

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

ALLOWANCES REPORT

Sam Greay – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

Allowances motions A1, A2, A3 and A5 raised at the 2020 State Conference were in regard to increasing the Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA).

It has been made quite clear that the current Government considers the Royalties for Regions (RfR) BAHA supplementation only to be funded for a finite period and is not considering reinstating it. The cessation by 2022 of the (RfR) BAHA component will result in a loss of financial support of \$785, not per family, but per student. This allowance has already decreased from \$2,105 to \$1,634 in 2020, with an overall decrease to \$1,320 in 2022. This equates to a 37% decrease over five (5) years.

With the increase in costs and decrease in accessibility, education is increasingly becoming less affordable for some rural and remote families. We are seeing families who are having to fragment with one family member moving away from the family home to access an affordable secondary education for their children.

The option of a second home allowance is often more advantageous but is so detrimental to family life, health and well-being, not to mention the impact this is having on rural communities. When the eldest child starts secondary school, all the children from the one family move. Coming from a small rural area, I have seen examples of this within my own community.

ASSISTANCE FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN (AIC) DISTANCE EDUCATION ALLOWANCE

This allowance assists students living in isolated locations who do not have appropriate access to a primary or secondary school who study via distance learning. Students who are in receipt of this allowance are either geographically isolated, have no reasonable access to a local school or have special education needs.

The 2020 annual rate for the Distance Education Allowance was \$4278.

ASSISTANCE FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN (AIC) BOARDING ALLOWANCE

This allowance assists students from isolated locations who do not have access to an appropriate education and have no other option but to board away from home.

The basic allowance for 2020 was \$8557 for students who board away for the full year, with payment being made in four (4) instalments usually at the end of each term. Where a student only boards at the college for part of the year, a pro-rata payment will be made based on the number of terms attended. The minimum stay with a boarding provider is four (4) weeks for a pro-rata payment.

Parents may also qualify for the AIC Additional Boarding Allowance which is subject to parental income and actual boarding costs. This additional allowance was \$2454 for 2020.

The payment/advice is sent directly to the boarding provider when the student attends a country Residential College (i.e., Albany, Broome, Esperance, Geraldton, Merredin, Narrogin, Northam, or St James Residential College, Moora) or where a student attends a Western Australian College of Agriculture (i.e., Cunderdin, Denmark, Harvey, Morawa, Narrogin) and is to be deducted from the residential boarding fees only.

If the student does not reside at a Residential College or Western Australian College of Agriculture then the allowance is paid to one of the following at the direction of the parent: the boarding facility, school, or parent.

ASSISTANCE FOR ISOLATED CHILDREN (AIC) SECOND HOME ALLOWANCE

Another allowance that falls under the AIC is the Second Home Allowance. This allowance helps families with the costs associated with having to take on a second family home for geographically isolated students to access appropriate schooling. This allowance is paid fortnightly at rate of \$248 (2020 rate) per fortnight, per student up to a maximum of three students. A claim needs to be lodged for each child.

You will not be eligible for the AIC Second Home Allowance if you received a First Homeowner Grant, stamp-duty concession or similar assistance when you bought the home.

BOARDING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE (BAHA)

The Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA) is only available to Western Australian students who qualify for the Commonwealth Government's Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Boarding Allowance or the Second Home Allowance. This allowance is funded through the Western Australian Department of Education. Applications must be submitted before the end of November of the school year that you are applying for directly to the Department.

Table of BAHA Rates 2013 – 2022:

2013	\$2,105
2014	\$2,105
2015	\$2,105
2016	\$2,105
2017	\$2,105
2018	\$1,948
2019	\$1,791
2020	\$1,634
2021	\$1,477
2022	\$1,320

Table of Applications 2014 – 2020:

School Year	Total Applications
2014	1247
2015	1397
2016	1503
2017	1453
2018	1244
2019	1375
2020	1307*

* Applications still being accepted and paid

BOARDING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE FOR STUDENTS IN RESPITE

The provision of a Boarding Away from Home Allowance for students who may board away from home because of physical or intellectual disabilities, health related conditions or learning difficulties was REMOVED, effective 1st January 2020.

BOARDING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE - AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE SPECIAL SUBSIDY

This allowance is to assist parents with secondary students attending and boarding at a Western Australian College of Agriculture. Claimants apply for the subsidy through the Western Australian College of Agriculture where their child is boarding.

ELIGIBILITY: The Student is enrolled and boarding at the Catholic Agricultural College or the Student is enrolled and boarding in a Western Australian College of Agriculture.

The student is not in receipt of:

- Youth Allowance at the away from home rate
- Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance (through the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) or
- ABSTUDY Boarding.

Note: This allowance is only available to students boarding at the Agricultural Colleges. If students are boarding at another location, they are not entitled to claim this special subsidy (they may be eligible for the Boarding Away from Home Allowance for Isolated Children if they are in receipt of Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) boarding or Second Home Allowance from the Department of Human Services (Centrelink).

PAYMENT: The Allowance for 2020 is \$1,634. The payment/advice will be sent directly to each Agricultural College and it is to be deducted from the residential boarding fees only. If a student only boards at the Western Australian College of Agriculture or Catholic Agricultural College for part of the year, a pro-rata payment will be made based on the number of terms attended. The minimum stay with a Boarding Provider is four weeks for a pro-rata payment.

BOARDING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE - GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAM

This allowance is to assist rural and remote parents with secondary students enrolled in gifted and talented programs at selected public schools and boarding at City Beach Residential College. The closing date for the Gifted and Talented Program Boarding Away from Home Allowance is 31st July. Forms should be submitted direct to City Beach Residential College. Applications must be completed annually (an application does NOT automatically cover all school years).

ELIGIBILITY: The Student is enrolled in a gifted and talented program at selected public schools and the student is boarding at City Beach Residential College.

The student is not in receipt of:

- Youth Allowance at the away from home rate,
- Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance (through the Department of Human Services (Centrelink) or
- ABSTUDY Boarding.

Note: If students are boarding at another location, they are not entitled to claim this special subsidy (they may be eligible for the Boarding Away from Home Allowance for Isolated Children if they are in receipt of Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) boarding or Second Home Allowance from the Department of Human Services (Centrelink).

PAYMENT: The allowance for 2020 is \$1,634 for students who board away for the full year, with payment being made at the end of Term 4. The allowance is paid directly to City Beach Residential College.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, SKILL AND EMPLOYMENT

On 19th October 2020, the Australian Government's Job-ready Graduates Package passed in parliament. This package aims to provide more opportunities for people to gain the qualifications they will require for the jobs of the future and will see opportunities for regional and remote students to attend university plus more investment in regional university campuses.

TERTIARY ACCESS PAYMENT

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a one-off payment of \$5,000 paid in two (2) instalments to assist school-leavers from outer regional or remote areas who relocate more than 90 minutes from their home to undertake full-time, higher-level tertiary education (Certificate IV or above).

The payment is intended to assist students with the additional costs associated with relocating to undertake tertiary study.

Vocational Educational and Training (VET) students must apply through Services Australia. Students studying via a university apply through their university. This payment is subject to parental income of \$250,000 or less.

A comprehensive list of allowances and eligibility criteria were published in the Bits and Pieces magazine; and are also available on the ICPA website or by contacting the portfolio holder.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE - INDEPENDENT (FEDERAL)

All applicants must check the Centrelink website www.centrelink.gov.au for detailed information and eligibility.

You may be an independent student if you support yourself through paid work. Applicants need to have:

- earned at least 75% of the National Training Wage Schedule within a 14 month period since leaving school, or
- worked part-time (minimum 15 hours each week) for the last 2 years since leaving school.
- Employed for 30 hours per week for 18 months in a 2 year period on leaving school.

