



## **PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL**

### **ALLOWANCES REPORT**

#### **Chandra Ridley – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

At the 2023 State Conference, allowance motions A1, A2 and A3 were raised regarding increases to the Boarding Away from Home Allowance (BAHA).

A letter was sent to the Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti and Premier Hon. Roger Cook. The Minister responded on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2023, stating that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate used to increase the BAHA each year will be aligned to the rate used to index the annual boarding fees at the Department's Residential Colleges and Western Australian Colleges of Agriculture. The 2024 BAHA will increase by \$39 to \$1,389 per annum.

In April 2023, the McGowan Government announced a \$5.4 million investment in the 2023-24 State Budget including practical measures to support students in regional Western Australia.

Minister for Training and Workforce Hon. Simone McGurk and Minister for Health Hon. Amber-Jade Sanderson unveiled a new package providing weekly work placement and travel allowance for regional nursing students. The \$2.9 million investment commences in January 2024 and will provide eligible Diploma of Nursing students with financial support to undertake up to 400 hours of practical placement required as part of their training. The allowance will be \$350 per week with a travel allowance of \$1,000 per training block for the Pilbara and Kimberley and \$500 per block for other regions except Peel, which will be an allowance of \$350 per week.

Also, the travel and accommodation allowance for WA apprentices, trainees, cadets and interns who are required to travel long distances off-the-job for their training will increase. The per-kilometre rate will double from 20 cents to 40 cents. The accommodation allowance rate will also be boosted by up to 43 per cent.

The \$2.5 million initiative will address the increased gap in out-of-pocket expenses for regional students for a two-year period from July 2023.

Assistance for Isolated Children Distance Education Allowance has increased from \$4,698 in 2023 to \$4,980, the Boarding Allowance has also increased from \$9,396 in 2023 to \$9,960 in 2024. As mentioned previously, BAHA has increased by \$39 in line with CPI to \$1,389 per annum. ICPA is still actively lobbying for a substantial increase in the BAHA.

#### **BOARDING**

**Table of BAHA Rates 2013 – 2024:**

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

**Table of Applications 2014 – 2023:**

School Year	Total Applications
2014	1247
2015	1397
2016	1503
2017	1453
2018	1244
2019	1375
2020	1338
2021	1279



2022	\$1,320
2023	\$1,350
2024	\$1,389

2022	1190
2023	1046*

\*Applications still being accepted and paid

## **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

### **Sally Brindal – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

Telecommunication technology is developing at an exponential rate. While this has resulted in a number of enhancements and improvements for rural and remote communications, the portfolio remains a focus for State Council to guarantee communications services are maintained and continue to be enhanced to ensure our rural and remote students and their families are always provided with adequate communications services commensurate to their needs.

#### **TELSTRA**

##### **3G CLOSURE**

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024, Telstra are switching off their 3G network; their 4G and 5G networks will be available instead and offer an improved experience. The impact the phasing out of the 3G network will have on rural and remote locations remains a concern for members. Although the 4G and 5G networks have far greater download speeds members question the range of these services and whether it will leave many areas without a phone service.

The following information was provided by Telstra:

- The major determining factor in how far coverage can extend is the spectrum frequency that is used. Lower frequencies reach further and penetrate better into buildings than mid/high frequencies. 4G uses a lower frequency (700MHz) than does 3G (850MHz) which means it can certainly match 3G coverage on a site-by-site basis. There are then maximum limits set by the technology but over the years 4G has been in service, Telstra has raised this maximum in stages with the latest 200km max limit established in 2020 which is sufficient to fully match 3G coverage reach.
- The perception that 4G does not reach as far as 3G is due to several factors that are either misunderstood or will be resolved prior to 3G closure.
- Signal bars on phones are a common source of confusion. 4G operates at lower signal levels e.g. it is more sensitive than 3G. Comparing signal bars between technologies is therefore a misleading indicator of relative coverage with 4G typically showing fewer bars for often better levels of connectivity. Further, there are no standards between device manufacturers for signal bar representation and this only adds to the confusion.
  - Comparisons of coverage and equivalence between 3G and 4G do rely on using like-for-like devices in a like-for-like manner – for example, if you are using a blue tick 3G device you need to use a 4G blue tick device to get equivalent coverage.
- There remain artificial constraints placed on 4G reach to prevent it from extending beyond the edge of 3G coverage. This has been to avoid situations where older non-VoLTE 4G phones (4G phones that only use 3G for voice) can 'see' a signal (4G) but be unable to make a voice call. This constraint has been gradually reduced as VoLTE (voice on 4G) device penetration grows and prior to 3G closure will be removed entirely.
- While the vast majority of mobile sites are now enabled with 4G there remain a few hundred that are still 3G only (from a total of 11,000+ sites). Around the fringes of site coverage, and where coverage overlaps between sites, having a mix of 4G and 3G-only sites can be easily misinterpreted as 4G having



lesser coverage when that will not be the case once all sites are upgraded with 4G – and this will occur prior to 3G closure.

- Telstra are also using re-purposed 3G spectrum (850 MHz) to support their 5G rollout so they can expand their 5G coverage in regional Australia earlier and more extensively than would otherwise be possible.
- 4G and 5G networks are more efficient than 3G – they can connect more devices, provide higher speeds and have lower latency. They also use the same towers and spectrum frequencies as 3G.
- Telstra's entire 3G network will remain open until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

Telstra are conducting detailed checks to make sure their 4G coverage (as they upgrade sites) is equivalent to 3G coverage.

Once Telstra has closed the 3G network they will repurpose the spectrum so that they can use it to expand their 5G network. While it is not quite as simple as flicking a switch, the closure will commence from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024 and is likely to happen relatively quickly. Telstra will confirm its closure schedule closer to the closure date, but there will be no loss of 3G coverage prior to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

### **What does closure of the 3G network mean for me?**

If you have a device that is only able to connect to 3G, that device will no longer be able to connect after the closure date. You will need to upgrade your device before 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. This includes customers using 3G mobile, IoT and network extension devices, some EFTPOS machines and antennas that operate on the 3G network only. These customers will be able to continue using their device or antenna until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024, but after this date, if the device has not been updated to be 4G or 5G compatible, it will no longer work.

Telstra is committed to upgrading areas that only have 3G coverage to ensure these areas have the same or better 4G coverage available by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Telstra is committed to providing you with 4G coverage prior to the closure of the 3G network. Your network experience should improve and in most cases, you should notice a substantial improvement in speeds when you move from 3G only coverage to 4G coverage. The 4G service accesses greater bandwidths and is more efficient than 3G, leading to higher end user speeds.

The speed you experience is determined by a range of factors including how close you are to a tower, how much traffic the site is carrying, if any obstructions are impeding the network (i.e., buildings, hills, vegetation etc.) and what sort of device you are using.

Demand for mobile data is growing by around 30 per cent each year.

### **3G and the Mobile Black Spot Program**

All mobile base stations built under the first four rounds of the Federal Government's Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) have 3G and 4G coverage. The 4G network will continue to operate in these areas, even after Telstra have closed the 3G network. Telstra stopped including 3G in their MBSP proposals from Round 5 onwards given their 2019 announcement to exit this technology.

### **Next G Wireless Link**

Several thousand active Next G Wireless Link Service (NGWL) services use 3G technology and they will be migrated to a 4G solution before June 2024. Telstra expects most of these customers will migrate to a 4G fixed wireless solution using the third generation of their Smart Modem (with an antennae port for connections to an external aerial). Existing NGWL customers who already have an external antenna will most likely be able to use it with their new 4G FW solution.

Vodafone closed their 3G network on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and Optus have announced they will be closing their 3G network in September 2024. For more details check in with the relevant carrier.



## **CONNECTED COMMUNITIES GRANT**

In partnership with the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR), Telstra's Connected Communities grant program supports organisations providing access to technology, education and facilities that connect rural and regional communities around Australia.

The Connected Communities grant program makes funding available so new or existing not-for-profit programs that help Australians in rural and regional areas get better connected, either through access to equipment, education and workshops or via social networks.

Telstra will make available \$600,000 over three years (the program commenced in 2023) with grants of up to \$10,000 each for community groups that can help build resilient, sustainable and liveable communities. The aim is to help communities connect in whatever way they want, so this is not just about Wi-Fi or stronger phone signals, it may be having someone available to listen and lend a hand when it is needed most.

The program supports local sustainability events and activities, programs that help agricultural groups adapt to changing climate and community e-waste recycling initiatives. It also helps with cyber safety and online awareness, especially vulnerable groups like seniors, students, First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Telstra understands this education is best delivered through the community.

Telstra awards the grants while the program and funds are administered by FRRR. FRRR is a not-for-profit organisation that connects common purposes and funding from government, business and philanthropy with the genuine local needs of rural people and places.

Applications for the 2023 Telstra Connected Communities grant round closed on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023 with strong interest received across Australia. The next Connected Communities grant round will open on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

## **HOW TO GET FREE WI-FI WHEN OUT AND ABOUT**

Since August 2022 about 3,000 of Telstra's Wi-Fi enabled payphones have free Wi-Fi available to anyone and the rest of their 12,000 payphones will offer the same in the next few years.

To connect, find your closest Telstra Wi-Fi enabled payphone or look for the 'free Telstra Wi-Fi' branded payphones. Select 'free Telstra Wi-Fi' in your Wi-Fi settings. Telstra's Wi-Fi portal will launch automatically, agree to the terms and conditions and you will be online.

## **KEEPING CUSTOMERS IN THE LOOP DURING OUTAGES**

Telstra are rolling out new capabilities to keep customers in the loop when they know their services are disrupted.

Telstra customers will now automatically get a heads-up via SMS and/or email to know they are working to fix it. They will then alert them when everything is back online, or if the fix is taking a while, they will get further messages keeping them updated. Telstra can also provide advice on how they can stay connected in the meantime, such as using Wi-Fi calling. After a successful pilot in regional South Australia, Telstra has extended this capability right across regional Australia.

Telstra have also recently refreshed the capability on their Telstra Outages page which will allow you to find out more information on both fixed and mobile outages, estimated fix times as well as planned outages and upcoming planned maintenance using new location mapping tools.

## **STARLINK**

Telstra is working with Starlink to connect more people in remote Australia.



To help provide additional solutions for regional customers, Telstra is now working with Starlink to provide voice and fixed broadband services in remote and hard to reach places using Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite connectivity.

This world-first offering means Telstra will be able to provide home phone service and Starlink broadband services to regional Australians as a bundle offer, as well as local tech support and the option of professional installation.

The Starlink agreement will also offer connectivity options for business customers, with a higher bandwidth business option available in areas without fixed and mobile connectivity from January 2024.

### UNIVERSAL SERVICE OBLIGATION

The Federal Government recently announced it would consult with regional Australia on how the Universal Service Obligation (USO) can be modernised. Telstra has long advocated that the current arrangements for the USO should be reformed, and specifically making the Universal Service Guarantee (USG) technology-agnostic. They would like to see a focus on delivering the services to our regional and remote customers using new and modern technologies, rather than a continued reliance on technologies approaching the end of life, such as a copper line.

Telstra is focused on getting the connectivity mix right in the regions. For many people in remote areas this will mean having access to services that utilise satellite coverage – something Telstra is currently working hard alongside Starlink to deliver for customers. It will also mean being able to use affordable new products such as Wi-Fi extenders available through Telstra technology partners like Zetifi.

### TELSTRA'S NEW DISASTER RESPONSE PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Telstra began a new disaster response public awareness campaign in November 2023, which included a range of new initiatives to support Australians.

Along with the temporary infrastructure, generators and disaster recovery experts Telstra regularly deploys, the new campaign highlights the following new initiatives:

- Extra data is automatically granted for postpaid mobile customers in a disaster-affected area.
- The upgrade of 1,000 payphones in disaster-prone areas, with free Wi-Fi, USB charging and backup power.
- Reaffirming their commitment to temporary emergency roaming and their intent to conduct a simulation to test its feasibility.
- Launch of the Telstra Response Team – a new way to identify our teams on the ground or at the end of our dedicated disaster assistance line.
- Trialling portable satellite technology that can help local communities connect when mobile and fixed connections are down in a disaster area.

#### Giving You More Data Automatically in a Crisis

This year, customers on Telstra monthly mobile plans will automatically receive 100GB of extra data on their service if they are in an affected area. As long as your mobile service is registered to an area where disaster assistance is available, you will receive a text message informing you that you will be set up with the extra data for use in Australia within 30 days. Previously, you would have to phone Telstra to get the extra data activated on your account. Now, they are adding it to your account automatically.

#### Upgrading 1000 Payphones in Disaster-Prone Areas

A few years ago, [Telstra made their payphones free for anyone who needed them](#). Then they went a step further and switched on free Wi-Fi at some payphones. Now, Telstra is working to upgrade 1000 payphones



in disaster-prone areas around Australia to help keep you connected during a disaster. This includes upgrades for 70 remote Indigenous communities. The upgrades provide technology like USB charging for your devices and free Wi-Fi connectivity (to those that do not already have it) so customers can get online, as well as backup power. Telstra has already started these upgrades and is working toward having all 1000 payphones upgraded by mid-2025.

### **Telstra Response Team**

The Telstra Response Team is a dedicated crew of technicians across Australia who will be deployed during a disaster to repair critical equipment (such as telephone exchanges, mobile towers, cables, etc) and restore connectivity to communities affected by disasters. The team is also made up of specialised disaster assistance agents who can help with payment support, advice on how to manage your services if you have had to leave home or resolve faults caused by the disaster.

