

DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT

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ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for recognition and support for those families who must educate their children by distance education or School of the Air because of being geographically isolated.

Following on from the 2019 Federal Conference, Federal Council has focused on our advocacy for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance, along with continuing to raise the necessity for Distance Education and School of the Air schools to be based in rural and remote locations and requesting a separate category for geographically isolated students in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme in recognition of the unique needs of these students.

Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

Seeking the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance continues to be one of Federal Council's major points of advocacy. ICPA Federal Council has and will continue to advocate strongly for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA).

The DETA topic was raised in a motion letter sent to the Federal Minister for Education, Minister Tehan and other relevant Ministers, members and senators shortly after the 2019 Federal Conference. The topic has also been comprehensively covered in Federal Council delegation Briefing Papers and during delegation meetings and further raised in correspondence with the Minister in a letter in December. Federal Council received correspondence from Minister Tehan's office indicating that the topic should be taken to State Education Ministers citing that "the delivery of school education is the responsibility of the relevant State or Territory. Distance education in government schools is a matter for State and Territory education authorities who have provision for distance education of their students in specific circumstances." This was raised with representatives from all State Councils at the Joint Councils meeting in February along with discussion on how to approach the DETA advocacy. We continue to see many branches and state councils across Australia requesting for Federal Council to pursue a DETA at a federal level and this reaffirms our commitment to continuing to seek the establishment of a DETA by the federal government and members can be assured we will do so.

Federal Council utilises every opportunity to raise the request for a DETA within submissions, meetings, delegations and other avenues, along with raising the profile of the distance education tutor and the extensive and essential role they play in achieving distance education success. A short video played at Federal Conference last year was released across our social media platforms showcasing the distance education tutor in distance education schoolrooms across Australia. The necessity for a distance education supervisor was thoroughly expounded in our submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments and we used this opportunity to highlight how fundamental the distance education tutor is to distance education success in remote educational environments. Most recently, the topic has been raised in recent conversations with the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, Hon Andrew Gee MP.

One of the greatest impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic felt across education in Australia, was the inception of the majority of students having to learn from home with their families required to supervise, support and implement online lesson delivery. ICPA (Aust) was able to provide advice and guidance to families across Australia faced with managing this challenging and unprecedented situation. This also gave rise to an opportunity to draw attention to the insights and experiences, and tell the stories of the difficulties faced by and the tenacity and resilience of geographically isolated families who always must educate their children at home and provide resources and a distance education tutor for their students as a matter of course, not just in the midst of a crisis. There is an opportunity to build on this newfound insight and appreciation of the challenges for geographically isolated families educating

children at home that has occurred across Australia as a result of COVID-19. ICPA Australia has every intention of continuing to raise, advocate for and pursue the DETA at every opportunity.

Location of Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

Federal Council continues to maintain the position that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education should remain in rural and remote communities and we have reiterated this to the Federal Minister for Education, Minister Tehan and other members and senators. We thoroughly understand the importance of this and while decisions of this nature are principally state-based, Federal Council will support States however we can to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities and maintain the resources and support provided for geographically isolated students who have no choice but to be educated via these schools.

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

With the changing nature of distance education schools, the request for a separate category for geographically isolated students to be established within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme was raised with the Minister for Families and Social Services, Minister Ruston to ensure that adequate support and assistance is maintained for these students. Federal Council has emphasised that increasing financial assistance needs to be provided to help with the costs associated with educating geographically isolated students who do not have daily access to face-to-face appropriate schooling due to distance, as per the original intent of the AIC scheme. Further to this, in our Briefing Papers we suggested a review is needed to ensure the AIC allowance is adequately meeting the needs of geographically isolated students. Within submissions, meetings and delegations and most recently in our submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments, Federal Council has highlighted that geographically isolated students need to be recognised as a unique disadvantage group who require specialised support and assistance in order to allow them to achieve equitable educational outcomes. Federal Council aims to use every opportunity to highlight and promote the unique needs of geographically isolated students.

Most recently, Federal Council wrote to Minister Ruston and other Members of Parliament in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, requesting assurance that with a move to schooling at home across the much of the community that the AIC-DE allowance would not be eroded noting that more families may become eligible for this allowance and the fact that our members do not have access to local schooling because of where they live at any time, not just in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis would not be overlooked. We welcomed reassurance in a reply from the Minister that stated, “AIC Distance Education Allowance will not be payable where the student's only reason for not being able to attend an appropriate state school is because their local school has been temporarily closed, or has encouraged students to study from home, in order to manage an outbreak of COVID-19, as this is outside the scope of the AIC Scheme.”

This response is encouraging as it shows a distinct recognition of the unique circumstances of those rural and remote students who receive the Distance Education allowance, not only through the COVID-19 crisis, as well as a commitment to ensuring the intended scope of the AIC scheme is maintained.

As always, Federal Council encourages all ICPA members to actively participate in opportunities to raise the profile of the nature of geographically isolated distance education and the importance and value of providing adequate resources and support for geographically isolated students who have no other options to access their compulsory education.

I would like to take this opportunity to show my appreciation to Christie Goddard, for leading the Distance Education Portfolio for part of the Federal Council year and to my fellow distance education portfolio members, as well as all of Federal Council for their support this year.