The age of independence was 22 years in 2020. Eligibility for Youth Allowance also depends on your parents' or guardians' income. Your parents can have a combined parental income of \$160,000 per year. There is also an extra \$10,000 added to the parental income limit for each of your eligible siblings.

STUDENT START UP LOANS

Available to all Youth Allowance recipients. You may apply for up to two loan payments each calendar year. Loan periods run from 1st January to 31st December each year. The Start Up loan rate is \$1094 per loan period.

RELOCATION SCHOLARSHIP

Is only available to Dependent Youth Allowance recipients that need to live away from home to study. Relocation payments start at \$4626 for the first year and \$2314 for years the second and third year.

FARES ALLOWANCE

Available to eligible Youth Allowance recipients only who are enrolled in either on campus or external tertiary study. You are entitled to up to 2 return trips per study year. Applications must be made by 31st March following the year of study.

LIVING AWAY FROM HOME ALLOWANCE

Available to eligible young people who must move away from home to take up or continue with an apprenticeship or traineeship.

Payment is based on full-time or part-time apprentice or school-based programs.

Rates are: First year \$77.17
 Second Year \$38.59
 Third year \$25.

Applications are to be made through your local Australian Apprenticeship Support Network provider.
www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au

COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Sally Brindal – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

Communications motions raised at the 2020 ICPA (WA) State Conference sought to have ICPA (WA) support ICPA (Australia) in lobbying the Minister for Regional Development and telecommunication providers to investigate mobile call dropouts and restoration times on mobile tower back up batteries.

WA State Council raised this issue as a communications motion at Federal Conference 2020. A letter of support was also written to ICPA Federal Council for their work so far in this area. Other motions presented at Federal Conference related to:

- Universal broadband internet to Australia, including alternative satellite-based internet services and technologies, which would improve access to equitable education for all students in rural, regional and remote Australia
- A customer end technology roadmap for the transition from existing mobile phone configurations to country 5G due in 2024 by Telstra
- Rebates for rural and remote customers who will need to upgrade equipment (aerials and boosters) to change from 3G to 4G

The COVID-19 pandemic and the requirement for all students to be educated via an online platform certainly put the spotlight on communications and internet connectivity. As a result, planned improvements to services, product adjustments and accessibility were accelerated by all telcos.

NBN CO

Sky Muster Plus Enhancements:

From 1st April 2020 there were a number of Sky Muster Plus enhancements:

- Unmetered activities were significantly expanded to cover all online content and applications, with only two exclusions – video streaming (Netflix, YouTube, Tiktok, Foxtel, Stan) and VPN traffic – which continue to be metered. Unmetered examples include WhatsApp, Google Duo, Instagram Live, Viber, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Zoom, Google Hangouts, Skype, Facebook Messenger, Facetime, Snapchat, GoToMeeting.
- The introduction of a new 25GB entry plan offering 25GB of peak data and 25GB off peak data, and the option of ‘top up’ data should customers exhaust their monthly metered data allowance.

Gaming and video streaming still contribute to data download allowances.

Standard Sky Muster:

From 1st April 2020 Sky Muster users also benefitted from improvements:

- Temporary access to an additional 45GB of download data for each standard Sky Muster plan for a period up to three months.

March 2020; NBN Co introduced a 40% additional wholesale Connectivity Virtual Circuit (CVC) capacity offer to support the nation’s additional data demands as more people relied on their home broadband connections for work, study and entertainment. In September, NBN Co announced a further extension of its capacity offer at no extra cost to internet retailers until 30 November 2020. NBN Co also extended its offer to increase the fair use thresholds for its standard Sky™ Muster satellite service to 90GB* of wholesale download data also until 30 November.

If you are having difficulties with your Sky Muster connection, there are a number of trouble-shooting measures that can be done prior to contacting your Retail Satellite Providers (RSPs):

- **Turn off ALL devices.** If you have a nbn Sky Muster connection unscrew the white cable from the SAT port that goes from the wall into the nbn box (NTD).
- Wait at least **5 minutes**.
- Turn the **Devices on in order**
 - Screw in the white cable, then turn on the **NBN box first** (also known as the NTD or modem). Wait until all the lights are on and indicate an active connection (this may take a few minutes). Active connection for NBN Sky Muster is a blue light.
 - Then turn on your router. Wait until all the lights are on the router indicate an active connection.
 - Then turn on all your other devices.

If you are finding that your connection, no matter what the type, is not performing as it should, or your plan does not meet your needs, you need to contact your provider. More trouble shooting tips can be found on the BIRRR website using the following links:

<https://birraus.com/2016/10/22/skymuster-not-working/>

or

<https://birraus.com/nbn/nbn-fixed-line/>

or

<https://birraus.com/2016/05/10/troubleshooting-your-fixed-wireless-internet-connection/>

depending on your type of connection.

The BIRRR (Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia) website www.birraus.com has a wealth of information on the whole range of internet options, various providers, trouble-shooting tips and COVID-19 updates. The following link will take you to their Sky Muster/Sky Muster Plus plan comparison and further information. <https://birraus.com/2018/11/12/skymusterfaq/>.

Sky Muster Installs:

- Currently there is no cost to have the hardware required for a Sky Muster NBN internet service installed at your place.
- This government funded incentive was originally only guaranteed until 2020 but is still continuing. ICPA (Australia) urges members to take advantage of this while they can. Information on providers and plans can be found here. <https://birraus.com/satellite/satellite-providers/>.

NBN help to connect low-income families with home-schooling needs:

To help Australians respond to the COVID-19 pandemic nbn provided up to \$50 million to assist phone and internet providers to support low-income family households with school aged children who do not currently have an active nbn connection at home. Participating nbn Sky Muster providers who were ready to connect customers on a 5GB/5GB Peak/Off Peak Sky Muster Plus Plan for \$0 for 3 months were:

- Activ8me
- IPSTAR Broadband
- SkyMesh
- Southern Phone

NBN Co later:

- Extended its Education Assistance offer for unconnected low-income households with online schooling needs until 15 January 2021; and
- Has broadened the 'Illuminate' (First Timers') wholesale discounts for premises that have not yet connected to the nbn network and have passed 18 months since their premises were able to connect or have disconnected after having an active service and have been inactive for more than 6 months.

100 Free Laptops:

NBN distributed 100 recycled laptops to schools with students in need in rural and remote schools. ICPA (Aust) took part in the discussions to assist with identifying schools in our states and NBN worked with ICPA (Aust) to understand how best to distribute the 100 nationally. All laptops have been allocated and delivered. NBN asked that the schools provide some indication of impact/feedback on how the laptops were being used by the students who have received them, e.g., some good news stories, but this feedback process is fairly open and simple.

NBN Co/ACCAN Local Round Table:

In May I participated in a virtual round table discussion hosted by Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) in partnership with NBN Co. ACCAN is the peak body that represents all consumers on communication issues including telecommunications, broadband and emerging new services.

The 33 participants involved in the round table discussion represented a broad cross section of community groups, across all of WA, who work with disabled, vulnerable, at risk or isolated people.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic millions of Australians have increasingly relied on their phone and home broadband services. Unfortunately, some Australians are at risk of being left behind because they are unable to afford a home broadband service. ACCAN is aware of this plight and wants 'No Australian Left Offline: affordable broadband for Regional, Rural and Remote Australian and All Australians'.

During the roundtable NBN Co looked at how it can work to lift digital capability, gave a progress update of the NBN rollout in WA and the key priorities for 2020 - including assisting our vulnerable communities.

It was important to understand what digital capability means, explore what lifting digital capability would look like and what benefits connectivity would provide to the most vulnerable members of community.