### **Testing Emergency Roaming**

In an Australian first, Telstra will test the ability for people to use any available mobile network during natural disasters if their own provider's network has been impacted or does not have coverage.

With the number and severity of natural disasters increasing, industry and government have been discussing the technical and commercial hurdles that will need to be overcome before emergency roaming can be introduced. To help guide that conversation Telstra is conducting a simulation within their own network as a first step to demonstrate it is possible.

Telstra will continue to engage with other network providers and Government on emergency roaming, including how it will operate and be funded, as well as the timing for roll-out.

### **TELSTRA SWITCHES ON FREE CALLS TO SANTA**

This Christmas saw the return of Telstra's Free Calls to Santa hotline from any of their 14,500 payphones around the country for Aussie kids (of all ages).

Kids across Australia simply dialled #HO HO HO (#46 46 46) at any Telstra payphone to speak with Santa until Christmas Eve. Kids across Australia were able to do more than just talk to Santa about their Christmas lists, from asking about the weather in the North Pole, to what the reindeer like to snack on before their big Christmas Eve adventure, making the Free Calls to Santa hotline more interactive this year, allowing kids young and old to have more engaging conversations with the jolly man in red.

### **TELSTRA BIGPOND**

Despite the rumours, Bigpond email is not going anywhere and they do not have plans to stop providing this service.

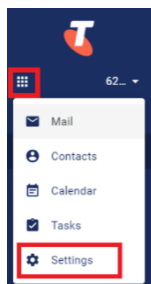
Telstra has invested around \$20 million this year to upgrade its Bigpond email platform. They are almost done moving more than two million email customers onto this new platform that is more reliable and more secure to make it an even better experience.

Telstra has spam filters that block some email addresses which are recognised as scams. To avoid important email addresses being blocked by a spam filter please add your email address to the Safe Senders list.

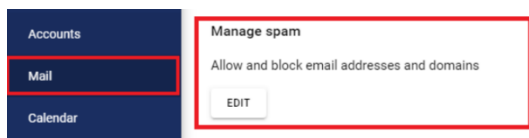
### **How to add safe senders and block emails**

1. Select the squares next to the email address in the top left and click **Settings**

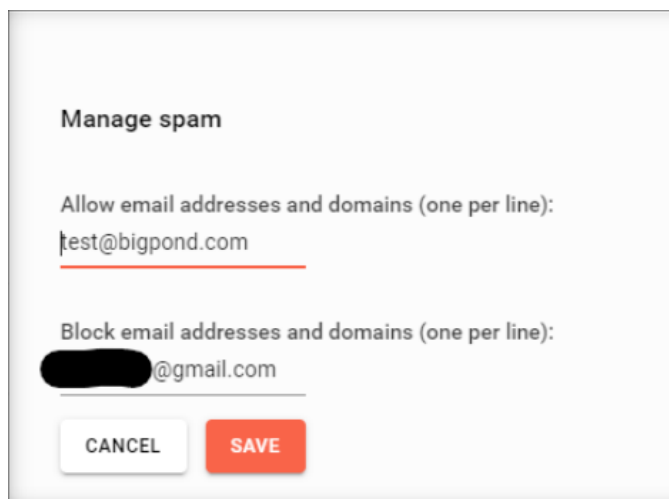




2. On the left side panel select Mail and find Manage spam. If any current safe senders/blocked were added manually, they will display here. To create/add a new one, select **Edit**.



3. The following box will appear. Email addresses can be added to the allowed addresses which would be Safe Senders and if you wish to block email addresses, add them to the Block list. Once the email addresses/domain has been added - click **Save**



## WA REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

ICPA (WA) State Council have an honorary position on the Telstra WA Regional Advisory Council (WA RAC). The WA RAC established in 2017, focuses on:

- Helping to ensure Telstra meets the needs of rural and regional stakeholders and customers.
- Providing input into the activities and plans of Telstra where they involve regional and rural communities.
- Bringing to Telstra's attention important issues facing rural and regional people and communities.
- Deepening understanding of the opportunities, risks and implications of new communications technologies; and
- Identifying and supporting relevant network and connectivity opportunities.

There are up to four meetings each year, including one regional trip. The board consists of members from grass roots organisations: Fresh Produce Alliance, Western Roads Federation, WA Farmers, Sweeter Banana Co-operative, CEO Regional Chambers of Commerce WA, Commissioner, WA Planning Committee and Statutory Planning Committee, an Aboriginal cultural and community leader and various Telstra representatives. There are RAC's in other states with ICPA representation.



On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2023, I attended our first face-to-face meeting in over 2 years, in Perth, with Vicky Brady, the new Telstra CEO joining us for dinner. Telstra provided an update on regional communications including how emerging technologies will deliver connectivity in regional and remote Australia, with a particular focus on Low Orbit Earth Satellite (LEO sat). Boyd Brown, Telstra Regional General Manager and Eva Colic, Telstra Regional Engagement Manager, provided a local and community update and the success of the communications for the Solar Eclipse event in Exmouth. A small amount of time was spent on Telstra's regional policies followed by a round table discussion with RAC members discussing their members' issues.

## PASSWORD SECURITY

Recent research with YouGov found that almost half of all Australians (46%) use an easy-to-guess password that contains either their favourite sporting team, pet's name or their birthday.

Of those people, 20 per cent have used their pet's name, a further 17 per cent admitted to using their birthdate as – or in – their password and another 9 per cent said they have used their favourite sports team.

Using these passwords makes it especially easy for hackers to access your accounts and personal details without too much guesswork. It is like plastering your password around town for the world to see.

### Top Tips for Password Security

1. Use a password manager.

Huge lists published online containing millions of hacked usernames and passwords increase the chance that criminals will compromise accounts with reused passwords. These attacks occur at scale. Criminals can automatically cycle through thousands of compromised logins until an attempt is successful.

This is where a password manager helps. These set and store highly complex, random and unique passwords inside a secured service that is protected with the only password you need to remember. Set one password and forget the rest.

There are many free and easy options available, but you may find it easiest to use the built-in managers you may already have. [Apple's iCloud keychain](#) password manager is built into iPhones, iPads, Mac OS, and the Safari web browser. [Google's](#) password manager is built into Android-based phones including Pixel and Samsung lines, tablets and in the Chrome web browser. Web browsers Firefox and Edge also contain a built-in password manager, while separate free and paid apps exist that work across all mobile devices and computer operating systems.

2. A good password is a sentence.

For decades we have all been taught to use passwords that are hard to remember and often easy for computers to break. Likewise, we have all become used to requirements to set passwords with an upper and lowercase letter and a special character which ends up with people setting predictable passwords such as P@ssw0rd1 or Summer2020! and hackers know it.

So, make the last password you need to remember for your password manager one that is strong but easy to remember by using a passphrase that is unique to you. Write it as a normal sentence, complete with spaces, and throw a number and a few capital letters somewhere to make a highly original combination. Do not use cliches like *I hate Mondays* or *famous phrases* as these could be guessed.

Here are a few good examples, but please do not copy these as your own!

- Time for tea at 1:23 (rhyming may help you remember)
- Somewhere, under TR (an altered version of 'somewhere over the rainbow')
- horsebatterystaplertelephone (random unrelated words that have personal meaning)



### Don't want to use a password manager?

Managers are in large part a convenient way to set, save and secure your passwords, but they may not be for everyone.

Those less comfortable with smartphones and apps may instead prefer to write down their passwords on paper. This is fine, provided a few steps are followed.

- Never let people you do not trust see your written passwords. In practice, this means never taking your passwords outside, including in a wallet, purse or backpack. About 1.2 million Australians keep passwords in their purse or wallet.
- If keeping passwords only inside your house is too inconvenient, then consider a password manager.
- You should also avoid storing passwords in any online service that is not a password manager, like a digital notepad, as doing so comes with security risks.

Telstra has developed a simple way to help protect yourself online: **Be SUSS**.



### NBN

#### **SKY MUSTER PLUS TRIAL**

Nbn trialled a new Sky Muster Plus satellite plan from March 2023 until May 2023 intended to deliver 100 per cent unmetered data usage and aimed to deliver faster download speeds of up to 100 Mbps. After one month, early indications suggested the satellite network appeared to remain robust despite an increase in data usage of about 33 per cent during the peak hours of 4pm-midnight. The trial was also extended to include up to around 15,000 eligible participants (previously 10,000).

The trial has now ended with service providers offering unlimited data for approximately \$100 per month.

Sky Muster Plus Premium was the first nbn satellite plan to offer residential and small business customers uncapped data use to cover all their internet activities. Their first ever uncapped data use satellite plan, [nbn® Sky Muster® Plus Premium](#), which was launched in June 2023, was so well received that it now accounts for over half of their Sky Muster Plus customer base and these users are consuming at least 4x as much data (on a monthly average basis) than their connections on metered plans. The plan has proven to be popular given



users no longer need to worry about managing a monthly data allowance, and it now accounts for 53 per cent of nbn's Sky Muster Plus users.

December 2023, NBN Co launched two new nbn® Sky Muster® Plus Premium plans introducing even more satellite connectivity options for people across rural and remote Australia.

Key features include:

- **More choice of uncapped data usage:** users can now choose from three plans – uncapped data use for all internet activities – offering more flexibility without the worrying of a monthly data allowance.
- **Different wholesale prices:** helps make the new plans even more accessible for people in regional and rural Australia.
- **New features for remote access:** the option to purchase static IP addresses for Sky Muster Plus and Premium customers (through their service provider).

The new nbn Sky Muster® Plus Premium plans are now available to order and join the suite of existing Sky Muster and Sky Muster Plus plans available.

Not all retail service providers offer nbn satellite connections. For further details and to connect with a participating provider, please visit the nbn website: [www.nbnco.com.au/skymusterpluspremium](https://www.nbnco.com.au/skymusterpluspremium).

The three available plans – at entry, mid and high tier levels – offer greater flexibility and choice for customers depending on their needs and budgets.

The new entry and mid-tier plans will be offered to retailers at lower wholesale prices than the existing Sky Muster Plus Premium plan, which was introduced in June this year.

The three plans now available are:

- **Sky Muster Plus Premium – high tier option:** Replaces the current nbn Sky Muster Plus Premium plan and offers uncapped data use\* with maximum wholesale speeds of 100/5 Mbps at least once every 24-hour period and an anticipated typical busy period wholesale download speed of 48 Mbps.
- **Sky Muster Plus Premium – mid tier option:** A new plan that offers uncapped data use\* with maximum wholesale speeds of 50/5 Mbps at least once every 24-hour period and an anticipated typical busy period wholesale download speed of 31 Mbps.
- **Sky Muster Plus Premium – entry tier option:** A new plan that offers uncapped data use\* with maximum wholesale speeds of 25/5 Mbps at least once every 24-hour period and an anticipated typical busy period wholesale download speed of 16 Mbps.

\*Fair use policy applies

In addition to the new plans, nbn is also introducing other new features for Sky Muster Plus and Premium users such as the option to purchase dedicated static IP (internet protocol) addresses for users who wish to do things like remotely access their network from outside their property.

Enhancements to nbn satellite services are made possible due to upgrades to the nbn Fixed Wireless network.

#### **UPGRADE OF THE NBN FIXED WIRELESS NETWORK**

NBN Co has announced that around 24,000 homes and businesses across regional Australia are now able to access nbn fixed wireless for the first time.

The 24,000 premises that can now access nbn fixed wireless services were previously located within the nbn satellite footprint. The locations were chosen based on their proximity to existing nbn fixed wireless towers, with priority given to those in the most heavily used parts of the nbn satellite footprint.



Key to the upgrade program is enabling an additional 120,000 homes and businesses in the satellite footprint to be able to access nbn fixed wireless, as well as introducing enhanced speeds during the busiest times of the day over the overall fixed wireless network and two new higher speed plans by the end of the program. The upgrade is being funded by a \$750 million investment, with \$480 million from the Australian Government and \$270 million from nbn. This is part of a nationwide upgrade program to deliver better broadband for homes and businesses across regional and remote Australia.

### **SCHOOL STUDENT BROADBAND INITIATIVE (SSBI)**

To boost education opportunities and narrow the digital divide, the Australian Government is providing up to 30,000 eligible families with no internet at home a free National Broadband Network (NBN) service. Originally a 12-month commitment, the initiative has been extended so the period in which a family can nominate to receive a free service is up to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024.

The duration of free services will continue until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025 for all existing and new families.

The Government has invested \$8.8 million to support NBN Co's implementation and delivery of this targeted affordability measure. This includes an additional \$4.3 million from the 2023–24 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) to extend the free services to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025.

To be eligible, a family must:

- Have a child living at home who is enrolled in an Australian school.
- Have no active broadband service over the NBN network.
- Live in a premise where they can access a standard NBN service.
- Not have had an active NBN service during the previous 14 days.
- Families can directly contact the National Referral Centre to have their eligibility assessed or be referred by a participating nominating organisation.

To check your eligibility, follow these simple steps:

- Contact the National Referral Centre, operated by Anglicare Victoria, on [1800 954 610](tel:1800954610) (Mon–Fri, 10am–6pm AEDT), [www.anglicarevic.org.au/student-internet](http://www.anglicarevic.org.au/student-internet).
- The National Referral Centre team will help assess your eligibility for the SSBI, by checking several things including your residential address and current financial situation.
- If eligible, you will be issued a voucher which can be redeemed at any of the participating SSBI retail service providers. The National Referral Centre will also be available to assist with contacting your SSBI retail service provider of choice and providing follow-up support.

