian, state and territory education ministers agreed to changes to the National Quality Framework (NQF) to ensure quality education and care in Australia continues to improve in the most efficient and effective way. Most changes commenced 1 October 2017 in all states and territories

(except Western Australia, which will commence by 1 October 2018). The 2018 National Quality Standard (NQS) and some related changes commenced 1 February 2018 (including in Western Australia). Under the National Quality Framework an early childhood teacher is required to be always in attendance at preschool, however, this is not always possible in small rural towns. Unfortunately, we have not had success with requests of qualified teachers or Diploma qualified educators as alternatives so far.

Mobile Early Childhood Services

Early childhood education and child care services in rural and remote areas which were previously provided by Budget Based Funding (BBF), have been assisted and supported in their transition to the New Child Care Package by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) through the Department of Education and Training. Some of these services have been able to access some of the \$61 million non-competitive restricted grant funding from the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) which was available to BBF Services who provided a fair proportion of child care to rural and remote areas. This has been a great help, although some services have had to also access funds from other sources.

Mobile Playgroups, despite being a vital resource in geographically isolated areas have also been supported by PwC in their transition to new funding either through the Department of Social Services, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) and/or their states as they did not fit the New Child Care Package requirements. Although we have been given assurance that their new funding will continue for a limited time, these services face uncertainty for future funding and may have to look elsewhere. Federal Council would appreciate any further feedback regarding these Playgroups as they move into their new arrangements.

Child Care

The New In Home Care (IHC) Model

ICPA (Aust) has attended several workshops, conducted an IHC Survey and participated in teleconferences to try to ensure that the Department of Education and Training have listened to us in preparation for the new model which commenced 2 July 2018. The Department has collated information from their Nanny Pilot Program trial and from the IHC Review and noted results from our IHC Survey. ICPA (Aust) has been able to provide comment on the IHC National Guidelines and the updated IHC Handbook. We have also encouraged our families to transition to the New Child Care Package, updating their details and applying for the new Child Care Subsidy by 2 July 2018, so hopefully those families concerned, or their Service Providers, are now receiving it on their behalf. Unfortunately, we are hearing that IHC member families are having many teething problems with the new system and unexpected large fee increases, contrary to what was expected.

The Department of Education and Training has employed In Home Care Support Agencies in each state to work with families and Service Providers to help prevent IHC being too expensive and provide more places for IHC educators, a total of 3000. The Activity Test has been widened to enable unpaid workers in the family business, volunteers, those studying /training or looking for work may also qualify to receive the new Child Care Subsidy (CCS) or the Service Providers on their behalf. The National IHC Guidelines, the IHC Handbook and various Minister's Rules and other relevant information have now been finalised and the IHC from 2 July 2018 webpage has been updated providing helpful information in all aspects of IHC. <https://www.education.gov.au/in-home-care>

ICPA (Aust) has been informed by the Department of Education and Training that IHC educators may continue to supervise DE students outside of 'formal school hours' when they complete their 'homework' but as this is not clearly defined and is a very grey area in the distance education schoolroom, many families have been unsure as to whether or not to engage an IHC educator. This

has been very concerning for them. The Department has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those 'formal school hours' but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time.

ICPA (Aust) has also written to the relevant ministers regarding the introduction of IHC educators turning 18-years-old through the year, instead of the minimal age being 18, as is the case with some gap-year students. As IHC educators will need to have a relevant Certificate III qualification or working towards one, this is problematic. The Department has now provided two ways for families in rural and remote areas where IHC educators can be exempt from having their Certificate III in ECEC, but only up to 18 months from 2 July 2018 until January 2020.

1. 20% of the time is spent with a suitably qualified person i.e. by emailing, Skyping or through phone calls
2. If having had 15 years' prior experience in Child Care

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 working on this and the *Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Part Two: Working with Children Checks Report* includes the following:

"The Australian Government supports an approach that ensures greater national consistency of working with children check schemes and has adopted a leadership role to assist jurisdictions to progress nationally consistent standards. Significant progress has been made through the Australian Government chaired working group. It is anticipated that the standards will be put to relevant State and Territory Ministers in 2018."

Working Holiday Maker Visa

The requirement for the extension from six months to twelve months being spent on one property of the 417 'Working Holiday Maker' visa to other remote areas besides Northern Australia as well as the need for distance education tutors and nannies to be included in the 'specified work' list, has been highlighted to numerous federal politicians and we have had a couple who have supported us in this. Unfortunately, the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon Peter Dutton MP, feels that the shortage of workers in rural and remote areas has been addressed. We will continue to promote this when we can, especially as the bush is so short of willing tutors in the schoolroom.

Federal Council will continue to work with the Federal Government and other bodies available to us to further your concerns and share developments with you.