NBN LOCAL

Regional Business Unit:

October 2019 nbn announced it would be creating a new business unit that was committed to better serving and engaging with regional communities. The Regional Business Unit is to take control of fixed wireless and satellite networks as well as expanding community and stakeholder capability to ensure customer expectations are understood. Naomi Evans was appointed the Head of Regional and Community Affairs (WA) for nbn Local in July 2020 and in the months since has been building a team that will live and work in the regions.

If anyone has any regional issues, concerns or opportunities please feel free to email her.

Testimonials:

NBN is seeking testimonials from members who are using a Sky Muster Plus connection for tertiary studies. If you know of anyone and you think they may be prepared to discuss their experience, please either pass my contact details on to them, or give me theirs with their permission.

Scam Warning:

Just a reminder - Members are advised that there are still scams occurring in relation to nbn. Customers are contacted by someone claiming to be from nbn asking for personal information and/or a threat to services being cut.

TELSTRA

Telstra made improvements to their plans and services for their customers as a result of COVID-19, offering:

- Unlimited data for home and small business broadband customers (ADSL, NBN, Cable) until 30 June 2020.
- Mobile Broadband plans received an additional 10GB data allowance on the small and medium plans increasing their data allowance to 20GB and 60GB respectively, and the large plan doubled to 200GB of data allowance.
- 25GB extra data to use in Australia, available for 30 days, for post-paid personal and small business mobile customers. Customers could apply for the extra data via the Telstra 24x7 and My Telstra Apps until 30 June 2020.
- 10GB extra data available for 28 to 30 days (depending on your plan) for the \$40+ pre-paid customers.
- Unlimited standard calls within Australia for eligible pensioner customers on landlines between 19 March – 30 April 2020.
- Switching on SMS over Wi-Fi on the mobile network.

Bridging the Divide:

From their Australian Digital Inclusion Index research, Telstra are aware that not all families can afford or have access to digital technology which meant their children's learning had the potential to be severely impacted if they could not attend school during the COVID-19 pandemic. To help bridge this divide Telstra provided 30,000 internet-enabled sims at no cost to state and territory education departments and Catholic Education to distribute to families in their states who were most at risk of not being able to access online learning. Telstra also worked with education departments to provide additional student and teacher devices, equipment, connectivity and digital platforms, such as Cisco Web-Ex or Microsoft Teams to enable virtual classrooms.

Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP):

Under Round 5 of the MBSP regional Australia will benefit from 182 new mobile small cell base stations with 27 in WA.

- Across all rounds of the MBSP program more than 740 sites are completed nationally.
- Completed more than 200 small cells for remote communities (at Telstra's expense).
- 200 additional sites are yet to be delivered, mostly from Round 5 of the program.

4G Update:

Telstra are making sure regional Australia benefits from breakthrough technology – like the innovation that [doubles the coverage range](#) of 4G towers in some locations – along with connectivity-enhancing products like the [Telstra Go Repeater](#). Telstra is on track to ensuring their regional customers have access to fast 4G well in advance of the 3G Network closure in 2024. Plus, the benefits of their [Narrow Band Internet of Things Network](#) – at nearly 4 million km² it is by far the largest in the country.

5G Rollout:

- Telstra's 5G reaches more than 40% of the population and will expand to 75% of the Australian population by the end of June 2021.
- More than 1,400 suburbs have 50% or greater coverage.

- There are more than 60 cities and towns across the country where Telstra's 5G rollout is now underway.
- Telstra has switched on more than 2,000 5G sites nationally.

Telstra WA Regional Advisory Council (RAC):

As President of ICPA (WA) I was invited to be a part of the Telstra WA Regional Advisory Council. The RAC was established in 2017. The purpose of the RAC is for Telstra to work together with 13 external key regional stakeholders from leading industry and community groups, who are invited to the Council by Telstra, to identify, and where appropriate, address the telecommunication challenges and opportunities facing rural, regional and remote Australians and their communities.

The WA RAC meet up two to three times a year. At the May meeting the discussion focused on the experiences of the various groups in accessing mobile technology and any barriers that exist.

Telstra also heard great feedback including - new towers are making a difference to the local communities, skilling up and training of digital mentors to help regional people, and new and innovative ways to deliver education and digitally upskill teachers.

MMS Services:

Earlier this year Telstra enabled SMS services to be used over Wi-Fi calling. By the end of September, MMS messages had the capability to be used over Wi-Fi calling. The way to ensure your handset can do this is to install any phone updates as they come through. Some older handsets and devices will not be able to use this facility. iPhone 6 and below and android equivalents are included in this list.

NGWL:

Telstra advised that they were withdrawing their Next Gen Wireless Link (NGWL) fax services from 10 November 2020. Where Telstra supplied a NGWL service to fulfil their USO voice obligation, the NGWL fax service had been offered as an additional service for an extra \$1 per month. NGWL voice services will not be impacted. There were over 2000 customers with the NGWL fax service, most of which are regional, and half are businesses. Around 600 customers had used it between July and October.

Federal Council welcomed feedback on this, to ascertain whether Telstra's decision was going to be problematic for users of the service, and gauge whether they have easy access to other replacement options like scanning and emailing.

Unmetering of Education Sites:

Telstra has contacted ICPA regarding sites and applications that are used for education that they may look at unmetering on their network. Federal requested States to get a list together of what they think their "top 10" sites/applications would be. In 2015 Telstra did commit to unmetering some sites, and we have asked them to revisit this and see if it needs changing/updating.

Please see the list here for each of the sites in our States.

https://www.icpa.com.au/module/latestNews/item_attachment/16/download-icpa-telstra-unmetered-site-list-2016-02-24.pdf

BIRRR:

A survey was sent out to members to help both BIRRR and ICPA gather information to assist with their lobbying. It was an independent survey designed to help nbn Sky Muster users choose a good provider. It was open to people with active nbn Sky Muster connections.

Alternative Voice Service Trials:

The WA Government is undertaking Alternative Voice Service Trials. More information can be found here: <https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/phone-services/universal-service-guarantee-telecommunications/alternative-voice-services-trials-program#:~:text=The%20Alternative%20Voice%20Services%20Trials,fixed%20wireless%20and%20satellite%20footprints.>

Regional Advisory Network:

The new Regional Advisory Network has recently been launched by Telstra.

"The RAN program has been designed to help customers who are having connectivity issues in their home, business premises or on the road. We want to be able to fix these problems the way that our regional customers need: by putting the right people on the job who understand the issue in detail and who can recommend a solution". - Telstra

More information can be found by following this link.

<https://exchange.telstra.com.au/helping-our-regional-and-rural-customers/>

Schedule a Regional Network Advisor (RNA) visit:

- The aim of the RNA team is to provide an Australia wide team of regional and rural based Telstra advisors, who can work with customers in their local area on mobile issues.
- This team consists of 5 RNAs and approximately 60 Local Communications Advisors (LCA's).
- RNAs are predominately wireless access skilled and are based in regional Queensland, Northern NSW, Victoria / Southern NSW, Southern WA and the Northern Territory.
- LCAs are located across Australia who provide customer service to rural and regional customers.
- Telstra have received positive feedback from customers and stakeholders from the expansion of this team.

STAND (Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters):

Improving telco network resilience;

STAND sites

- Federal Government funded \$37.1m package was announced on 17 May 2020 and includes four key elements:
 - \$18m for improving the resilience of base stations by providing longer lasting backup power sources in the event mains power is disrupted.
 - \$10m for portable communications facilities such as Telstra's Cell on Wheels to allow faster restoration of service in the event infrastructure is damaged by a natural disaster.
 - \$2.1 to improve information provided about access to telecommunications in an emergency.

- \$7m to deploy ~2000 NBN satellite services to rural fire authorities and evacuation centres.
- Telstra are actively supporting this program and have put in bids for the Temporary Telecommunications Infrastructure Deployment and Mobile Network Hardening Grant opportunities.

