

# **DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT**

**Alana Moller**

ICPA (Aust) is determined to ensure that recognition of the unique needs of geographically isolated distance education students, home tutors and their families are catered for and that resources and support are maintained or improved. At every opportunity we continue to represent and support our distance education members by emphasising wherever possible the distinctive nature of geographically isolated distance education and the major issues affecting its success.

## **2018 Federal Conference**

With a focus on the value of Distance Education Home Tutors and of Schools of Distance Education and Schools of the Air being based in rural and remote locations, the 2018 Federal Conference saw two motions presented and passed in relation to Distance Education.

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

A request for Federal Council to continue its lobby for a DETA was presented as a conjoined motion at Federal Conference. Following on from Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) has continued to advocate for the establishment of a DETA. The topic was raised in a standalone motion letter, sent to the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan and other relevant ministers and rural senators and members with an interest in rural and remote education and included links to the DE Resource video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFqc0StaORE&feature=youtu.be> and the ICPA's Distance Education Research for Geographically Isolated Families survey results <http://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1022/federal-icpa-portfolios/federal-distance-education-portfolio/deta-survey-results.pdf>. Notably, this year we also sent this letter to the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP, Minister for Women, with the view that this matter is one which affects the wellbeing of women in geographically isolated communities. To date we have not received responses to this correspondence.

The call for a DETA to be established was also included in Federal Council Briefing Papers and raised at every opportunity during delegation meetings. In our Federal Election campaign strategy, the need for a DETA was listed on our election infographic as one of our top four priorities and included in briefing papers sent to politicians and candidates across the country.

To this end we cannot say we have made any progress on this issue, however we continue to include the topic within submissions, meetings, delegations and other avenues, attempting to raise the profile of the distance education tutor and the extensive and essential role they play in achieving distance education success.

### **Location of Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education**

In 2017 the Western Australian Government made a decision to close regional Schools of the Air and to instead provide a single service from a central Perth (metropolitan) facility. Though later retracted, the proposal highlighted a lack of broader understanding and appreciation of why Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education are so important to rural and remote communities. On the back of this, a motion was presented at the 2018 Federal Conference requesting that ICPA (Aust) advocates the importance, value and critical need of Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education being based in and part of their respective rural and remote communities.

While decisions of this nature are principally state-based, Federal Council will support and advocate along with the States to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities. We are also prepared to promote awareness of the features of educating

children via distance education in a geographically isolated situation, such as the opportunity to host Central Station blogs focussed entirely on School of the Air and Distance Education experiences.

### **Central Station Blogs**

The Central Station Blog posts which ICPA (Aust) hosted, have been very well received. Circumstances which have eventuated in recent years, makes it clear that geographically isolated distance education is widely misunderstood and the opportunity to tell our stories to a global audience goes a long way to increasing the awareness in the general community of this unique educational experience. Sincere gratitude to all of those people who contributed to our two Central Station blog opportunities in 2018 and this year. We appreciate that you were able to take the time to tell your story.

### **Other Points of Interest**

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

Although not included in the Distance Education motions in 2018, Federal Council has continued to work on issues associated with AIC. At meetings with the Department of Human Services, ICPA (Aust) raised issues with the AIC application, approval and implementation process, specifically requesting an online application process. Concerns around the application process for distance education students were raised at the 2017 Federal Conference and our advocacy has been around improving AIC processes for distance education, boarding and second home allowance. Federal Council has been assured that an online application process for the AIC is being investigated and developed, however its implementation seems to continue to be a long way off. Comment and suggestions provided by Federal Council on the AIC application process were well received by the Department of Human Services, however, no commitment has been made as to when changes may occur. ICPA (Aust), in a motion letter to the Hon Paul Fletcher, Minister for Families and Social Services, has also requested an increase of the AIC, in line with the costs associated with educating geographically isolated children.

Federal Council has also been in contact with the Departments of Human Services and Social Services requesting an indication of the proportion of geographically isolated students who receive AIC – DE allowance. Federal Council feel that having a clearer understanding of these numbers would assist when advocating for issues around Distance Education to ensure our lobbies are well-informed and up to date.

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

After the demise of the former Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (VISE) program and concerns raised by our members around this, ICPA (Aust) is pleased to report that AHVISE has successfully taken the place of the former program. The AHVISE program has established additional support mechanisms this year, including a virtual classroom, where volunteers who cannot travel can tutor bush kids online. We would once again like to congratulate Aussie Helpers for their determination and dedication to helping educate geographically isolated students.

#### **Impact of Digital Technology on our Students**

Federal Council has been in contact with the Australian Council on Children and the Media who are combining with the Australian Council of Educational Leaders to host the first ever *Digital Environments and Developing Minds* Conference. These organisations are aiming to promote a recognition that while the advantages of technology use for children are well documented, any risks to their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development are not necessarily considered or understood. ICPA (Aust) are aware that there are concerns being raised by our members across Australia around student technology use, especially when many of our students' study via a digital distance education curriculum, with extensive online learning required. We are therefore very interested in keeping abreast of these issues and will endeavor to collaborate with these

organisations, as well as their Conference partners, to raise our members concerns and seek information which may be beneficial for members. Further information about this Conference can be found at

[http://www.ace1.org.au/ACEL/ACELWEB/Events/2019/Children\\_and\\_The\\_Media/About.aspx](http://www.ace1.org.au/ACEL/ACELWEB/Events/2019/Children_and_The_Media/About.aspx)

### **Sky Muster Education Service**

Issues have been raised around some distance education students being unable to access the Education Service on nbn Sky Muster, with access/eligibility varying across states. ICPA (Aust) can confirm that distance education students with a student ID number from their respective State education department are eligible for an education port, provided that they do not already receive a state based internet service for their schooling. If distance education students do not currently have a Sky Muster Education Port or access to a state provided service, ICPA (Aust) recommend contacting a Sky Muster provider to apply. This includes students in NSW, WA and NT that may not yet be receiving an internet service from their distance education school, perhaps due to a waiting period or some other reason. While the nbn Sky Muster Education Service (Ed Port) is not free, it is offered to eligible Distance Education families at a lower cost than similar regular service plans and can greatly assist families who do not have state provided internet with additional data for their schooling needs. Please do not hesitate to contact Federal Council if you have any queries or concerns around this issue.

### **Sky Muster Plus**

The long-awaited Sky Muster Plus service is due to launch in mid-2019. This will give rural and remote satellite users greater data capacity, with essential internet services no longer contributing to monthly data usage by Sky Muster users. ICPA (Aust) are optimistic that educational sites may be included in the list of services to be unmetered.

### **Distance Education Multicast Trials**

The **REACT** multicast technical trials with nbn Sky Muster in the Northern Territory were successful. Product trials will commence in the near future.

### **In Home Care (IHC)**

Although not specifically dealt with in the Distance Education portfolio, the changes made to IHC as at 1 July 2018 have had a significant impact on distance education families and their ability to use IHC to assist them with their situations. ICPA (Aust) remains abreast of developments around IHC and have been supporting members to manage the many issues associated with IHC for geographically isolated families.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate strongly for geographically isolated distance education students and their families. We encourage all ICPA members to actively highlight the valuable role of the geographically isolated distance education tutor and to participate in opportunities to raise the profile of the nature of geographically isolated distance education. If members have any concerns or issues which they feel Federal Council may assist with, please do not hesitate to request our assistance.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my fellow distance education portfolio members Christie Goddard, Caroline Robinson, Wendy Hick and Lisa Slade.