### **NBN DIGITAL SEMINAR SERIES**

ICPA (Aust) partnered with nbn to host a series of digital skills webinars exclusive to ICPA members. These events were designed to provide an opportunity to increase digital capability, hear about available nbn updates, and come along to chat directly with nbn representatives.

### **YOU DID NOT NEED TO BE AN NBN CUSTOMER!!**

**Webinar 17<sup>th</sup> August:** Sky Muster Satellite Upgrades

**Webinar 21<sup>st</sup> September:** Online Safety for Families

**Webinar 19<sup>th</sup> October:** In-home Optimisation

**Webinar 16<sup>th</sup> November:** Online Safety and Scam Awareness

**Webinar 7<sup>th</sup> December:** Smart Devices

The webinars were highly informative with plenty of opportunities to ask questions. Each webinar was repeated over two time slots 11am and 1pm AEST.



**ICPA 2023 CALENDAR**

Join your nbn local team for a digital awareness presentation.

On the third Thursday of every month, the same discussion topic will run twice per day. Join us at either 11am or 1pm (AEST) to hear more from your nbn representatives and come along to ask questions.

**11am-11.45am & 1pm-1.45pm (All times AEST)**

<b>ICPA National Conference</b> <b>Increase digital awareness series will be launched.</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> August</b> <b>Sky Muster Satellite Upgrades:</b> nbn is excited with the launch of the new nbn <sup>®</sup> Sky Muster <sup>®</sup> Plus Premium, come along to find out more and get your questions answered.
<b>21<sup>st</sup> September</b> <b>Online Safety for families:</b> Improve online safety for all family members as we discuss your digital footprint and CyberBullying and being a positive contributor online.	<b>19<sup>th</sup> October</b> <b>In-Home Optimisation:</b> • Are you getting the most out of your nbn <sup>®</sup> connection? What is wi-fi and what is data? In this session we look at tips to optimise your in-home internet experience.
<b>16<sup>th</sup> November</b> <b>Online Safety &amp; Scam Awareness:</b> Want to take advantage of the digital world but unsure about scammers? Come along to learn tips and tricks on identifying and avoiding scams.	<b>Early Bird Session (1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month)</b> <b>"Christmas Special" 7<sup>th</sup> December</b> <b>Smart devices:</b> Have you noticed all the Wi-Fi enabled products? Let's look at the connected devices that are available now, and what might we be using in the future?

>Keep your eye out for the Microsoft Teams Link

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Nbn is planning to deliver a similar digital series in 2024 with improved time schedules.

### REGIONAL TECH HUB

Established in 2020, the Regional Tech Hub (RTH) is a centralised resource providing regional, rural, and remote residents with the critical support needed to navigate the complex world of connectivity and technology options.

The Regional Tech Hub provides **independent** and **free** information about digital technologies, services available, equipment solutions, setup and installation.

Two-thirds of Australia's landmass currently has no mobile coverage, despite a third of Australia's population living outside metro cities. Evolving internet and mobile solutions are helping our regions overcome the digital divide; however, they can be confusing.

The RTH aims to address the gap in digital inclusion between regional and metropolitan communities by simplifying the noise, confusion and frustration around phone and internet connectivity. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, then the Regional Tech Hub can help you:

- Do you need to *get connected*?
- Are you wanting to *stay connected*?
- Would you like to *improve your connection*?
- Would you like to be able to *use your connection better*?

People living in rural, regional and remote Australia are encouraged to reach out to the Regional Tech Hub for independent support to address these four questions.

The Regional Tech Hub offers support via its [website](#), a phone support line 1300 081 029 and social media pages [Facebook](#) and X (formerly [Twitter](#)).



Since December 2020, the Regional Tech Hub (RTH) has received close to 200,000 requests for help, including more than 70,000 website enquiries and has helped close to 10,000 people with their mobile and internet connectivity options.

Of the queries received, maximising coverage through the nbn Skymuster Satellite service was the most common advice sought, followed by requests for information on mobile broadband, mobile phone, nbn fixed wireless and nbn fixed line. Many queries are from people living with an unreliable service that is too expensive or does not meet data needs. In most cases there are options available, which the RTH can raise awareness of and ultimately help more people to find the best solution suited to their needs.

### **SCAMS**

Telstra has a new short national number (7226) for customers to report suspected SMS and MMS scams.

Customers who forward SMS and MMS scams to 7226 (SCAM) will help Telstra better protect millions of Australians from receiving harmful SMS/MMS messages that may attempt to trick them into providing their personal information, credit cards, or downloading malicious apps.

Telstra has a [link](https://www.telstra.com.au/exchange/cyber-security-and-safety/cyber-safety/reporting-sms-and-mms-scams-to-telstra---what-you-need-to-know) available (<https://www.telstra.com.au/exchange/cyber-security-and-safety/cyber-safety/reporting-sms-and-mms-scams-to-telstra---what-you-need-to-know>) with simple tips and tricks on how to forward text messages, including video tutorials as well as tips on what to look for in a scam SMS and MMS.

#### **Top 5 scam calls:**

- Amazon impersonation: Scam calls about an issue with your Amazon account. They claim funds will be taken from your account if you do not act immediately by providing personal information.
- Banking/finance impersonation: Scam calls, emails and SMS claiming suspicious activity, unauthorised debits or that your account has been suspended. They request personal details to verify your identity.
- NBN impersonation: Scam callers posing as someone from technical support. They claim there is a fault with your internet to get access to your computer and personal information.
- Telstra impersonation: Similar to the NBN scam. Callers pose as Telstra technical support and claim you have issues with your service or internet to access your computer and personal information.
- eBay impersonation: Scammers use a recorded message to claim you have made a purchase that requires a charge to your account. This is to get you to provide personal information.

All five of the top reported scams impersonate trusted and well-known businesses, with scammers often displaying a fake number or sender information on your phone to make the contact look legitimate.

Many businesses clearly state they will not contact you out of the blue or send messages with links seeking financial information or personal details, so always treat these calls with caution.

#### **How To Avoid Scams**

- Do not provide your personal information to an unsolicited caller or sender of a message.
- Do not open links in any unsolicited messages you receive.
- If the brand has an app you can use instead of receiving messages consider whether this will work for you. Messages you receive via the app are much more likely to be legitimate.
- Even if a message slips into a legitimate message stream on your phone, double-check it is from the brand concerned.
- If in doubt, always contact the business via their publicly available contact details (or the details on your regular bill or transaction record) rather than the details provided by the caller or in a message.



## **PHISHING**

Hackers are going to great lengths, including mimicking real people and creating and updating fake social media profiles, to trick victims into clicking phishing links and handing over usernames and passwords.

The alert from the UK's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) - the cybersecurity arm of the intelligence service GCHQ - warns that the phishing attacks are targeting individuals and organisations in a range of sectors.

The end goal of the phishing attacks is to dupe the victim into clicking malicious links that direct to fake but realistic-looking login pages, where the victim will enter their login credentials providing the attackers with access to their account, which hackers abuse directly or use to gain access to other victims.

Many of the malicious links are designed to look like commonly used cloud software and collaboration tools, including OneDrive, Google Drive and other file-sharing platforms. In one case, the attackers even set up a Zoom call with the victim and then sent a malicious URL in the chat bar during the call. They have also created multiple characters in the phishing thread (all controlled by the attackers) to add the appearance of legitimacy.

## **CHATGPT AND AI**

ChatGPT has captured the internet's attention with millions using the technology to write poems, craft short stories, answer questions and even ask advice - and 'meanwhile', cybercriminals are using it to generate malicious threats through its impressive ability to generate human-like text that adapts to different languages and audiences.

Norton, the consumer cyber safety brand of Gen, warns that cybercriminals can now quickly and easily craft email or social media phishing lures that are even more convincing, making it more difficult to tell what is legitimate and what is a threat.

Norton says its latest Pulse Report reveals that throughout 2022, it thwarted over 3.5 billion threats or around 9.6 million threats per day, and blocked:

- 90.9 million phishing attempts
- 260.4 million file threats
- 1.6 million mobile threats
- 274 thousand ransomware attacks
- Norton AntiTrack blocked over 3 billion trackers and fingerprinting scripts.

In addition to writing lures, ChatGPT can also generate code. Just as ChatGPT makes developers' lives easier with its ability to write and translate source code, bad actors too can manipulate the technology and use it to scam at a larger and faster scale.

While the introduction of large language models like ChatGPT is exciting, it is also important to note how cybercriminals can benefit from and use it to conduct various nefarious activities.

*"We're already seeing ChatGPT being used effectively by bad actors to create malware and other threats quickly and very easily,"* said Mark Gorrie, Asia Pacific Managing Director at Gen.

*"Unfortunately, it's becoming more difficult than ever for people to spot scams on their own, which is why Cyber Safety solutions that look at all aspects of our digital lives are comprehensively needed, be it our mobile devices to our online identity or the wellbeing of those around us – being cyber vigilant is integral to our digital lives."*

In addition to using ChatGPT for more efficient phishing, Norton experts warn bad actors can also use it to create deepfake chatbots - these chatbots can impersonate humans or legitimate sources, like a bank or





government entity, to manipulate victims into turning over their personal information in order to gain access to sensitive information, steal money or commit fraud.

To stay safe from these new threats Norton experts recommend:

- Avoiding chatbots that do not appear on a company's website or app and being cautious of providing any personal information to someone you are chatting with online.
- Thinking before you click on links in response to unsolicited phone calls, emails or messages.
- Updating your security solutions and making sure it has a full set of security layers that go beyond known malware recognition, such as behaviour detection and blocking.

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION, SOTA AND CURRICULUM REPORT**

**Jane Hughes – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

### **EDUCATION INVESTMENT**

The McGowan Labor Government announced on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023 that the 2023-24 State budget would include a \$6.4 billion allocation for education, with a total of \$24.3 million committed to supporting improvements to the current Version 9 Western Australian Curriculum and the development of resources to support teachers in the classroom.

The Government will continue to invest in improving educational outcomes for Western Australian students, by increasing education funding. Public education funding will continue to increase over the forward estimates to accommodate growth in student enrolments.

An extra 3,962 (1.2%) students enrolled in public schools in Semester 1, 2023 compared to Semester 1, 2022. Additional funding has been allocated to ensure schools will have the necessary teaching staff and resources to accommodate enrolment growth and provide high-quality programs for all students.

The 2023-24 Budget also continues to increase support for students with disabilities and additional learning needs, with an additional \$137.6 million allocated over the forward estimates. On top of this, from 2023, an extra \$8.5 million will be provided to public schools per annum to support more students with additional learning needs in developing their literacy and numeracy.

A total of \$12.4 million has been allocated to provide additional regional incentives to teachers and school leaders to work in locations where demand for staff is the greatest.

<https://www.miragenews.com/record-investment-in-boosting-wa-education-1004077//>

### **WA District High Schools Funding Boost**

The Cook Government has committed \$5 million a year on an ongoing basis to strengthen regional education and enhance student services in 51 District High Schools throughout WA.

Funding is allocated to the District High Schools to improve curriculum delivery, expand access to specialist student support services and help schools provide the best education to students in multi-age classes.

In 2024, District High Schools with 30 or more students enrolled in Years 7 to 12 will receive \$105,705 and District High Schools with less than 29 students in these year groups will receive \$63,423.

The funding will also be used to employ additional staff for the secondary years, build the skills of existing staff members through professional development and to secure support through the School of Isolated and Distance Education.



In addition, schools can use the funds to provide teachers with face-to-face and online mentoring in both mathematics and english.

<https://www.miragenews.com/wa-district-high-schools-receive-funding-boost-1085181/>

## **CURRICULUM**

The Western Australian Government's revised Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines have been released. These guidelines will strengthen the teaching of digital literacy, cultural responsiveness, environmental education and mental health. The guidelines were reviewed following the Australian Government review of the Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V1.0. These guidelines are now available for use in all Western Australian kindergartens.

Quality early childhood education and care plays a critical role in supporting outcomes in children's early years development, school readiness and successes for later life.

The School Curriculum and Standards Authority has updated the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines, which support teachers and educators to develop curriculum and facilitate the optimal learning and development of kindergarten children in Western Australia. The guidelines also support teachers and educators as they prepare kindergarten children for the transition to formal schooling.

<https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/teaching/kindergarten-curriculum-guidelines>

## **NAPLAN**

NAPLAN is a national assessment that tests students' ability in three domains of literacy—reading, writing and language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation)—and numeracy.

NAPLAN transitioned to fully online testing in 2022, except for a very small number of schools delivering an authority-approved alternative curriculum. These schools will continue with alternative format (paper) testing.

From 2023, NAPLAN testing was conducted in Term 1 of the school year to allow the return of results to education authorities earlier in the year to inform school and system teaching and learning programs and will allow teachers to better assess what support students need for the coming year.

From 2023 four proficiency standards were introduced to the NAPLAN national report and replaced the 10 bands and national minimum standard previously used.

Around 93,100 WA public school students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 sat the national literacy and numeracy tests in 2023. Almost all students sat the assessments online, excluding the Year 3 writing assessment which remains a paper-based test.