ICPA (Aust) Federal Communications Portfolio:

Transportable connectivity - transportable connectivity solutions for itinerant geographically isolated students, for example, droving camps, mustering contractors and the like. Typically, these families move regularly to live at current workplaces and do not have a building (or such) to establish a Sky Muster connection. ICPA (Aust) is currently working closely with government and other key stakeholders to see what could be done to help these families. If you know of any families that would be in this position, could you please ask them if you could pass their details? It would be great to get some idea of the number of families and their individual scenarios in this position.

Regional Tech Hub - is now up and running. ICPA (Aust) sits on The Regional Tech Hub - Stakeholder Reference Group, which meets regularly to discuss how the Hub can help our members in the best way it possibly can. Go to <https://regionaltechhub.org.au/> or call their hotline on 1300 081 029 for Independent, free advice about telecommunications services for regional, rural, and remote Australians. Please let them know how your experience or your member's experiences go, so ICPA (Aust) can pass feedback on their performance to The Ministers and department.

DISTANCE EDUCATION, SOTA & CURRICULUM REPORT

Chandra Ridley – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

At the 2020 State Conference there was one motion, A7, presented relating to the Distance Education/SOTA/Curriculum Portfolio concerning funding for the Support Teacher Learning (STL) in Schools of the Air (SOTA).

Letters were sent to various Government Departments with Ms Lisa Rodgers, Director General, Department of Education responding, assuring ICPA that there are no plans to change the funding for the STL or cease the funding beyond 2020.

CURRICULUM

The 2019 NAPLAN report was released in February 2020. Nationally Year 5 Numeracy, Year 3 and 5 Reading, Year 3 and 5 Spelling and Year 3 Grammar were significantly above the 2008 average when NAPLAN began.

Cumulative gains by Indigenous students are positive. The rate of improvement for Indigenous students is almost twice the rate of improvement for the general population since testing began.

The full report can be found at <https://nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/naplan-2019-national-report>

On Friday 18th March 2020 it was announced that, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, NAPLAN 2020 would be cancelled. Those students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in 2021 will sit the assessments.

In June it was decided that the full transition to online NAPLAN testing would be delayed until 2022 due to the 2020 NAPLAN testing being cancelled and the ongoing impacts of COVID-19.

For Year 9 students unable to sit NAPLAN more flexibility will be introduced into Online Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (OLNA). Year 9 students will be given the opportunity to demonstrate Literacy and Numeracy standards to achieve the Western Australian Certificate of Education (WACE).

In April it was announced that every Year 12 and ATAR student will be able to obtain a WACE and an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) in 2020. Students working towards Vocational Education and Training (VET) will not be disadvantaged due to workplace cancellations.

In May Minister Ellery announced that all ATAR written exams would go ahead as scheduled from 2nd November 2020. Reporting on student achievements would be amended: The Semester 1 report would include information about student's general learning progress without using grades. Also, the individual's performance in relation to their peer group. Semester 2 reports would be made following the usual minimum reporting standards.

On 8th June 2020, Minister Ellery announced work placements could resume if employers were complying with COVID-19 Health Guidelines.

ATAR examinations went ahead as planned beginning on 2nd November 2020.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) announced in June 2020 that it would be reviewing the Foundation to Year 10 Australian curriculum. It is being reviewed to ensure it continues to meet the needs of students now and into the future.

In 2014 Ministers agreed that ACARA should undertake a six-year cycle of review of the Australian Curriculum to keep it up to date. There will be opportunities for consultation with teachers throughout the review process.

Minister Ellery announced in January that development of curriculum Hindi, Korean and Tamil will begin in July and syllabuses will be developed for Pre-Primary to Year 12. The syllabuses for these languages will be available from 2023.

In 2021 every student in Year 3 to 6 at a Western Australian public school will learn a language.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) are producing a series of videos designed to help raise awareness around disability and how online tests have enabled students to participate and be included in regular school activities such as NAPLAN.

The Australian Government has introduced an initiative to gauge and support Year 1 students' phonics skills. Understanding phonics is foundational to the development of writing, reading and spelling skills.

A website called The Literacy Hub (www.literacyhub.edu.au) contains resources for parents and teachers including a Phonics Check for teachers, a Reading Awareness Check for families and tips and activities for families to participate in at home.

DISTANCE EDUCATION

Due to COVID-19, parents were encouraged to keep their children at home where possible from 30th March 2020 and access online learning. Minister Ellery announced the "Learning at Home" website

to provide lessons in line with the Australian Curriculum. There are a variety of resources aimed at each year level with documents showing how they tie in with the Curriculum. There is also a lot of support for parents and carers including tips on how to set up a learning environment and advice for parents to take care of themselves when teaching their children at home.

On 17th April 2020, a soft Term 2 opening for schools was announced. Public schools were to open on 29th April with Years 11 and 12 encouraged to attend. Distance Education packages and online resources were available for all other students to continue learning from home. These arrangements were to be in place until the end of week three.

On 14th May 2020, it was announced that all students except the medically vulnerable or those with a family member who has chronic health issues should return to school. Distance Education resources would continue to be available for those students unable to return.

On 1st December 2020, ICPA held the inaugural Geographically Isolated Distance Education Day. The aim was to recognise the vital role parents play in geographically isolated distance education and to raise awareness of the ongoing plight of families who must educate their children at home at all times.

COVID-19 has highlighted the challenges parents face in educating their children at home which is a situation many rural parents face on a regular basis. The aim was to put forward a positive message celebrating what families do but also calling for recognition.

EARLY CHILDHOOD REPORT

Jane Hughes – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

Wow what a ride 2020 was! Amongst the turmoil of a future unknown we saw many wonderful services going online to help support families especially support for Early Childhood Education.

There were no Early Childhood Education motions put forward at the March 2020 State Conference.

Throughout the past year, I attended two (2) meetings with the Strategic Advisory Group for Parenting Connection WA. Topics covered were regarding:

- COVID-19,
- Wanslea support groups for parents,
- Updates on Playgroup WA,
- Update on the new Parenting Connection website.

I received an email on 12th June advising that the Parenting Connection WA microsite is now live at: <https://parentingconnectionwa.com.au>

I have been contacted by Matheus Garde from Wanslea several times in the past year regarding their In-Home Care (IHC) service and how they can support remote families. It has been wonderful to work productively on ensuring that the best services are available for rural and remote families.

The Early Childhood sector saw a lot of changes during 2020 regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. IHC suffered greatly with many families not being able to pay their home carers as the government cut

funding; claiming that as parents were now having to work from home as part of the self-isolation, they would not need carers, which for many families this simply was not the case.

On 8th June 2020, the Hon. Dan Tehan MP announced that the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) would be returning to normal as of 13th July.

Please find below the announcement from Minister Tehan.

<https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/return-child-care-subsidy>

IN HOME CARE

A transition payment was provided to childcare services from 13th July until 27th September 2020 on top of the Child Care Subsidy, this amounts to 25% of the fees received in the reference fortnight in February. There were several conditions for the period of the transition, these can be read at the following link <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/tehan/return-child-care-subsidy>

The Government also eased the activity test until 4th October to support eligible families whose employment has been impacted as a result of COVID-19. These families received up to 100 hours per fortnight of subsidised care during this period.

The IHC guidelines have now corrected the terminology from 'Carer to Educator'; the term carer is now no longer in use.

The most recent In-Home Care National Guidelines can be found at the following link: (Updated August 2020)

<https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/home-care-national-guidelines>

I discovered while reading the updates that they have now listed SOTA arrangements as being on and off air where this was previously a 'grey' area.

