

RURAL SCHOOLS /TRAVEL REPORT

Jean Cashmore

It gives me great pleasure to submit my first portfolio report as a Federal Councillor. I feel very privileged to head the Rural Schools/ Travel Portfolio.

Two rural schools' motions were presented at the 2016 Federal Conference.

Application for AIC under Special Needs Criteria

The inequities faced by families who live in or near rural and remote communities, where secondary schools are not able to meet the educational needs of individual students by allowing them to access the Assistance for Isolated Children's Boarding Allowance or the Second Home allowance. This was discussed with the Department of Human Services and with the Minister for Education and Training. ICPA (Aust) has requested the Department of Human Services provide information regarding the application process for students with special needs applying for AIC under the special needs category so that it can be considered, reviewed and further comment made.

An independent comprehensive review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education and in particular access to this education has been announced jointly by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Education and Training. ICPA (Aust) has been in discussions with the government leading up to the announcement of this review and we will be taking every opportunity to put forward the issues and challenges facing our rural and remote students. The difficulty in applying for special consideration for eligibility under the AIC scheme will be one of the points we will raise in our submission to the review.

Recent conversations with some educational institutions has provided support around the issue of eligibility criteria of the AIC in order for students to access an appropriate education. A growing number of students are unable to attend schools that offer specific programs due to the high cost of boarding and their not being able to receive the AIC. Federal Council will continue to develop these conversations in order to strengthen the case being put before the government in their consideration of students who have a need to live away from home in order to meet their educational needs for inclusion of the AIC allowance.

Sporting Schools Program

Federal Council wrote to then Minister for Sport, Susan Ley, following the Federal Conference, requesting that modifications be made to the Sporting Schools Program to allow suitable volunteers, not just qualified teachers or endorsed national sporting organisation coaches, to run sports where coaches are not available in rural areas.

Federal Council now knows that the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) have partnered with 32 recognised National Sporting Organisations (NSOs) to extend the delivery of the Sporting Schools program across Australia via their networks of aligned organisations and coaches. Community volunteers with a passion and interest are encouraged to seek endorsement to deliver one of the 32 recognised sports in their communities. More information can be found on the Sporting Schools website <https://sportingschools.gov.au/sports> or alternatively by contacting Sporting Schools on 1300 785 707.

School Travel

Federal Council continues to lobby major airlines to offer concessional rates for students travelling to attend educational facilities. In 2014, similar motions were passed and Federal Council contacted all major airlines requesting the concessional fares for students along with presenting information to support the need for this consideration. All replies were fairly standard, basically stating: “we are not able to provide concessional fares for students, however families should watch for our special fares when making plans.” Preliminary inquiries this year indicated that the same responses would be received.

In order to gain some traction on this issue, Federal Council has been working with State Councils and members to gather information on what is available in each State to assist students with their travel to and from school as well as inquiring about what local programs are in place that offer reduced fares for residents or students. ICPA (Aust) has been investigating further the ways in which local reduced fare programs operate and the possibility of these programs being expanded or implemented in rural and remote areas.

Changes to School funding - Gonski 2.0

The Turnbull Government's plan for real needs-based funding for Australia's schools passed the Parliament on the 23 June, 2017. The new Quality Schools (QS) reforms deliver an additional \$23.5 billion on top of the 2016 Budget for schools over the next decade ensuring that investment is distributed according to need, as envisaged by David Gonski's Review of School Funding in 2011. Changes will include the replacement of 27 separate school funding deals with different states and sectors, with a nationally consistent, needs-based funding model. The new plan will deliver about \$2 300 per student to schools over the next few years. The new model is also committed to growing the funding standards by 3.65 per cent for the three years from 2018 – 2020, from 2021 moving to a floating indexation rate, with guarantee in legislation that funding not only keeps up with the wages and inflation growth base but also will have an added safeguard for certainty of school planning that such indexation cannot fall below three per cent.

Federal Council welcomes the Gonski 2.0 announcement, however concerns continue to exist around the need for the location loading to recognise a student's home address rather than the school's address. For instance, students who do not have access to mainstream schooling and who have no other option but to educate via distance education lessons have had their funding reduced significantly in comparison to the previous funding model due to the fact that in most cases a student may be living in a very remote location but their school of distance education is located in a major city which does not attract the location loading. Both Government and Non-Government boarding schools play an important role in the education of rural and remote students. Remote and very remote schooling outcomes are only partially correlated with socio-economic status, suggesting that being resident in a remote area has separate and distinct disadvantage. However, under the Gonski funding structure, boarding schools taking on rural or remote students will not be recognised for their role for delivery of education to those students attributable to socio economic status related to the location of their home.

Federal Council is very concerned around any unintended consequences there may be when considering the school communities capacity to contribute towards high tuition fees charged by many of the boarding schools. For families who must send their children away from home for their secondary education, is one of necessity and not by choice and has no reflection on their ability to afford these expenses.

On closing, I look forward to continue working with Federal Council and our States to lobby for *'equity of access to services in our rural and remote communities'*.