A summary of Western Australian public school students' results for 2023 can be found [here](https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/m38lq3l) (<https://www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/m38lq3l>).

The NAPLAN test window runs from Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> to Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

## **National Assessment Program – Information and Communication Technology Literacy (NAP ICT)**

The first national NAP ICT Literacy results since the COVID pandemic were released on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2023 by the Australia Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

The test, part of the National Assessment Program (NAP) sample assessments, was undertaken in 2022 and tests students' general ICT skills and knowledge in a sample of schools across the country.

The sample tests are held every three years but were cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic. The 2022 report shows at the national level:



- 55 per cent of Year 6 students attained the proficient standard compared to 53 per cent in 2017. This result is not significantly different from previous NAP–ICT Literacy cycles, except for 2011, at 62 per cent.
- The average scale score of students in Year 6 (414) was significantly lower than in 2011 (435), but not significantly different from the average in any other cycle including 2017 (410).
- 46 per cent of Year 10 students attained the proficient standard compared to 54 per cent in 2017. This is significantly lower than the percentage achieved in all previous cycles of NAP–ICT Literacy.
- The average scale score of students in Year 10 (503) was significantly lower than in 2017 (523), 2011 (559), 2008 (560) and 2005 (551) but not significantly different from the average reported in 2014 (520).

Digital and ICT literacy skills are key in today's ever-changing world and from the NAP sample assessment, proficiency in this area among students is broadly stable. However, it is concerning to see a drop in ICT literacy amongst Year 10 students, which was more pronounced in certain states.

Other achievement results from the report show:

- Gender: Female students had higher levels of ICT literacy in comparison to male students in both Year 6 and Year 10. This is consistent with previous testing cycles.
- Indigeneity: The gap between indigenous and non-indigenous students attaining the proficient standard remained large in 2022 with a difference of around 30 percentage points.
- Language Background other than English (LBOTE): Year 6 students who speak a language other than English at home outperformed students who speak English at home. The difference was not significant for Year 10 students.
- Geographical location: Students from a metropolitan location tended to have higher levels of ICT literacy than students from a regional location for both Years 6 and 10.
- Parental occupation and education: ICT literacy achievement gradually increased with increasing levels of parental occupation and parental education resulting in large, significant differences between the highest and the lowest occupational and educational groups.

The NAP ICT assessment was last undertaken in 2017.

### **SCHOOL OF ISOLATED DISTANCE EDUCATION (SIDE)**

On 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2023 the Cook Government announced a \$7.1 million funding boost for the Department of Education's School of Isolated Distance Education.

The additional investment in 2024 will enable SIDE to continue to deliver high-quality, inclusive and culturally responsive education programs for young people who are living in isolated, regional or remote locations.

SIDE was established in 1918 to educate primary students in the 'outback' via correspondence. Over the years, it has transformed into an online model using digital technologies that caters to students from Kindergarten to Year 12.

Demand for online learning services continues to grow, particularly among students outside of major cities.

This increase in resourcing will ensure SIDE can maintain appropriate student-to-teacher ratios.

### **ONLINE EDUCATION**

Scotch College launched an online co-educational school 'Scotch Global' for geographically isolated students starting with Year 7 students in 2024. Scotch College has a track record of delivering the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) with exceptional results. Now, students from across the globe can access this education program online.

Offered in equal measure, students engage with a combination of remote collaborative and independent learning. Scotch Global uses a variety of modern technologies to deliver remote learning that is engaging and promotes connection.

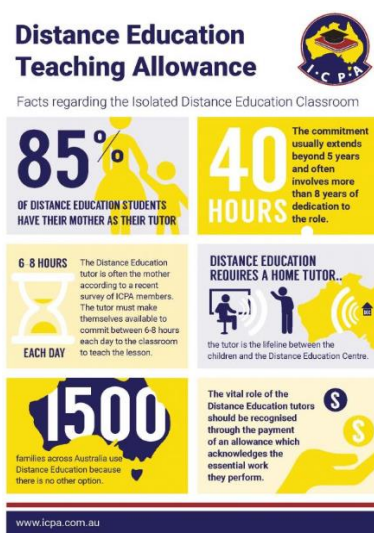
<https://global.scotch.wa.edu.au/home>

## **DETA**

Correspondence was sent to the Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti advocating for a Distant Education Teaching Allowance. Unfortunately, Minister Buti replied that the WA Government would not assist with a DETA and that it needed to be taken up with the Federal government.

The DETA would be the recognition of the supervisory role undertaken in the distance education schoolroom where families must provide a distance education tutor.

For around 1,500 families living in isolated regions of Australia, the only means of accessing education for their children is via distance education programs.



## **SCHOOL OF THE AIR**

Throughout 2023, ICPA (WA) State Councillor Lousie Ford, has collaborated with a dedicated group of School of the Air (SOTA) parents from various regions in WA, to encourage parental engagement and conversations within this distinct educational framework. Louise diligently gathered insights from all five SOTAs, recognising the pivotal role parents play as educators. Parental input is crucial for informed decision-making in SOTA education.

In late November 2023, Melesha Sands, Deputy Director Schools; Denise Hilsz, Chairperson REVISE; Sue Potter, Co-ordinator REVISE and fourteen parents had a very productive discussion. Topics included: the significance of regular home visits, school camps, workload management, programming and inclusive family consultation.

An observation from the meeting was the limited collaboration among the five SOTAs. It is hoped that in the future, there will be increased opportunities that encourage and enable greater collaboration and processes between all SOTAs, to ensure optimal educational outcomes.



Melesha showed a keen interest in gathering ideas to enhance the understanding of practices that result in the optimal functionality of a distance education schoolroom. We look forward to future developments.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD REPORT**

**Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Support, March 2024**

### **EARLY YEARS COMMUNITY PLAN GREAT SOUTHERN**

In May 2023, an Early Years Community Plan for children living in the Central Great Southern region was released as part of the Early Years Partnership (EYP).

The EYP is a 10-year partnership between the State Government and the Minderoo Foundation to improve child wellbeing and school readiness for children aged 0-4 years across four Western Australian communities, including the Central Great Southern region, where more than one in four children are considered developmentally vulnerable.

The 'Children Growing Strong' Central Great Southern Community Plan, launched in Katanning, has been co-designed with local communities and forms a roadmap for change for children living in the shires of Katanning, Kojonup, Gnowangerup and Broomehill-Tambellup.

The local communities identified five priority areas to support child wellbeing and school readiness:

- Child health;
- Child development;
- Financial wellbeing;
- Family safety; and
- Maternal health.

The Central Great Southern Region Community Plan will be implemented in partnership with a local working group, which is made up of representatives from Local and State Government agencies, the four local Shires, community organisations, families and community members.

The Telethon Kids Institute is involved in the partnership, providing research and evaluation support.

### **What Closing the Gap Report Means for Early Childhood**

The Australian Government has released the Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report and 2024 Implementation Plan.

The report:

- Assesses progress against Closing the Gap targets over the last year
- Outlines strategic priorities to improve Closing the Gap targets over the next year.

Closing the Gap targets 3 and 4 aim to ensure children:

- Engage in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education
- Thrive in their early years.

Key achievements from 2023 included:

- Strengthened engagement with SNAICC through the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
- Changes to the activity test for First Nations families.



Key actions that they are focusing on in 2024 include:

- Developing a formal partnership agreement between the Commonwealth and SNAICC
- Continuing the work of the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
- Expanding Connected Beginnings to 50 sites by 2024–25
- Finalising the Early Years Strategy in early 2024
- Developing the Preschool Outcomes Measure for trial in 2025
- Driving improved participation in preschool in the year before full-time schooling.

The report also recognises Connected Beginnings as a case study of progress against Priority Reform 4.

Read the [Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 annual report and 2024 implementation plan](https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/commonwealth-closing-gap-2023-annual-report-and-2024-implementation-plan).

<https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/commonwealth-closing-gap-2023-annual-report-and-2024-implementation-plan>

### CONNECTED BEGINNINGS

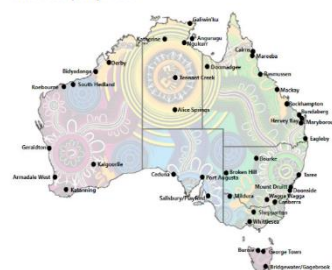
Connected Beginnings is a grants program that helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children get the best start in life and draws upon the strength and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The aim is to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's and families' engagement with health and early childhood education and care.

The program supports self-determination through community level data dashboards. The dashboards give communities access to accurate, current and meaningful data about children's and families' health and early childhood services.

Grants are made available across Australia. Funding is used to improve access and integrate local support services so children and families can access culturally appropriate support services, including:

- Maternal and child health
- Early childhood education and care
- Family support
- Preschools and schools
- Local government and council support.

Current projects



so, children are safe, healthy and ready to thrive at school by the age of five.

### CHILDCARE SUBSIDY

Changes to Childcare Subsidy commenced on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023, meaning childcare is now cheaper for most families. It also means some families previously not eligible for the Childcare Subsidy will now be eligible. This change provides more support for more families across Australia.

Childcare Subsidy changes include:

- The family income limit of the Childcare Subsidy has increased from \$356,756 to \$530,000 per annum.
- The maximum amount of Childcare Subsidy has increased from 85 per cent to 90 per cent.
- Families earning \$80,000 or less get a Childcare Subsidy rate of 90 per cent.
- Families earning over \$80,000 may get a Childcare Subsidy rate starting from 90 per cent. This reduces by 1 per cent for each \$5,000 of income they earn above \$80,000. This rate reaches zero per cent for families earning \$530,000.
- Families earning below \$362,408 with more than one child aged five or under in care can still get a higher rate for one or more of their children.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children can get at least 36 subsidised hours of early childhood education and care per fortnight, regardless of their family's activity level.





Changes to Family Assistance Law, which give effect to increases in the subsidy, came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023.

### **LOTTERYWEST GRANT SUPPORTS NEW MINGENEW CHILDCARE FACILITY**

A LotteryWest grant of \$500,000 will go towards the construction of a new purpose-built facility for the town's only childcare service, Mingenew Education and Care.

The funding will allow the service to increase its capacity to 24 places, expand to wider age ranges and provide a full five-day-a-week early childhood education and care service, as well as before and after school care which is not currently available.

Improved childcare services were identified by the Mingenew community as a key priority during a strategic community planning process undertaken by the Shire of Mingenew.

### **GRANTS TO ATTRACT CHILDCARE EDUCATORS TO REGIONAL WA**

In January 2023, Regional Local Government Authorities (LGAs) were invited to apply for grant funding to attract and retain regional early childcare educators and carers to regional Western Australia.

The Attraction and Retention Packages for Regional Childcare Workers Program provides grants of up to \$25,000 per annum to regional LGAs to fund initiatives that support the early childhood education and care workforce.

### **GOVERNMENT EXAMINING BEST EARLY EDUCATION OPTIONS**

The Government is investing \$940,000 to examine options to enhance non-compulsory early learning in Western Australia. This new funding recognises the vital role that early childhood education plays in the social and educational development of children, as well as the workforce participation it enables.

Deloitte, who undertook significant work as part of the South Australian Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, are contributing to this work which will examine early learning in other States and Territories and support national developments to boost outcomes in the early years of childhood education.

The Western Australian Government will continue to work collaboratively with the Australian Government as well as other State and Territory Governments to develop a shared long-term vision for early childhood education and care, designed around the principles of equity, accessibility, affordability and quality to support parents' workforce participation and children's education and development outcomes.

### **REVISED KINDERGARTEN CURRICULUM GUIDELINES**

Minister for Early Childhood Education, Hon. Sabine Winton MLA, launched Western Australia's revised Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines in August 2023, which are now available for use in all Western Australian Kindergartens.

Quality early childhood education and care plays a critical role in supporting outcomes in children's early years development, school readiness and successes for later life.

The School Curriculum and Standards Authority has updated the Kindergarten Curriculum Guidelines, which support teachers and educators to develop curriculum and facilitate the optimal learning and development of Kindergarten children in Western Australia.

These changes will strengthen the teaching of digital literacy, cultural responsiveness, environmental and sustainable education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, social competence and mental health and wellbeing.



## **GRANT FUNDING DELIVERED UNDER PRESCHOOL REFORM AGREEMENT**

Funding of more than \$1.3 million is being provided to Western Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector through the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA).

Commonwealth funding will be distributed for the first time to the ECEC sector through the Supporting Children in ECEC WA grants program administered by Child Australia. Under the program grants between \$20,000 to \$100,000 will be available for ECEC organisations to deliver initiatives that develop and maintain quality preschool programs, promote enrolment and regular attendance and prepare children for school.

The program is aligned with the PRA's objectives with a focus on enhancing preschool participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and developmentally vulnerable children.

The Australian Government and all States and Territories are signatories to the PRA, which sets out the national reform agenda aimed at strengthening the delivery of preschool education to better prepare children for their first year of school. One of the key reforms of the PRA is for funding to flow to all settings, including the ECEC sector.

Details are available on the Child Australia website <https://childaustralia.org.au/>

## **RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS REPORT**

**Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

### **FAIRBRIDGE RUN CAMP SCHOOLS**

At the 2023 State Conference two motions were presented regarding the state of disrepair and the lack of services offered at Fairbridge run camp schools. Of particular concern is the Goldfields Camp School in Kalgoorlie.