DISTANCE EDUCATION AND HOME SCHOOLING

Commonwealth funding is provided to State and Territory Governments for the purposes of providing distance education, including School of the Air (on-air and off-air) arrangements. Families cannot receive childcare subsidies during the time a child is engaged in formal schooling, including for a tutor or governess to supervise the provision of distance education where the care (or part thereof) is for the purpose of the child to undertake a State or Territory education program.

This longstanding policy is stipulated in section 85BA (1) of the *A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999* and further clarified in Part 2, Section 8 of the *Child Care Subsidy Minister's Rules 2017*. Care provided while a child is completing homework does not constitute formal schooling.

It is wonderful to see the Education in Remote and Complex Environments Report handed down in November had two (2) of the key recommendations that directly addresses long term policy for ICPA.

A copy of these two (2) recommendations are below. ICPA (Australia) have followed this up with the Minister for Regional Education Mr Andrew Gee who has assured them he will continue to advocate for this change.

3.27 The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc. (ICPA Australia) noted that while all jurisdictions offer early learning programs delivered by distance education, families accessing the programs bear 'the entire cost associated with administering,

resourcing and teaching the lessons.’²⁹ ICPA Australia noted that no support is available for early learning programs through the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) distance education allowance, and that CCS payments are unavailable because these children are still in their parents’ care. As a result of this, ‘less than 200 children access recognised 4-year-old programs in their homes through distance education’.³⁰

3.39 ICPA Australia expressed concern that funding for mobile playgroups is provided on a temporary basis, and that there is no funding available for KICS to expand into surrounding areas. ICPA Australia called for ‘flexibility and surety of funding for these services’. ⁴²

ICPA Federal Council continues to work towards kindergarten students being eligible for AIC Distance Education Allowance and a National Working with Children Check.

POST COMPULSORY REPORT

Kym Burns – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

There was one motion raised for the Post Compulsory portfolio at the 2020 ICPA (WA) State Conference.

The motion raised by ICPA (WA) members asked *“that ICPA (WA) approach universities who offer the “Bachelor of Education” to investigate whether station placements could count towards their practical placements as part of their degree”*.

In response to this motion ICPA (WA) forwarded a letter to Professor Stephen Winn, Executive Dean of Education, Edith Cowan University. It expressed that ICPA (WA) could see some fantastic examples of how this could benefit not only the student completing the degree, but also many Western Australian families.

A very welcome change to Youth Allowance was announced by Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud. As of 1st November 2020, young people who are working on farms and earning \$15,000 or more will have faster access to Youth Allowance. They will be eligible for the independence certificate needed to qualify for Youth Allowance or Abstudy, rather than having to work for at least 14-18 months or part-time for two (2) years to be able to prove financial independence.

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a payment for those students moving away from home (more than 90 minutes) and commencing studies straight after Year 12 or equivalent. Certain rules must be met to be eligible to claim this allowance.

A number of allowances are available for students who are undertaking an apprenticeship or tertiary studies, these are subject to eligibility criteria. Further information is available to our members through the Centrelink website, <http://www.centrelink.gov.au>

RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS REPORT

Naomi Obst – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

COVID-19 has certainly provided many challenges for 2020 and continues to challenge us in 2021. Being isolated suddenly became an advantage, being able to work and study alone was a newfound skill for many in the urban areas. For those in the regions it was largely business as usual.

For those who had to adjust to online learning it was a totally foreign concept. So foreign that I actually received a letter from a gentleman in England who had found my address through the Midwest ICPA Branch. He requested information on how we managed to teach remotely, what was this “School of the Air”? How do you structure the day? How do you even teach your own kids in your own home? I was able to give him a brief outline and gave him the names of some educators far more experienced in this area than myself. COVID-19, it has been devastating and disruptive for many people. However, I think it has taught many around the world what we have always known and do so well.

It is time for ICPA to capture this movement and make sure that we can have the best education for all our rural students no matter their location when face-to-face teaching cannot occur. We have some very clever and inspiring teachers with an amazing array of technology to lead our children on their learning journey. I hope that we are able to build on the Strengths of SOTA and SIDE (was it mentioned by our political leaders what an amazing institution this is during school closures?) to develop programs for small schools to give them access to inspiring and subject specific teachers via an online platform. COVID-19 and the ensuing shutdowns/school closures has shown the rest of the world what ICPA members have always known and done so well.

DENTAL VANS

Central Wheatbelt North submitted a motion at the 2020 State Conference: *“That ICPA WA lobby the Minister for Education to ensure that services such as the mobile Dental Therapy Centre are not rationalised purely due to population.”*

Concerns from members have highlighted the lack of regular dental care for many children living in rural and remote areas. In the past the “Dental Van” has made an annual visit to all schools to attend to the basic dental requirements and education of dental hygiene.

This service still continues but for many families dental care involves a lengthy car trip to attend a Dental Therapy Van in a larger regional town. If any ongoing work is required then there are more trips to make and more school days are lost due to the distances needing to be travelled.

For some families, the cost of travel or inability to get time off work is having a direct impact on the children’s oral health. There are cases of children not seeing a dentist until they reach high school age in a larger regional school. Children with poor oral health in primary school will have their learning ability impacted.

ICPA State Council has written and met with the Minister for Education, Hon. Sue Ellery MLC throughout a difficult COVID-19 year, on this motion. We thank the Minister for her understanding and listening to our concerns. Minister Ellery followed up this concern with the Minister for Health, Hon. Roger Cook MLA.

The response received from the Minister for Health was that primary health care is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government. The State Government provides a safety net public dental service for eligible school students via the School Dental Service (SDS). This is operated by Dental Health Services and provides free general dental care to enrolled school children between the ages of five (5) and to the end of Year 11.

Mobile Dental Therapy Centres (DTC) are located across 160 sites throughout Western Australia. Eighty percent of students enrolled in the school dental service are located at feeder schools and are required to travel to a fixed or mobile site to receive dental care. It has been difficult to ascertain the exact number of students and distances required to travel for appointments for our rural students, however it is concerning that many of our students travel in excess of 200km to receive dental care.

Further communications with the Education and Health Ministers have elicited the following response: *“That...it is not an efficient use of resources for Dental Health Services to provide onsite services to every school in Western Australia. The mobile DTC provides care in schools which are strategically located and have the highest population of students.”*

The locations that a Dental Therapy Centre (DTC) visit is dependent on a number of factors including:

- Number of children to be treated at a location
- The proximity to a nearby Mobile DTC service
- The availability of a suitable location within the school to house the Mobile DTC
- The availability and cost of providing the required utilities to operate the Mobile DTC
- The cost of relocating the Mobile DTC
- The availability and cost of suitable accommodation and travel for SDS staff.

ICPA (WA) State Council and its members are committed to ensuring equity for all students no matter where they live. Poor oral health for some students in our rural and remote areas is impacting their learning and we are happy to continue to lobby on your behalf to re-instate the Dental Van service for all students.

PRINCIPAL PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS UPDATE

In 2019, the Esperance Branch raised the motion A8 *“For the Department to provide relevant professional development for all new Level 3 Principals”*. A follow-up conversation with the Minister for Education confirms that in 2020, forty-seven (47) new Principals have been appointed and twenty-four (24) of them have been appointed for the first time. This group of twenty-four (24) have attended the Newly Appointed Principal induction session and 88% of them have also completed the Principal Eligibility Modules. There are fifteen (15) newly appointed Principals in regional Western Australia that have completed the modules.

This is a very positive step that is providing new Principals in our small regional schools a *“tool bag”* of information that is enabling them to confidently lead our schools from day one.

We hope that the Department will continue to support this initiative so that our small rural and remote schools can begin to see some stability and length of tenure in their appointments.

CAMP SCHOOLS

There were concerns in 2019 with the condition and operating procedures at the Fairbridge Camp Schools. Feedback from schools using these facilities in 2020 was good, although limited camps were operating due to COVID-19 restrictions. We will continue to watch this space in 2021 and urge any members with concerns to contact an ICPA State Councillor.

Thank you to Education Department staff and the many teachers and boarding school support staff that our children are so reliant on for an education. 2020 was a difficult year in education but our members and State Council acknowledge your efforts to ensure our children continued to receive an education.

A special thank you to Richard Stokes and Tom Dunsmore for their never-ending support within their organisation of Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and their recognition of the difficulties many families faced in returning boarders to face-to-face learning.

SPECIAL AND SPECIFIC NEEDS REPORT

Kym Burns – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

There were no Special Education motions raised at the 2020 ICPA (WA) State Conference. However as always, the area of Special Education remains of great importance to ICPA (WA) and its members.

As education is a vital part of every child's life families with children who have special and or specific educational needs want reassurance that their children are guaranteed the correct support and services available to their unique learning needs.

The Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM) introduced in 2015 is the funding mechanism allocated to public schools for each student enrolled and additional funding for students needing extra support. The objective of the funding model is:

- allocate resources based on the learning needs of students
- ensure funding is responsive to the needs of individual schools and their students
- increase flexibility for principals in relation to financial and workforce management decisions
- provide a simple and transparent funding mechanism

Further information can be obtained at SCFM@education.wa.edu.au

ICPA both at a State and Federal level continue to lobby for the needs of all students across Australia. ICPA members have highlighted many issues impacting students with special/specific learning needs. A brief summary of these are:

- Provision of a Medicare rebate for Telehealth Services
- Provision of travel and accommodation assistance for travel to face-to-face services
- Improved staff training for teachers in rural and remote locations
- Workshops for rural and remote parents of gifted and talented students
- Early identification and intervention for learning difficulties
- Provision of additional resources in boarding schools for students with disability

Recommendations on the above summaries can be found at:

<https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachement/217specific-education-needs-briefing-paper-december-2020>

An area of interest to members, especially those with family members who may have special educational needs is, the School of Special Educational Needs: Medical and Mental Health. (SSEN: MMH).

This learning facility provides educational support for those students whose medical or mental health prevents them from successfully participating in their enrolled school programs. They are 1 of 4 schools of Special Educational Needs federated Schools. The others being Behaviour and Engagement, Disability and Sensory.

Support is available to both public and private school students. Referrals are received through the Department of Health, with parent consent. They deliver over 60 teaching and liaison programs in more than 40 "Department of Health" settings statewide.

GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS

Children with exceptional abilities from country Western Australia who wish to participate in a Gifted and Talented Academic, Arts or Languages Secondary Selective Programs have access to a range of options:

- participate in the Selective Academic Program Online
- attend Bunbury Senior High School or Albany Senior High School (from 2022), our regional schools
- study in Perth and board at City Beach Residential College
- study in Albany and board at Albany Residential College (from 2022, students must live outside Albany).

Students in regional Western Australia are not required to travel to Perth for testing. They will be allocated a testing venue within their education region based on the location of their current school.

Country testing is coordinated by Regional Assessment Coordinators who organise venues based on the location of students in their region. For more information contact the Gifted and Talented Selection Unit by phone on (08) 9264 4307 or email gtsu@education.wa.edu.au.

Selective Academic Program Online:

If you live in country Western Australia, your child can apply for the Selective Academic Program Online. Using computer links and innovative technology, your child can access the program without moving to Perth.

Each online program is managed by a coordinator from one of the following schools. Who conducts:

- mathematics and science from Perth Modern School
- humanities (English, society and environment) from Kelmscott Senior High School.

If your child will attend a public secondary school in a regional area, they will be able to access the online program.

Selection into these programs is based on the results of the Academic Selective Entrance Test.

For more information about the Selective Academic Program Online, visit the program's [website](#), email PerthModern.GTOOnline@education.wa.edu.au or phone (08) 9392 6818.

Residential College:

Country students offered a Gifted and Talented Secondary Selective Program placement are able to apply to board at [City Beach Residential College](#), [Rotary Residential College](#) or [Albany Residential College](#).

The Gifted and Talented Boarding Allowance is available to those children boarding at City Beach Residential College who do not qualify for:

- the Australian Government Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme
- a State Government Boarding Away from Home (BAHA) allowance.

In 2020, the Gifted and Talented Boarding Allowance was valued at up to \$1 634 a year.

To find out more, phone:

City Beach Residential College on (08) 9285 2672, email citybeach.rescol@education.wa.edu.au or visit their [website](#).

Rotary Residential College on (08) 9470 4177, email admin@rotaryresidentialcollege.com.au

Albany Residential College on (08) 9842 1007, email albany.rescol@education.wa.edu.au or visit their [website](#).

PRIMARY EXTENSION AND CHALLENGE (PEAC) PROGRAMS

The Primary Extension and Challenge (PEAC) program is a part-time withdrawal program for upper primary school Year 5 and 6 students in public schools.

Identified students are selected to participate in differentiated programs offered in a range of delivery modes.

Delivery modes include:

- regional based PEAC centres providing a series of specialist courses or programs
- co-ordinator/s who establish courses in a range of schools and/or other sites and teachers are released to teach the courses
- allocation to schools and multi-age programs operate within schools
- online delivery of programs.

Blanket testing of all public school Year 4 students occurs each year with individual schools testing their own students. Parents who do not wish for their children to be tested can opt out by contacting their school in writing.

PEAC programs are managed at a regional level. Contact your local Education Regional Office to find out more.

STUDENT ACCOMMODATION REPORT

Chandra Ridley – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

It was a difficult year for Student Accommodation with the COVID-19 outbreak.

From mid-March 2020 boarding facilities began introducing measures such as social distancing, staggered mealtimes, reduced recreation activities and increased cleaning regimes to help combat COVID-19. By 27th March 2020 boarding facilities were closed.

Students in Years 11 and 12 were required to start attending school again from 29th April. There were no boarding facilities open at this time, with some schools recommending students stay with Perth based family or guardians.

A media statement issued by the Minister of Education and Training on 1st May 2020 announced that all residential boarding facilities would reopen from 5th May 2020. All Year 12 students would be able to return back to public boarding facilities.

Years 10, 11 and 12 could return to Albany, Broome, Esperance, Moora and Narrogin Residential Colleges. All years could return to City Beach, Geraldton, Merredin and Northam Residential Colleges.

Year 12 students were permitted to return to Cunderdin College of Agriculture. Only Years 11 and 12 were able to return to Denmark, Harvey and Narrogin Agricultural Colleges, with all years permitted to return to boarding at Morawa Agricultural College.

Catholic and Independent schools made their own decisions in line with Government guidelines.

An additional \$343,000 was to be spent on cleaners, cleaning staff and cleaning supplies.

Parents had the choice as to whether they sent their children back to boarding. Those students needing to cross residential boundaries could do so via Educational Exemption.

Quite a few restrictions were imposed including:

- No visits home during term time.
- No visitors to boarding, including parents.
- Modified recreational outings.
- Staggered mealtimes.
- Possible temperature monitoring.
- Contact tracing upon returning from leave.
- Flu vaccination recommended before returning to boarding.
- Public transport discouraged.
- Social distancing in boarding houses, boarders spread throughout facility.

Also announced on 1st May 2020 by the Minister was that eighty (80) Public Schools, Education Support Centres and Residential Colleges were taking part in the DETECT Program to test for COVID-19 in schools and the psychosocial impacts of the virus. The tests targeted groups that do not have any symptoms. The testing took place for three to six months and included Albany Residential College, Geraldton Residential College, Western Australian College of Agriculture Harvey and Narrogin. There were three aspects: surveillance study where staff and students are tested over

three months, contact tracing of positive test results and psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 among students, parents, and teachers.