Following the 2023 State Conference letters were written to Minister for Education Hon. Dr Tony Buti, Director General Lisa Rodgers and Fairbridge CEO Mirina Muir outlining how vital the Goldfields Camp School is to the Kalgoorlie School of the Air (KalsOTA) students and their families.

Ms. Muir responded in what I feel was quite a flippant manner.

*"Many thanks for your letter. The issues you have raised are inconsistent with the feedback from the Principal of SOTA. As for the pricing structure – the Department of Education consumed all costs when they ran the Goldfields facility."*

*With COVID and the increased commentary on climate change schools do not attend the facility as learning about mining history or operations is not a focus of classroom programs. SOTA is the only school that uses the facility on a regular basis.*

*Fairbridge alone cannot keep the Goldfields facility operating at the same levels as the Department of Education did back in 2018 for the exclusive use of SOTA.*

*Fairbridge is very supportive of the equity issues that exist with students in SOTA. Fairbridge is actively working with the Department of Education regarding camp facility operations."*

The points Ms Muir raised in her response are definitely **not** inconsistent with that of the KalsOTA Principal who has gone above and beyond to try and make conditions workable when holding camps at the Goldfields Camp School; often visiting the site several times before a camp to ensure cleanliness and that bedrooms have beds and curtains.



Commenting that schools do not want to visit Kalgoorlie due to the impact of mining on climate change is not true. If schools are not coming to Kalgoorlie, maybe it is the poorly run facilities and exorbitant cost that is stopping them. Kalgoorlie has so much to offer and a camp in Kalgoorlie can cover a lot of curriculum areas and provide many engaging and enjoyable experiences for our children.

Pricing continues to be an issue at the Goldfields Camp School and we thank the Department of Education for subsidising camp costs to make them accessible.

We thank Minister Buti for engaging in conversation with us about the camp schools' issue throughout the year; it appears at this stage there is no other provider able to operate these facilities. At some point, the Minister for Education and the Department of Education must realise that education comes at a cost, and for our School of the Air students, providing a well-run and resourced camp school is money well spent.

### **VACSWIM VENUE CANCELLATIONS**

In early June 2023, it was announced by the Department of Education that three venues would not be hosting VacSwim in the upcoming season due to safety concerns. These venues were Cosy Corner, Cape Riche and Starvation Bay. Reasons included the timing of an ambulance if there was an emergency, lack of sealed roads, poor phone service and vehicles on beaches. Locals reported these were not issues as they could be easily overcome.

It was disappointing that communities were not consulted before these cancellations were made. These cancellations would mean some families may have had to travel a 180km round trip to access VacSwim lessons.

We were very thankful for the intervention by the Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti and the calling for an independent review of the Department's decision. Late last year it was announced that it would be up to the local councils to address safety concerns and decide whether VacSwim should continue at the locations. We believe that all three locations went ahead with VacSwim.

### **VULNERABILITY OF SMALL RURAL SCHOOLS**

Late in Term 2, 2023, we became aware from ICPA Lakes District members of drastically reduced numbers at Gairdner Primary School. Gairdner Primary School was projected to have approximately 22 students in 2023. At the start of Semester 2, 2023, no students were attending the school.

Families had concerns about the school and this had led them to attend surrounding schools. Several people in the community had raised concerns with the Department of Education, but response and action had been unreasonably slow. We need to ensure there are practices in place for parents' concerns to be heard and addressed to ensure that this does not happen again.

This circumstance highlights the vulnerability of our small schools and how important it is to listen to the community.

ICPA (WA) reiterated the concerns of the community to the Director General and I am pleased to report that a new Principal was appointed with the task of rebuilding the school.

Encouragingly, at the commencement of the 2024 school year, there were 9 students enrolled at Gairdner Primary School.

### **TEACHER SHORTAGES**

It goes without saying that a consistent teacher of high quality is what our children need in the classroom. So many stories have been shared of small schools being unable to staff their classrooms, leading to some classes having up to six different classroom teachers in one semester.



There is a teacher shortage across Australia. Rural and remote areas are missing out now as schools try and recruit teachers to the more isolated parts of Western Australia. It used to be that these teacher shortages were 'remote' areas, but we have seen in 2023 that there were many places in the Wheatbelt and Great Southern as well.

The Cook Government has allocated \$15.49 million to assist more schools in regional and remote areas in 2024 with the recruitment and retention of staff.

Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti said *"the successful temporary Regional Attraction and Retention Incentive package initially rolled out in 2023 will now be applied to more schools in 2024. An additional 18 schools would be included, taking the total to 66 schools to benefit from the initiative"*.

The incentive supports schools to attract, recruit and retain teachers and school administrators to schools delivering secondary education in regional areas, by providing additional financial incentives.

Eligible staff members will receive between \$5,000 and \$17,000 for teachers and school administrators working in rural and remote public schools for the 2024 school year.

The incentive will be paid in two instalments. The first will be paid at the start of the 2024 school year, or when staff commence at the school if it is later in the year. The remaining balance will be paid to staff remaining at the school at the end of the 2024 school year.

In 2023, the temporary Regional Attraction and Retention Incentive was allocated to 48 regional and remote schools. These schools saw a significant reduction in teacher resignations by up to 75 per cent.

On 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024, Minister Buti welcomed 103 experienced teachers from around the world to teach in Western Australia. The Department of Education recruits from overseas only when there is no teacher in Australia to fill the role, with the vast majority heading to the regions.

I believe motions are being presented at the State Conference relating to teacher attraction and retention and we look forward to pursuing this area in 2024.

### **GOVERNMENT REGIONAL OFFICER HOUSING PROGRAM (GROH)**

The GROH program provides housing for teachers in regional and remote areas and is key in attracting and retaining staff.

Early in Term 3, 2023, we were contacted by members in the Munglipup area after the cancellation of a planned GROH build.

After four years of discussions and action from the local community, the Munglipup Community Group was notified by Sean Wilson, Principal Consultant, Housing and Transport, in July 2019 that the Department of Communities' GROH program would provide the town with an additional four-bedroom house, suitable for a family or shared accommodation.

I have a very detailed timeline of phone calls and written correspondence between the Munglipup Community Group and the Department of Communities over the ensuing four years detailing many delays that resulted in Andrew Sutton, GROH Project Manager, suddenly advising that *"GROH regularly reviews its construction projects to ensure they are aligned to best meet government service delivery needs in regional and remote WA. As a result of this review, a decision has been made to no longer progress the delivery of additional housing in Munglipup"*.

Without suitable (or any) housing for teaching staff and given the nationwide shortage of teachers, it will be almost impossible to attract and retain a teacher in this town.



In October 2023, we met with Minister Buti and a representative from the Minister for Housing John Carey's office to discuss the situation. The result was that although they understood, the money was allocated elsewhere due to higher need. This was very disappointing and we will continue the discussion in 2024.

I have heard several stories from other areas of teachers being appointed to schools and accommodation not being available. In one instance a teacher was put in motel accommodation in a neighbouring town for an extended period of time. In another, a teacher in Esperance was moved out of her GROH accommodation as a family had been allocated there and was put in a small holiday chalet which meant her pet dog had to be sent to her family in Perth. These are not the conditions that attract and retain staff.

### **MANJIMUP SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN-HOUSE GP**

Manjimup Senior High School students will have access to a General Practitioner on-site during school hours as part of an innovative trial starting this year. Many students currently commute up to 90 minutes to attend school, which significantly impacts their ability to access youth-focused GP appointments before and after school. By increasing accessibility to healthcare with an on-site GP, the healthcare needs of students will be addressed and their time in the classroom will not be impacted.

### **DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOLS CURRICULUM SUPPORT**

On Friday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2023, Minister Buti announced:

*"That the District High School Curriculum Support initiative is to continue, with \$5 million in funding being allocated for the same schools on an annual basis.*

*This funding builds on the initial allocation of \$9.3 million in additional funding over the last two years that was negotiated through workplace bargaining to strengthen regional education in District High Schools with students enrolled in Years 7 to 12.*

*This funding will be distributed through a Targeted Initiative each year to eligible District High Schools. In 2024, these schools with:*

- 30 or more students in secondary years will receive \$105,705
- 29 or fewer students enrolled in these year groups will receive \$63,423.

*The annual amounts will be indexed in future years.*

*This funding will provide the freedom to hire additional staff and give existing staff opportunities to upskill through professional development or the chance to learn from expert teachers. It may also be used to develop curriculum materials, secure support through the School of Isolated and District Education and help provide the best education to students in multi-age classes."*

### **WA EDUCATION AWARDS**

This was the first year ICPA (WA) has been invited to attend the Education Awards and I was very pleased to represent our organisation at the awards on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2023 (at 6.30am) in the Crown Ballroom. Ninety-seven nominations were received across the five categories. The four finalists in each category were presented at the awards ceremony with regional and remote WA being well represented including Wananami Remote Community School, Dawul Remote Community School, Narembreen District High School, Geraldton Primary School, Manea College and Western Australia College of Agriculture - Cunderdin.

It was wonderful to see the Bob Hawke College orchestra perform along with the Fremantle College band 'Dive Knife', but the highlight for me was our Rangeland Kids. Though they were not performing, the 2023 Rangeland NRM/School of the Air Photography Competition held a prime position as the only display in the foyer and it was of incredible quality.



### **CHANGES TO REGIONAL SCHOOL BUS ELIGIBILITY**

On 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023, Minister for Transport, Hon. Rita Saffioti and Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti announced the following improvements in response to recommendations from the Bus Fair Report:

- Allowing students to attend either their nearest district or senior high school, rather than just their closest school;
- More flexibility for social and community factors to be considered in an application for transport assistance; and
- Allowing eligible students to receive transport assistance to travel to a regional town to attend their selected school.

### **SCHOOL FUNDING FOR STUDENTS TO FOSTER CREATIVE LEARNING SKILLS**

A total of over \$600,000 in grants from the Creativity in Schools program have been handed out to over 16 projects. I look forward to seeing the outcome of the following project:

Carnarvon School of the Air - Creating Music Magic - \$54,319. A collaboration between Carnarvon School of the Air and Creality artists to engage students in storytelling using media and music during the 2024 school year. Students will write a song and create a video in a collaborative approach that will utilise creative pedagogy across curriculum areas.

### **SSTUWA FACING THE FACTS REPORT**

In November 2023 the State School Teachers Union of Western Australia (SSTUWA) ***Facing the Facts: A Review of Public Education*** was released. The SSTUWA commissioned the review into public education in Western Australia. Dr Carmen Lawrence chaired the review panel which presented key findings and 46 recommendations, several of these are quite pertinent to rural and remote schools and their students.

ICPA (WA) met with Lindsay Hale from SSTUWA at our February face-to-face meeting to discuss how we can work together for greater improvements for our geographically isolated children.

A copy can of the report can be found at:

[DIGITAL - Final - Facing the Facts - Summary document - 25Oct23 8.30pm.pdf \(sstuwa.org.au\)](#)

## **SPECIFIC EDUCATION REPORT**

### **Jane Cunningham – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

At the 2023 ICPA (WA) State Conference four motions were presented that related to the need for increased health services and support for children with specific needs. Although we did not receive any favourable news in the area when corresponding with the Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti and Minister for Health, Ms. Amber-Jade Sanderson, opportunities did arise during the year where we could advocate for our members.

### **EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS**

An inquiry commenced on 18<sup>th</sup> May, 2023 with submissions closing on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2023. The areas covered by the terms of reference were:

1. The prevalence of autism in WA and projected demand for support in schools.
2. Current support available for autistic students in WA schools. (A focus on regional, rural and remote at this point.)





3. Strategies in other jurisdictions that support systems to respond to the needs of autistic students, and the applicability of those strategies to WA.

ICPA (WA) presented a submission and was invited to attend a public hearing in October 2023. I attended the hearing and spoke with Chris Tallentire Member for Thornlie, Lisa Bake Member for Maylands, Lisa Munday Member for Dawesville, Caitlin Collins Member for Hillarys, Catie Parsons Principal Research Officer and Sylvia Wolf Research Officer.

The information relating to our rural and remote children with autism was very well received by the Committee.

### **SELECT COMMITTEE INTO CHILD DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES**

ICPA (WA) wrote a submission and Kym Ross and I gave evidence at a hearing in Albany in March 2023. On 28<sup>th</sup> November, 2023, the Select Committee tabled its first report, 'Child Development Services in Western Australia: Valuing our Children and their Needs'.

A copy of the report can be found at: [Committee Details - Inquiry \(parliament.wa.gov.au\)](https://parliament.wa.gov.au/CommitteeDetails-Inquiry)

The members conducting the inquiry were Hon. Dr Sally Talbot MLC, Hon. Donna Faragher MLC and Hon. Samantha Rowe MLC.

### **EDUCATION REVIEW TO SERVE AND SAFEGUARD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY ANNOUNCED**

On 4<sup>th</sup> December, 2023, the Minister of Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti, announced a review of the 'School Education Act 1999' to better safeguard students with disability and to strengthen access, inclusion and services across the public education system.

Telethon Kids Institute autism researcher Professor Andrew Whitehouse will provide expert input and strategic guidance during the review process.

As a supplement to this long-term transformation, a \$2.26 million trial of 16 Complex Behaviour Support Coordinators will help school leaders develop tailored and inclusive approaches that suit the specific needs of students with disability.

### **SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST FTE 2024**

Jim Bell, Deputy Director of Student Achievement, shared the following information in relation to school Psychologist Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for 2024.