From 18th May 2020 all students in residential facilities were allowed to return home on weekends at the discretion of the Principal or Residential Manager. Restrictions on parents, care givers and non-essential visitors from entering school grounds remained in place.

On 8th June 2020, a media release stated restrictions had been lifted for public schools allowing the resumption of several activities including school camps, sports training, assemblies and excursions with a limit of 100 people for indoor events and 300 for outdoor events. School camps were limited to 100 attendees. It was stated that the AHPPC (Australian Health Protection Principal Committee) were reviewing advice regarding risk management for boarding schools.

On 17th June 2020, the AHPPC released an updated statement on reducing the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission in boarding facilities.

Risk assessments should include but not be limited to a consideration of:

- Accommodation and sleeping arrangements.
- Mealtimes and processes.
- Control of entry and exit to sites.
- Process for and records relating to visitors.
- Off campus visits.
- Cleaning regimes.
- Vulnerable students.
- Vulnerable teachers and other staff.
- Laundry areas and other ancillary areas.
- Mental health of students.

Minister Ellery released a media statement on 18th June 2020 stating that dormitory capacity restrictions had been lifted for public school boarding facilities. Home visits could resume and parents were able to visit the facilities.

School camps were able to fill their dormitories but the 100-person limit for camps remained.

From 27th June 2020 the limit of 100 students at school camps no longer applied, in line with the introduction of Phase 4 of the WA COVID-19 Roadmap.

Some boarding facilities continued to limit access to boarding houses and students needed to complete contact tracing upon returning to boarding after outings.

On 18th August 2020, the McGowan Government announced a \$4 million allocation to establish a Martu Residential Facility in Newman. The project includes converting three BHP owned houses into separate accommodation for male and female students. Construction is expected to begin in early October 2020 and be ready to house up to twelve students in 2021. This will enable Martu children wishing to further their education to do so close to family and country.

The Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) Chief Executive Officer, Richard Stokes, released a media statement on 18th August 2020 regarding students who board interstate. Students who attended school outside of their home state were unable to travel home for the holidays, or to see their parents if they wish to return to school without quarantining for two weeks. He was asking for

consideration of these students needs as a matter of urgency so they could travel home for the holidays. This affects 19 students in Western Australia.

On 31st August 2020, the Minister for Decentralization and Regional Education, Andrew Gee, asked State and Territory Governments to map out a COVID safe pathway to allow interstate boarding students to travel home for the school holidays then return to school. Many students were forced to self-isolate in a hotel or commercial accommodation at their own expense before returning to school.

Many students were returning to homes in remote locations that were COVID-19 free. They should be able to isolate in their own homes before returning to school without posing a risk to the community. Minister Gee was trying to develop a compassionate pathway forward that looked after the health and wellbeing of the community, boarding students and their families.

On 18th September 2020, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) released a statement stating it supported the safe return of boarding students to their homes during the school holidays and recognized the challenges COVID-19 was presenting. Several States implemented appropriate risk-based approaches and class exemptions to support the safe return of students and staff. As the issues were more complex for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boarding students, these needed to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

On 31st January 2021, a weeklong COVID-19 lockdown was announced by WA Premier Mark McGowan. This coincided with the return to school. Boarding facilities were closed. When they reopened a week later Phase 4 restrictions were put in place. Although masks had to be worn to school, boarding facilities were classed as homes and students were not required to wear masks.

Phase 4 COVID-19 restrictions are still in place in boarding schools.

Some Catholic boarding schools require all visitors to boarding to have the Safe WA app. This includes parents, family members and Perth based guardians.

TEACHER TRAINING REPORT

Naomi Obst – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

No motions were presented to this portfolio in 2020.

TEACHER TRAINING UPDATE

In 2020, all teacher training institutes across Australia are required to undertake a Quality Teacher Performance Assessment (QTPA). This is one of three quality assessment models approved for use by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership. It is aimed at ensuring all pre-service teachers entering the profession are required to meet the highest of standards.

Edith Cowan University assessed and interviewed 607 students in July 2020. Professor Stephen Winn, Executive Dean, School of Education, ECU said the QTPA is in addition to the existing academic assessments and professional experience requirements and was a massive undertaking for staff and students. The Teacher Professional Assessment will continue to demonstrate how ECU'S pre-service

teacher graduates will maintain public confidence that teachers are classroom ready upon graduation.

It is a requirement for any student enrolled in a nationally accredited initial teacher education course to sit the literacy and numeracy test. They must meet or exceed the national benchmark to graduate as specified by the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER). These tests are set, monitored and assessed by ACER.

Primary School Teaching Direct Entry Requirements (Year 13)

Edith Cowan University	Direct entry ATAR	70	4 years duration
Curtin University	Direct Entry ATAR	70	4 years duration
Murdoch University	Direct Entry ATAR	70	4 Years duration
Notre Dame University	Direct Entry ATAR	80	4 Years Duration

All the above Western Australian Universities have alternative modes of entry for students who meet these criteria.

TRAVEL REPORT

Sally Brindal – Portfolio Holder, March 2021

STUDENT TRAVEL SUBSIDY SCHEME

At the 2020 ICPA (WA) State Conference a number of travel motions were presented relating to various aspects of the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme.

Motions A10, A11 and A14 sought to have ICPA (WA) lobby the Department of Transport – On-demand Transport and the Minister for Transport to review the transport hub policy criteria for the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS) – Road Travel Subsidy. These motions were presented as a result of members having applications for the STSS – Road Travel Subsidy for the 2019 school year rejected.

Although there had been no change to the eligibility guidelines, ICPA (WA) highlighted the inequities that were occurring due to On-demand Transport applying the proximity to a transport hub on a strict basis, irrespective of whether the service goes to the nearest public school, how frequent the service operates, or whether the transport goes in the totally opposite direction. ICPA (WA) provided examples from members where claims had been rejected and requested a review into the transport hub policy criteria to more appropriately fit rural travel situations.

One of the objectives of the Student Travel Subsidy Scheme Policy is *‘to alleviate the difficulties associated with access to secondary/tertiary education related transport in regional and remote Western Australia.’*

The following questions were asked of Minister Saffioti:

- How can it be equitable that to be eligible for the Road Travel Subsidy (RTS) there is absolutely no correlation between the closest appropriate government school with boarding facilities and transport to get to that school?

- What is the purpose of the Road Travel Subsidy (RTS) if the eligibility criteria are based on the proximity of government services, such as public transport, if the transport service does not go to the nearest school to where a family lives? The nearest appropriate government school to a family home is the benchmark by which many allowances are based and yet according to the Department of Transport it is not a consideration for the RTS.
- What is the purpose of the RTS if it is not assisting children who live more than 56km from their nearest appropriate government school, with no public transport, to access that school?
- How can it be considered equitable in using the proximity to a transport service as a means of rejecting an application if that transport service goes in the completely opposite direction?

Responses from Ms Veronica Jeffreys, Chief of Staff to Minister Saffioti clearly highlighted that proximity to a transport hub is the determining factor so, utilising mail chimp, a survey was sent to members requesting further information from families who had their 2019 RTS claim rejected. Such information included the details of school location, transport hub location and whether they attend the nearest government school.

The results of the survey highlighted that the greatest number of affected families are those within the Lakes and Eastern District Branches, especially those within the Narrogin High School catchment. The plight of these families, and the inequities of the current system, were also raised with Mr Peter Rundle MLA, The Nationals, and Donna Faragher, Shadow Minister for Education, who raised the issue in the last sitting of Parliament. This is a matter that State Council will continue to pursue.

Motion A13 was seeking additional discounted fares for students who are required to travel home by air, bus or train at times additional to those already provided for in the STSS Fares Allowance scheme.