In 2021, the State Government committed to an additional one hundred full-time equivalent (FTE) school psychologists for public schools, as well as additional supervising and lead school psychologists. Part of a \$104 million boost for student support and wellbeing, the initiative commenced in 2022, and in 2024 (the third year of the election commitment), more FTE will be directed to schools and regions. The trajectory is outlined below.

	2022	2023	2024	2025
<i>School psychologist FTE</i>	40	20	20	20
<i>Supervision (school psychologist) FTE</i>	4	2	2	2
<i>Lead school psychologist FTE</i>	3	1	1	2

For 2024, additional FTE has also been provided in response to actual and estimated enrolment growth, bringing the total budgeted school psychologist FTE to **397.00**.



## **STUDENT ACCOMMODATION REPORT**

### **Kym Ross – Portfolio Leader, March 2024**

At the preceding State Conference, the Midwest Branch presented a motion concerning the complex issue of support for students with a disability residing in boarding house facilities. The motion aimed to ensure a student's needs are addressed effectively through the implementation of reasonable adjustments and accommodations, and a request for funding to support these students.

### **DISABILITY AND INCLUSION**

Communication has been sent to numerous stakeholders, including the Minister for Education, Minister for Disability Services, Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA), Catholic Education Western Australia (CEWA), Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and ICPA State and Federal Councils, emphasising that while the issue has been recognised, a consistent solution has yet to be implemented.

Minister for Education, Hon. Dr. Tony Buti, conveyed that according to information provided by the Department of Education, every student with a diagnosed disability who has applied to board in a Western Australian government-run residential college has been accepted. In each case, the residential college has effectively accommodated the student and their needs using the resources available.

Residential colleges maintain the practice of evaluating the requirements of each student on a case-by-case basis, ensuring that students with disabilities, for whom boarding is suitable, are offered placement. This process involves collaborating with parents to ensure that appropriate support is provided for every student.

Hon. Don Punch MLA, Minister for Regional Development; Disability Services; Fisheries; Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering reaffirmed that existing funding arrangements that provide specific support for students with disability in boarding are spread across the Commonwealth and State Governments, along with some philanthropic support from not-for-profit organisations.

He concurred that for students residing in educational boarding facilities to achieve the best outcomes, they should have access to the same services and facilities as the broader community, recognising the pivotal role education plays in shaping the lives and futures of young individuals.

Assurance was given that the State Government is committed to working with the Commonwealth Government and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to ensure systems complement one another to achieve important outcomes for all Western Australians with disability.

In recognising the issue raised, the letter noted that this falls under the responsibility of the Hon. Dr Tony Buti MLA, Minister for Education.

Chris Massey, Executive Director of AISWA indicated schools are obligated to implement The Disability Standards for Education (DSE 2005) that seeks to ensure that students with a disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students.

AISWA Inclusive Education Consultants assist member independent schools in implementing these standards as well as supporting, consulting and training staff in addressing the needs of all students with disability including boarding students.

Their role also includes supporting schools in submitting information for both State Government funding (Special Education Supplementary Per Capita) and Federal Government funding (National Consistent Collection of Data – NCCD on school students with disability). Each school has the responsibility and flexibility to disseminate these funds to support the unique and specific needs of every student with a disability.



AISWA has representatives that work with various agencies and is a voice on behalf of independent schools to advocate for students and staff in many areas including disability. They continue to provide input on behalf of their schools to ensure voices are heard and needs are understood.

Dr Debra Sayce, Executive Director of CEWA provided comprehensive information and support. Boarding schools that are under the governance of CEWA for boarding operations include Clontarf Aboriginal College and La Salle College. The following schools provide residential options through externally governed Residential Colleges (Department of Education) and Rotary Residential College:

- Aranmore Catholic College, Leederville
- Nagle Catholic College, Geraldton
- St Mary's College, Broome
- St Joseph's College, Albany
- St Joseph's College, Northam

According to CEWA school data, there are a number of boarding/residential students with a disability across four of the schools listed above. These students are identified with a disability via the Australian Government's Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with a Disability (NCCD). One of these students is also identified via the State Government's Student with a Disability-School Support Program (SWD-SSP), CEWA's equivalent to Schools Plus. The funding from NCCD and SWD-SSP is required to only be used for the purpose of school education.

CEWA boarding schools have also identified the lack of funding specifically for boarding and the need for further wrap-around services in the boarding/residential environment.

Support for students with disability in boarding is provided by the respective boarding/residential college on a needs basis through:

- Collaboration with school staff to communicate needs and support requirements.
- Allied health services – boarding staff support students and families to attend appointments or have services visit the school/boarding i.e. General Practitioner, Ear Nose and Throat (ENT), Hearing;
- Sensory rooms – self-regulation and de-escalation practices.
- Trauma Informed professional learning – Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) Training, Berry Street Education Model (BSEM);
- School Psychologist/Social Workers/Youth Workers that work across school and boarding.
- Inclusive social activities within boarding and with other boarding schools.
- Inclusive design with accessible toilets and bathrooms, ramp access and lifts.

CEWA acknowledges the necessity for dedicated funding to support students with disabilities in boarding/residential colleges, aiming to enhance ongoing support and facilitate access to essential services. CEWA also values the efforts of ICPA (WA) in advocating for additional funding.

The Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) was approached to gather insights into this motion and to comprehend how similar issues are addressed in other facilities nationwide. Additionally, ABSA was queried regarding its stance on and provision of specialized training for boarding staff to assist students with disabilities.

ABSA has limited information on this matter, and to their knowledge, there is no government support available for independent boarding facilities to facilitate alterations to accommodate students with disabilities. While many member schools endeavour to support students with disabilities, ABSA lacks information on how this is addressed nationally. They have not received any requests from their member schools for specific training in this area thus far but would be open to providing it if there is expressed interest.

A request for information was made to each ICPA State Council and the Federal portfolio leader seeking information on how boarding facilities nationwide address this issue, with a unanimous agreement among all

parties that *'it is a grey area where no one wants direct responsibility for boarding students with a disability'*. There is a scarcity or absence of information regarding how these students are adequately accommodated and this issue must continue to be pursued.

During the examination of this motion, it was noted that the Disability Standards for Education 2005 referenced is federal legislation. As a result, the Midwest Branch was advised that this motion should be presented at the Federal Conference.

### **BOARDING SCHOOLS**

Boarding schools are a critical component of educational provision in Australia. They are located in metropolitan, regional and remote areas right across the country, are large and small, single-sex and co-educational and care for a diversity of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to international boarders.

For many families having children board away from home is the only practical and sometimes preferred way to access learning, social opportunities and preparation for employment.

Boarding structures, offerings and options are varied and strive to respond to the diverse needs of families and students. Students can board full-time, on a daily or weekly basis or as required depending on individual circumstances and availability of places. This range of options provides flexibility and diversity of experience and culture.

Boarding schools provide an important educational choice for students and families.

The independent school sector is the largest provider of boarding in Australia, operating almost 75 per cent of all Australian boarding schools. In 2021 there were 140 boarding schools in the independent school sector, housing 14,147 students. Sixteen per cent of boarders in independent boarding schools are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Independent Schools Australia estimates that a further 13 per cent are international students and it is estimated that nationally across all sectors 71 per cent of all boarding students are from rural locations.

Boarder numbers in independent schools have remained relatively constant since 2011 despite increased access to virtual schooling and on-line education. The impacts of COVID restrictions have seen the onset of a steeper decline in student numbers from 2019 to 2020.

The economic and social benefits of boarding schools to the Australian economy and community are considerable. Independent boarding schools are estimated to have contributed to approximately \$1.9 billion in GDP in 2019-20.

Nationally, enrolment growth at all independent schools between 2011 and 2020 was 17.3 per cent or an additional 115,190 enrolments. This growth includes an additional 172 schools. Over the same period, enrolments in independent schools with boarding facilities increased by 8,301 (5.9%), the number of boarding facilities increased by 15 (10.7%) while the boarding population decreased by 1,086 (-6.9%).

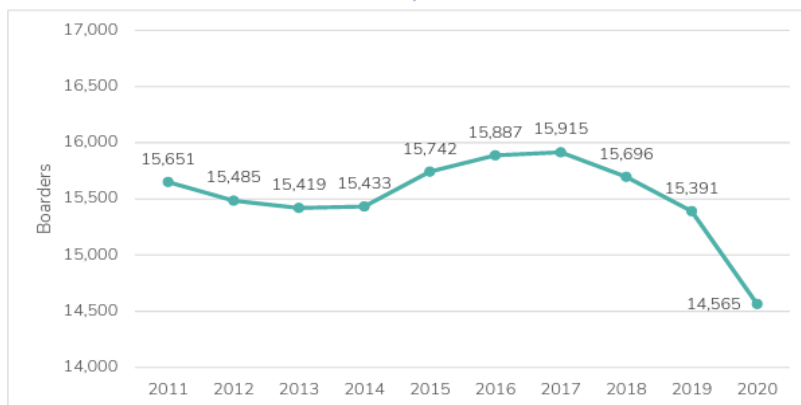
**CHART 1. INDEPENDENT SCHOOL BOARDER GROWTH, 2011 TO 2020**


Chart 1 shows the number of boarders at Independent schools reducing between 2011 and 2013 before growing again to peak at 15,915 in 2017. Since 2017 boarder numbers have fallen to 14,565, a reduction of -6.9% since 2011.

It should be noted that between 2011 and 2019 the number of boarders only decreased by 260 (1.7%). The large fall in boarder numbers between 2019 and 2020 (-5.4%) accounts for most of the reduction in boarders between 2011 and 2020. The most likely reason for the reduction in boarder numbers, especially between 2019 and 2020, is COVID restrictions but the fall continues a downward trend seen since 2017.

### 3.4 INDEPENDENT BOARDING SCHOOL GROWTH BY STATE AND TERRITORY

**TABLE 7. INDEPENDENT BOARDING SCHOOLS AND FACILITIES - BOARDERS AND ENROLMENTS, BY STATE, 2011 AND 2020.**

	NO. OF INDEPENDENT BOARDING FACILITIES (2020)	% OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN THE STATE WITH BOARDING FACILITIES	BOARDERS AT INDEPENDENT BOARDING FACILITIES				ENROLMENTS AT INDEPENDENT BOARDING SCHOOLS			
					GROWTH				GROWTH	
			2011	2020	NO.	%	2011	2020	NO.	%
NSW	48	12.0%	5,342	4,947	-395	-7.4%	40,876	47,364	6,488	15.9%
VIC	27	12.3%	2,635	2,403	-232	-8.8%	32,062	34,058	1,996	6.2%
QLD	34	15.3%	3,837	3,736	-101	-2.6%	30,886	30,939	53	0.2%
SA	10	9.2%	930	896	-34	-3.7%	10,021	10,274	253	2.5%
WA	22	15.0%	1,836	1,773	-63	-3.4%	17,215	16,834	-381	-2.2%
TAS	6	18.2%	289	203	-86	-29.8%	5,105	5,053	-52	-1.0%
NT	6	30.0%	632	463	-169	-26.7%	2,382	2,093	-289	-12.1%
ACT	2	10.5%	150	144	-6	-4.0%	2,928	3,161	233	7.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>15,651</b>	<b>14,565</b>	<b>-1,086</b>	<b>-6.9%</b>	<b>141,475</b>	<b>149,776</b>	<b>8,301</b>	<b>5.9%</b>

Table 7 shows that there has been a reduction in the number of boarders in Independent boarding schools across all states and territories between 2011 and 2020 with the largest falls in Tasmania (-29.8%) and the Northern Territory (-26.7%). The Northern Territory also had the largest fall in total student enrolments at Independent boarding schools (-12.1%) with New South Wales recording the largest increase in enrolments at Independent boarding schools (15.9%).

Between 2011 and 2020 four new independent schools opened that have boarding facilities, two new schools in Western Australia and one each in Queensland and Victoria. Also, eleven new boarding facilities were established in existing independent schools, four in Queensland, two each in Victoria and Western Australia and one in New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. However, the increase in independent boarding schools and facilities in those States was not enough to offset the reduction in boarders in those States.

<https://isa.edu.au/our-sector/diversity/boarding-schools/>



## Boarding in a Western Australian Independent School

Independent Schools in Western Australia offer a wide-ranging educational menu that includes boarding. Over 22 AISWA member schools offer boarding facilities for their students, 17 within the metropolitan area of Perth and 5 situated in rural centres of the state.

TABLE 3 INDICATIVE NUMBER OF AVAILABLE BOARDING PLACES IN THE ABSA 'FIND A SCHOOL' LIST BY STATE AND SECTOR

	INDEPENDENT		CATHOLIC		GOVERNMENT		AUSTRALIA
	NO.	%	NO.	%	NO.	%	
NSW	5,398	83%	353	5%	749	12%	6,500
VIC	2,773	90%	320	10%	0	0%	3,093
QLD	4,192	61%	2,251	33%	396	6%	6,839
SA	814	68%	321	27%	63	5%	1,198
WA	1,849	42%	1,063	24%	1,524	34%	4,437
TAS	280	100%	0	0%	0	0%	280
NT	414	69%	107	18%	77	13%	598
ACT	181	100%	0	0%	0	0%	181
TOTAL	15,901	69%	4,415	19%	2,809	12%	23,125

Table 3 shows that the Independent sector has the highest number of available places at boarding facilities (15,901) and provides more than double the available places in the other two sectors combined. The states with the highest number of available boarding places are Queensland (6,839 or 30%), NSW (6,500 or 28%) and Western Australia (4,437 or 19%).

## National Boarding Week

Took place from 14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> May 2023, the event was advertised on social media under the theme 'digital patchworks' for the National Boarding Week social media competition.

## ASIA-PACIFIC ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION (APAIE)

May 2023, it was announced that the APAIE conference will be held in Perth, on 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Western Australia's international education sector will be in the global spotlight in 2024; it will be eight years since the event was last held in Australia, with Melbourne hosting in 2016.

Thanks must go to StudyPerth, Business Events Perth, the Western Australian Government, Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Murdoch University, the University of Notre Dame and the University of Western Australia. Attracting more than 2,000 professionals and service providers, the highly anticipated event will bring together education leaders, policymakers and experts from around the world to discuss the latest trends and innovations in international education.

The McGowan Government committed \$75.4 million over four years to the State's international education sector, including a \$13.1 million package in the 2023-24 State Budget. International education is one of eight priority sectors identified in the WA Government's 'Diversify WA' economic development framework, recognising the importance of the sector to securing the State's long-term prosperity. (Reference: Media Statement 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023)

## COMMONWEALTH REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

### *Better support for boarding school students from regional Australia*

The Australian Government is investing \$10.9 million in the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program. This program will offer scholarships to students from regional, rural and remote areas, to assist with boarding fees and associated costs.

Scholarships would be available for up to six years, starting in 2024 to support boarding students over the entire period of their secondary school education. A two-tier approach to scholarship support will also provide longer and additional support to families who need it the most.





- Scholarships of \$20,000 per student, per year will be available to support low-income families to meet the cost of boarding school.
- A second tier of scholarships worth \$10,000 per student, per year, will also be available to students from low to middle-income families experiencing financial hardship.

Scholarships available under the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program will commence from the start of the 2024 school year, with up to 100 scholarship places available, or 50 places across each of the two support tiers.

The program settings will be piloted and the outcomes evaluated to inform decisions about future ongoing support, including additional scholarship places in future years if the program is successful.

<https://www.education.gov.au/commonwealth-regional-scholarship-program>

## **TEACHER TRAINING REPORT**

**Jasmine Carmody – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

One motion was presented at the 2023 State Conference.

### **S4 Goldfields Eyre Branch**

***“That ICPA (WA) approach universities who offer the Bachelor of Education to investigate whether preservice/student teachers’ time spent as home tutors on stations could count towards their practical placements as part of their degree.”***

In action to this motion, letters were sent to the Deans of Curtin University, Edith Cowan University (ECU), Murdoch University, Notre Dame University (UNDA) and the University of Western Australia (UWA) asking them to investigate whether they could incorporate a model such as at Charles Darwin University where preservice/student teachers’ time spent as home tutors on stations could count towards their practical placements as part of their degree. Ms. Lisa Rodgers Director General, Department of Education and Hon. Dr Tony Buti were cc’d on these emails. I included a copy of the brochure from Charles Darwin University (CDU) about their education opportunities for home tutors so that they had a model to look at for reference.

Notre Dame University replied with; *“Thank you very much for sharing this. These are exciting developments, and we at Notre Dame would be keen to continue the conversation. There are quite tight rules from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) around what kinds of experiences can ‘count’ as placement days, which can make it challenging to take up opportunities like this, but at UNDA we include a large number of additional placement days in our program design than the minimum required by AITSL, so that does give us some additional flexibility.*

*We are in the process right now of developing new national Initial Teacher Education programs that will be offered in 2024 from both our Sydney and Fremantle campuses and will watch with interest the development of the new CDU qualifications and the links with ICPA (WA) and beginning teachers working as home tutors”.*

UWA responded stating that they do not offer an undergraduate teacher education course.

Murdoch replied with; *“Thank you for reaching out to us about this important innovation. Due to our present commitment to other innovations in the area of professional experience for preservice teachers, we are unable to take up this opportunity at this time. However, we would be pleased to review this opportunity 2024/2025. We wish you every success and thank you again”.*

ECU email could not be delivered and Curtin University unfortunately did not respond.

At the 2023 Federal Conference in Darwin, a pre-conference meeting/information session between ICPA and Charles Darwin University discussed the processes that they collectively undertook to implement training pathways for home tutors through CDU. Unfortunately, WA State Representatives were unavailable to attend the session. ICPA NT has provided us with the pamphlets that were available and spoken about at this session.

## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOME TUTORS

ICPA NT IS WORKING WITH CHARLES DARWIN UNIVERSITY TO CREATE TRAINING PATHWAYS FOR HOME TUTORS



### QUALIFICATION

**Certificate III** in School Based Education Support.  
15 units - 10 core and 5 elective units.


**Cert IV** in School Based Education Support.  
17 units - 13 core and 4 elective units.  
Once completed equates to 40 credit points towards an education degree.

**Diploma** of Educational Studies  
Once completed equates to the first year off an education degree.

### LEARNING

- Learning is online and self-paced.
- Weekly 1-hour online training sessions via TEAMS with CDU lecturer.
- Online lessons to commence Mon 17 October 2022.
- Face to face training sessions in Alice Springs and Katherine during In-School.

#### FOR MORE INFO & TO ENROL

 [steve.kiya@gmail.com](mailto:steve.kiya@gmail.com)



### CAREER IN EDUCATION

Make your 'gap year' in the bush count towards your future.



### RECOGNITION

Due to the nature of the role home tutors play in our classrooms, you may be eligible for recognition of prior learning for some of the course units as well as reduced classroom time.



### FEE EXEMPTION

- Current enrollments free, to be reviewed in Dec 2023.
- RPL admin fee waived for 2022.
- Must be an Australian Citizen and NT Resident



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Goldfields Eyre Branch has been sent an updated letter explaining the actions and responses around this motion.



## **MINISTER FOR EDUCATION ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Media Statement**

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 Minister for Education Hon. Dr Tony Buti, for the Cook Government announced the first instalment of initiatives to reduce red tape, ease workloads and bring about changes in schools to free teachers up to teach.

The first stages will include:

- Testing of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools to reduce teacher workloads and improve learning
- Pilot range of digital solutions to lessen paperwork and administration
- \$2.26 million trial of 16 school-based Complex Behaviour Support Coordinators to help teachers support public school students with disabilities
- Expansion of 'Connect and Respect' program to limit after-hours contact with public school staff

These decisions are based on a review into red tape that was conducted earlier in the year and have considered the findings of two reports and early research into the effective use of AI tools.

Recommendations from the Department of Education's 'Understanding and Reducing the Workload of Teachers and Leaders in Western Australian Public Schools' review and the State School Teachers' Union's 'Facing the Facts' report have informed some of the initiatives. Both of these reports identify the increasing complexities of teaching and the major drivers of workloads for staff, school leaders and schools.

The Cook Government is considering the use of AI already trialled by other Australian states to modernise and make more efficient professional learning, lesson planning, marking and development of assessments. It can also be used to reduce teacher workload by simplifying and automating jobs such as excursion planning, meeting preparation and writing general correspondence.

The Department will work with the School Curriculum and Standards Authority and the independent and catholic sectors to explore how AI can be applied to streamline curriculum planning and improve classroom teaching. This includes creating out-of-office templates which will set limits on when it is acceptable to contact staff after hours.

The aim is to reduce misunderstandings and conflict and allow teaching staff to enjoy a better work-life balance.

### **Media Statement**

On 15<sup>th</sup> January 2024 Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti, for the Cook Government, announced 103 highly experienced educators from around the world have put their hands up to teach in Western Australian public schools following a successful international recruitment campaign by the Cook Labor Government.

The program targets high-quality teachers from the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada.

Sixty of those teachers kicked off a week-long induction ahead of the new school year, where they will have the chance to connect with other educators. The practical induction included specialised learning modules on teaching in WA, cultural responsiveness and classroom management.

The Department is recruiting international teachers through a rigorous selection process and only when there is no teacher in Australia available to fill the role.

A majority of the teachers have been appointed to regional and remote schools where they will bring their diverse and experienced teaching knowledge to the classroom, while also having the chance to explore unique parts of WA.



This continues the Cook Government's ongoing commitment to regional education following the success of the Regional Attraction and Retention Incentive package and a significant number of major school redevelopment projects.

## **TERTIARY, TRADE AND TRAINING REPORT**

**Chandra Ridley – Portfolio Holder, March 2024**

### **UNIVERSITY REVIEW**

In February 2023, the McGowan Government announced an independent review into Western Australia's public university sector. Reviewers will investigate what changes may help to better support the performance and financial sustainability of the States four public universities.

The university sector generates an estimated \$2 billion in economic activity and employs more than 10,000 people.

Even before the COVID pandemic, WA's university sector had become increasingly constrained due to declining Australian Government funding, low student growth and a reduced share of Commonwealth funded Competitive Research Grants.

WA's share of Australian Competitive Research Funding fell from 11 per cent in 2001 to 2.9 per cent in 2022. This was the largest decline of any other Australian State or Territory.

The review will be led by eminent individuals with significant experience in the university sector but no current affiliations with WA universities.

Terms of reference for the review include:

- Meet the state's current and future knowledge and skills needs.
- Increase student enrolments both domestically and internationally.
- Give students equitable access to a high-quality university education.
- Enhance students' experiences of attending university in WA.
- Ensure the financial sustainability of the sector.
- Increase WA's share of the Australian Competitive Research Fund.

### **HEAVY VEHICLE DRIVER TRAINING**

Heavy vehicle driver training is being expanded to cover the Pilbara and Kimberley. The \$3.5 million expansion, building on the previous \$6.1 million investment, is expected to result in more truck drivers hitting the road.

It will support the North Regional TAFE to deliver training to around 350 participants in the Pilbara and Kimberley over a four-year period. It will also support the economy by addressing a need for heavy vehicle training in these areas.

Since February 2023, of the 552 participants enrolled at a TAFE College to undertake Heavy Vehicle Driving Operations programs, 282 had achieved Heavy Rigid, Heavy Combination or Multi Combination licenses. Around 30 per cent of these have been women.

### **MAY 2023 BOOST FOR REGIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE**

The WA State Government has released an action plan to further support the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in regional Western Australia. The Workforce Action Plan addresses nine recommended strategies put forward by the State Training Board's Regional Early Childhood Education and Care Report.



The State Training Board is the Government's chief advisory body on WA's training and workforce needs. Implementing new training opportunities to help build a pipeline of skilled childcare educators remains a key priority for the State Government. According to the ABS Labour Force Survey, as of February 2023, an estimated 14,600 Western Australians are employed as childcare workers or childcare managers. Over the past 12 months, the estimated number employed in these occupations has increased by 1,600.

Many of the initiatives put forward to support the training and development of skilled workers in early childhood education are already underway, including:

- Funding local government grants to help attract and retain childcare workers as part of the State Government's \$5.1 million election commitment to improve access to early childhood education and care in regional WA;
- Providing low-fee existing worker traineeships for key early childhood education and care qualifications to help the sector address the need to upskill its workforce;
- Introducing an Early Childhood Education and Care Job Ready program, which provides entry-level candidates with a pathway into traineeships and jobs in the industry.

Job Ready programs are a fresh approach to short course training that can lead to direct employment. Prepared in collaboration with Community Skills WA, the State Training Board's Regional Early Childhood Education and Care Report was informed by extensive consultation with the regional early childhood education and care sector.

The report and the State Government's Workforce Action Plan are available on the State Training Board's website: <https://www.stb.wa.gov.au>

### **JUNE 2023 REVIEW OF POST-SCHOOL OPTIONS FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS**

The Cook Government has launched a review of senior secondary school pathways in a bid to ensure all Western Australian students can reach their full potential through their post-school study, training or employment pursuits.

'Pathways to Post-School Success' is being led by the Department of Education in partnership with Catholic Education Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia.

Minister for Education, Hon. Dr Tony Buti, said the review would be spearheaded by a panel of education specialists, including principals and tertiary education leaders. A larger advisory committee, representing key stakeholder groups, will work with the advisory panel and provide direction for the review.

The review will explore whether current pathway options are effectively preparing students for the full range of further study, training and work options available to them. A key outcome will be to investigate whether current certification and university entry requirements assist students to make the best study choices as well as identify the barriers to students being able to access equitable pathways. The review is scheduled to conclude early 2024.

### **FEE FREE TRAINING**

All Job Ready short course skill sets will continue to be fee-free for 2024. There are over 130 free training courses available.

### **MURESK EXPANSION**

A new specialist Agriculture Machinery Training Centre was opened at the Muresk Institute in Northam in September 2023. This centre modernises and expands the facilities at Muresk enabling apprentices to complete a Certificate III in Agricultural Mechanical Technology through Central Regional TAFE. Once trained, qualified technicians will service all types of agricultural machinery across WA's broadacre farming industry.



A new \$800,000 shearing shed was also completed at Muresk providing students with high quality training in wool handling and shearing.

Two state-of-the-art combine harvester simulators have also been delivered by the State Government with a range of other machinery options to offer a realistic farming experience in a training environment.

### **DENTAL FACILITY**

In August 2023, the Minister for Training and Workforce Development, Hon. Simone McGurk, opened a \$2.6 million dental training facility at North Metropolitan (NM) TAFE's Leederville Campus. The facility will provide access to training and on-site services for dental students and train more work-ready graduates for the industry. Skilled dental workers are in high demand in Western Australia.