The subsidised fare is designed to assist families with the cost of to and from the student's educational institution and travel dates should reflect term/semester dates.

Correspondence received from Ms Jeffrey felt the STSS is sufficiently flexible to enable eligible students to use their entitlements at any time during the school year including travelling home for mid-term breaks, long weekends or other circumstances.

Ms Jeffreys confirmed that the entitlements can be used at any time throughout the school year. The 'within two weeks' requirement only relates to the start and end of the academic year. Although this provided some clarity with regards to the application of the scheme, we have been unsuccessful, so far, in our request for additional discounted fares.

Motion S1 requested ICPA (WA) lobby the Department of Transport to accept and process requests for refunds for airfares up until 31st December.

The current STSS allows for subsidised fares to be accessed using a travel voucher or by requesting a refund. If a family chooses to book and pay for air, bus or train travel rather than applying for a travel voucher, they may apply for a reimbursement, however, completed refund applications for airfares must be submitted no later than one month after the last date of travel on the e-Ticket or tax invoice. The STSS Road Travel Subsidy allows families to remit refund applications for subsidised air, bus or train travel up until the end of the calendar year.

When managing the logistics of secondary students boarding away from home from remote areas, circumstances often change during the year altering the plans of transporting students to and from boarding school. The flexibility of allowing airfare refunds until 31st December ensures families are receiving the entitlements the scheme has been designed for.

Ms Jeffrey's response was that the option to request a travel voucher from the Department of Transport (DoT) and incur no out of pocket expenses is available to all families. Additionally, processing refund applications within a specified timeframe allows DoT to meet its financial governance obligations and allows for processing of refunds within a single financial year. It also ensures families receive their refunds as quickly as possible and are not out of pocket for extended periods

Motion S2 was seeking increased flexibility in relation to where a student flies to and from due to special circumstances such as weather events adverse family logistics when attending camp schools etc.

Currently, when applying for a refund or voucher through STSS, a student is only eligible to submit a request for flights via the most direct route by air/bus/train between the principal family home or usual place of residence and Perth.

ICPA (WA) explained that there are two circumstances that may affect the location a student flies to:

1. Weather events such as flooding and fires may cause road closures between a family home and their nearest airport; however, roads between the family home and an alternative airport may be open, allowing the opportunity for students to fly to the alternative airport.
2. Families in remote areas can travel large distances to access needs and services for a variety of reasons, such as student pick-ups from school camps for younger siblings who attend Distance Education schools, such as School of the Air, and/or medical services.

ICPA (WA) provided an example of how things might occur and requested they investigate this matter and support rural and remote families by offering an element of flexibility to receive a fairer distribution of the benefits of the scheme. A student should be eligible to request a voucher or claim the amount of a fare to their usual place of residence regardless of the location they are flying to.

Ms Jeffrey explained that the primary objective of the STSS is to reduce the amount of time that children are outside parental supervision when travelling between home and educational institutions. DoT is committed to assisting students, in particular, minors travelling alone, to be transported as safely as possible between their home and school. It is therefore a requirement that students travel directly to home or to school rather than to other locations. Any person aware of the practicalities of living in the Defined Remote Area (DRA) of WA would understand this is not always possible.

Motion F1 sought a review of the eligibility criteria for families in receipt of the AIC Second Home Allowance in relation to accepting the principal place of residence as the address of the claimant rather than the second home address. This would enable those families in the Defined Remote Area of Australia to utilise the STSS Fares Allowance.

A conflict exists between the place of residence eligibility for the AIC Second home Allowance and STSS fares allowance.

Paula Tomkins A/General Manager, On-demand Transport explained the following:

“Federally funded payments and allowances do not direct how this State-based STSS is administered, however there are a number of payments and allowances provided by the Federal Government that may affect eligibility for the STSS.

A primary objective of the STSS is to limit the amount of time a child spends away from parental supervision (e.g. boarding away from home for extended periods)..... Families who are able to benefit from the Federally funded AIC Second Home Allowance and can therefore spend the entire school year together, are spared the expense of boarding fees that other families living in remote areas on a fulltime basis incur.”

CONVEYANCING ALLOWANCE

Motion A12 was raised at State Conference requesting an increase in payment per kilometre for the Public Transport Authority (PTA) Conveyance Allowance.

A conveyancing allowance is paid to a parent/carer to assist in costs of driving their child to and from school or a pickup location. It is a contribution towards the cost of fuel, tyres, repairs and maintenance of a private vehicle, and the amount payable is indexed annually.

ICPA (WA) wrote to John Bailly, School Bus Services outlining that in previous years, the payment per kilometre travelled contributed considerably towards the costs associated with transporting children to school when there is no access to school bus services. However, in the past two years, the cost of fuel and parts to remote areas has meant that this allowance now only contributes a token amount towards the cost families incur in transporting their children to school. An increase to the payment per kilometre would help support rural and remote families accessing an equitable education.

In response Mr John Bailly explained that the PTA were operating under tight budgetary restraints from Treasury. There had been increased costs caused by the pandemic such as additional school bus cleaning. The Transport CPI figure applied every June had decreased by 8.1% although there would be no reduction to the current conveyancing allowance rate of 21.51c. Mr Bailly did suggest we re-raise the issue when things are more normalised

COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly progressed, shortly after our State Conference, State Council was contacted by members concerned about their STSS Fares Allowance travel bookings. In accordance with the guidelines many families had already utilised the travel voucher system to secure travel arrangements (predominately air) for the end of Term 1 on 9th April 2020. If the Department of Education directed the closure of schools, prior to the end of term, these families would need to make alternative travel arrangements. At least one member had contacted the Department of Transport with regards to the possibility of transferring that voucher to cover the cost of return travel in the event of early school closure. The Department of Transport advised that the travel voucher can only be used on that specific day (9th April). The cost of an alternative day of travel to be borne by the individual. Fortunately, after correspondence from ICPA (WA), On-demand Transport notified ICPA (WA) that, families would be able change their existing flights if students need to return home due to their educational institution or boarding facilities closing and the Department of Transport would cover the cost of changing flights.

With the introduction of regional borders and additional bio-security restrictions in the Kimberley, students from the Kimberley, attending an educational facility in Perth, were initially required to self-isolate for 14 days prior to returning home for the holidays. As a direct result of communications from ICPA (WA) an exemption from the 14 days self-isolation was granted, with applications to be made via the G2G PASS.

Since March 2020, the Department of Transport had been working with Student Travel Subsidy Scheme (STSS) participants to support families' travel requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As educational institution and domestic travel schedules returned to normal, the additional supports that had been in place ceased from 1 January 2021. Standard conditions of travel and reimbursement resumed for all travel that is booked on or after 1 January 2021.

All other terms and conditions are also reinstated.

Please familiarise yourself with the requirements of the STSS, which can be found on the Department's [website](#). If you require any further information, please phone 1300 660 147.

RURAL & REMOTE EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (RREAC) REPORT

Naomi Obst – Appointee, March 2021

There were no face-to-face meetings in 2020 due to COVID-19.

There were two zoom meetings, one in July, one in November.

There was no input from RREAC to the Minister for Education's office during 2020 in relation to the pandemic. This is extremely disappointing given the impact that school and boarding school shutdowns had on all families in Rural and Remote regions that this council represents.

Communication with RREAC could have prevented the angst that parents were facing when returning children to school with signed access documents, and the continuing confusion on non-uniformed restrictions in Boarding Schools.

10th December 2020 a letter from the Hon. Sue Ellery MLC advised that cabinet had approved my appointment to the RREAC board as a representative for ICPA (WA). The term of appointment is for two years from this date after which appointments may be renewed by cabinet, subject to a maximum tenure of 10 years.