The new facility has approximately triple the space for students.

From 2024 NM TAFE will be offering one day a week courses for secondary students to obtain a Certificate III and IV in Dental Laboratory Assisting.

### **FEE-FREE TRAINING AVAILABLE TO HELP WOMEN INTO THE WORKFORCE IN 2024**

The Certificate I in New Opportunities for Women (NOW) course has been added to the fee-free list for 2024. This course has been developed specifically to help Western Australian women who have been out of paid employment for a long period or who are considering VET pathways - to refresh and boost their skills to be job-ready.

The program provides participants with the opportunity to explore various career options, build self-confidence and gain the necessary foundation skills to progress to other VET courses or take up entry-level jobs.

NOW is open to women of all ages and backgrounds and can be accessed either full or part time with flexible training hours to suit women with family responsibilities. Special provisions have also been made to fully subsidise the resource fees associated with the course providing equal access to all Western Australian women.

### **SCHOLARSHIPS FOR WOMEN**

In November 2023, the State Government announced that starting from 2024, it will provide 400 TAFE scholarships for women with a one-off payment of \$5,000. Applications opened for Women in Non-Traditional Trades Scholarship (WiNTT), a program to help women break down stereotypes and train for their dream career.

The WiNTT program is part of the Cook Government's \$3 million four-year investment to help reduce barriers to training and support increased workforce participation in traditionally male-dominated industries such as building and construction, automotive and electrical and engineering and mining.

There are currently around 2,500 women enrolled in courses eligible for the program - less than 12 per cent - and it is hoped the WiNTT scholarship will help drive increased participation. Scholarship recipients will benefit from tailored mentoring and support services to help them to complete their qualification and successfully transition into a career in their chosen industry.

### **TWO WESTERN AUSTRALIANS NAMED NATIONAL WINNERS AT AUSTRALIAN TRAINING AWARDS IN 2023**

Now in its 30<sup>th</sup> year, the Australian Training Awards reward and recognize apprentices, trainees, VET students, teachers, practitioners, employers and training providers from around Australia.





Amy Hunt was the worthy winner of Australian Apprentice of the Year, 2023. She is the only woman and youngest cable joiner on her worksite. She credits her training experience with enhancing her leadership and communication skills. She was drawn to the fast-changing environment of the power industry and was inspired by her father and brother to enter a trade.

Craigie's Holly Gudsell was named Australian VET Teacher/Trainer of the Year, 2023. A teaching position in a remote aboriginal community near Fitzroy Crossing was the catalyst for a change in career direction for Holly as she discovered an interest in Aboriginal education. While lecturing in Education Support at North Metropolitan TAFE Holly was approached to develop and deliver a new program for the Department of Education to upskill Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officers (AIEO) across Perth Metropolitan schools.

She delivered a '*mixed mode*' course that successfully supported Aboriginal students through Certificate III and IV in School Based Education Support (SBES).

## **TRAVEL REPORT**

### **Kym Ross – Portfolio Support, March 2024**

During 2023, the Travel Portfolio once again focused on the challenges encountered by our rural and remote students in accessing education. At the preceding State Conference five motions were presented addressing a range of issues.

The Midwest Branch and Lakes District Branch presented two motions advocating for an increase to the payment rate per kilometre for the Public Transport Authority (PTA) Conveyance Allowance to better reflect the costs associated with running a vehicle.

In a submission to the Minister for Transport regarding the Road Travel Subsidy in October 1988 ICPA (WA) recommended the Road Travel Subsidy rate be increased from 9 cents per kilometre to 20 cents per kilometre. The last review of the Conveyance Allowance rate occurred in June 2002 by the School Bus Task Force, which supported a rate of 16.08 cents per kilometre based on the RAC (WA) private running costs for a Ford Falcon 4 Lt GLI Auto Sedan. This rate was linked to the Transport CPI (Perth) index to allow for inflation. Interestingly, some 35 years later the current rate of Road Travel Subsidy is 25.24 cents per kilometre.

Correspondence to the Minister for Transport, Hon. Rita Saffioti MLA and the Public Transport Authority concerning an increase was once again brought up making reference to the Student Transport Assistance Policy Framework review and recommendations as outlined in the 'Bus Fair Report' by the Public Accounts Committee (18<sup>th</sup> August 2022). We were informed the PTA would explore alternate rate options, and it was emphasised that the allowance is only intended to assist in covering the running costs of a motor vehicle and not the costs of ownership. Any adjustments to the rate would apply to eligible families starting from the beginning of the 2024 school year.

Under the Student Transport Policy framework, eligible regional students generally have access to orange school buses contracted by the PTA. However, where it is not possible to provide a dedicated bus service, a conveyance allowance is provided to parents to help with the cost of driving their eligible children to and from school or, in some cases, to connect with a service.

State Council has long advocated for an increase in this allowance; the news of a raise in the Conveyance Allowance rate for school travel in regional areas to 55.6 cents per kilometre, effective Term 1, 2024, was a welcomed development, especially prior to Christmas.



During our October 2023 face-to-face meetings in Perth, a council delegation convened with Mr. John Bailly, Manager of School Bus Services, to deliberate on additional motions presented in 2023, including:

- **Wearing of Seatbelts**

School Bus Services (SBS) confirmed the PTA Code of Conduct mandates that all passengers must remain seated and securely fasten their seatbelts. Non-compliance constitutes a Category 1 Offense under the Code, resulting in a record against the student's personal file. Repeated breaches may result in suspension from the bus service. Additional details regarding the Code of Conduct are outlined in the Behaviour Management Guidelines,

accessible

[here](#).

<https://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/TransportAssistance/RelatedInformation/Behaviouronacontractschoolbus.aspx>

It is important to note that SBS lacks jurisdiction over buses that are hired.

- **Look Before You Lock**

The introduction of a safety program similar to that currently operating in Queensland was addressed in meetings with School Bus Services. The requirement for further safety programs was considered unnecessary, given the confidence placed in the current safety measures. Nonetheless, all stakeholders recognised the potential advantages of emphasising specific safety measures anew. It was agreed that contractors should be reminded about the significance of exercising due diligence and the repercussions of not adhering to safety standards.

## **ISSUES**

ICPA (WA) collaborated with three branches to address issues concerning members' access to suitable school bus services in their respective areas.

Members of the Esperance Branch advocated for the reinstatement of the Munglinup East bus route following its cancellation in 2022. With twenty-five children attending the Munglinup Munchkins playgroup, this shows a strong increase in the number of future students requiring this service. Despite concerted efforts from both our organisation and the community, regrettably, no review or adjustment to this service has been successfully accomplished.

We were also advised of the proposed amalgamation of the Tambellup Flat Rocks and Lake Toolbrunnup bus routes servicing the Tambellup Primary School. Correspondence was sent to Mr John Bailly, SBS in September 2023 and we have since been advised that this decision has now been revoked.

ICPA (WA) received a request for assistance from members of the Lakes District Branch who were advised of the termination of the South Gairdner Chillinup service due to steadily declining student numbers. The service operated for two complimentary passengers (without registered eligible student passengers) and was therefore deemed unsustainable given the low student numbers and any possible future students in the area are expected to be supported by the remaining surrounding network. At the conclusion of the 2023 school year this service was terminated and alternative arrangements with another bus contractor were introduced for 2024.

Members from this same branch were also affected by alterations to services on the Gairdner South Bus route that were to be introduced at the commencement of Term 4, 2023. Correspondence and appeals were submitted to School Bus Services regarding these changes. Families were notified by their contractor late Friday afternoon, just before school was due to commence the following Monday, about the cancellation of the spur and termination of bus stops. Particularly for one family, this proposal seemed illogical as they were required to drive their child 7.7km down the road to catch the bus, only for the bus to pass by their gate with



a designated safe pull-off approved bus stop. Fortunately, common sense prevailed and the decisions affecting families using this service were reversed.

## **ROAD TRAVEL**

### **Improvements to be Implemented for Regional School Bus Eligibility**

Among the forty recommendations tabled in the 'Bus Fair Report', the Minister for Transport has approved several amendments to the School Bus eligibility criteria in November 2023, these include:

- **Secondary School Election Rule**

From 2024, where a student completes Year 6 at a primary school (not part of a school offering secondary year levels) they shall be eligible for transport assistance to either their nearest appropriate senior high school or the nearest appropriate district high school for Year 7 rather than just their closest school.

- **School Local-Intake Areas**

Eligibility rules have been amended to remove the disconnect between Nearest Appropriate School and a student's requirement to enrol at a school with a 'local-intake area'.

- **Regional Town Transport Boundaries**

Where an application for student transport assistance is approved to a school located within a Regional City or Town where there is a designated Public Transport Area (e.g. Bunbury, Albany), eligibility will now be extended to where there are multiple schools of the same denomination within the transport boundary.

Eligibility will be determined by distance to the requested school being greater than 4.5km from the student's residence.

- **Social, Economic, Financial and Community Factors**

In rural and regional areas, a nearest appropriate school for transport assistance purposes might not be the same town or centre where a family has well established social, working, health care and community recreational networks, where this town also has a school. More flexibility for social and community factors to be considered in an application for transport assistance.

When determining the nearest appropriate school, where a family resides a similar distance (up to 5 km) from two or more schools, consideration will be given to social, economic, financial and community factors.

All transport solutions will be bound by the defining principle of no adverse impacts on the broader cohort of travelling students in the region attending their nearest appropriate school.

The Department of Education advised the rollout of the new eligibility allowing students to choose either their closest district or senior high school will be rolled out in 12 months' time for a small number of select schools. The 12-month deferral for these schools will provide the Department of Education time to assess the long-term impacts of the change on those particular schools.

The 5 district high schools where implementation will be delayed for one year are:

- Boddington District High School
- Carnamah District High School
- Gingin District High School
- Lake Grace District High School
- Wongan Hills District High School



This also applies to the primary schools that feed into them. Students are still able to apply for a complimentary seat on a bus to a senior high school should eligibility criteria be met. The primary schools are:

- Coorow Primary School
- Bindoon Primary School
- Lancelin Primary School
- Kukerin Primary School
- Calingiri Primary School
- Yerecoin Primary School
- Wandering Primary School

Further information on eligibility criteria can be found in the [STAP and Operational Guidelines](https://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4Oly1kngmwk%3d&portalid=2).  
<https://www.schoolbuses.wa.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=4Oly1kngmwk%3d&portalid=2>

### Free Public Transport for School Students and Sundays

The Labor Government announced in January 2024 its latest cost-of-living relief measure, with free public transport to be provided for school student travel and the entire community every Sunday. The announcement follows the success of the Summer of Free Public Transport, which began on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2023 and concluded 28<sup>th</sup> January 2024. The new initiative provides ongoing cost-of-living relief to Western Australian families.

The Ride to School Free Program will be specifically for travel to and from school Monday to Friday and will be available to those who hold a valid Student SmartRider card. The Ride to School Free Program will commence on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024, while the Fare Free Sundays will begin on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

Families who have two children travelling to and from school daily on public transport could see savings of up to \$560 across the school year as a result of the change. The Ride to School Free Program will benefit every student who rides the bus or train to school – with around 300,000 students currently holding Student SmartRiders.

### School Bus Services

Did you know?

- The contract school bus network services around 530 schools across the State.
- The contract SBS network comprises of 962 buses.
- On average 26,400 regional and special education students use contract school buses each day.
- The total SBS network travels per year is estimated at 33.0 million kilometres.
- They have been transporting students for over one hundred years.
- Services extend from Esperance to Wyndham.

### Smoking and Vaping on School Buses

There has been an increase in complaints and reports relating to the use of electronic cigarettes (or e-cigarettes – also known as 'vapes') on school buses.

Smoking or the use of vapes on the school bus is unacceptable and considered a serious breach of the Code of Conduct and will be managed in accordance with the Behaviour Management Guidelines as a Category 3: Dangerous and Offensive Behaviour.

Penalties for this category include:

- First Offence – Suspension up to 1 Week
- Second Offence – Suspension 2 to 4 weeks

- Subsequent Offence – Suspension 5+ weeks and permanent suspension from the service may also be considered.

## **AIR TRAVEL**

### **Capped Airfares Prove Popular in the First Year**

- 151,181 capped airfares flown in the first 12 months of the Regional Airfare Zone Cap (RAZC) scheme.
- 42,519 airfares were flown in the fourth quarter of the scheme.
- The initiative is making flying significantly cheaper for regional residents.
- The scheme will be in place until June 2025.

The popularity of the State Government's successful Regional Airfare Zone Cap (RAZC) scheme continues to surge with more than 150,000 airfares flown in the first year of the scheme.

The latest quarter results show more than 42,500 capped airfares were used by regional residents between April and June 2023. This is a five per cent increase on the third quarter results and brings the total amount of fares used during the first year of the scheme to 151,181.

Karratha-Perth remained the most popular route during the June 2023 quarter, with the highest uptake of 11,253 capped airfares. Kalgoorlie had the quarter's second-highest results of 5,967 fares flown, followed by Port Hedland with 5,926 and Broome with 4,371.

Geraldton, Broome, and Exmouth experienced significant growth in demand in the June 2023 quarter, with quarterly increases of 30 per cent, 27 per cent and 23 per cent respectively.

The RAZC scheme launched in July 2022 and is an Australian-first initiative, delivered in partnership with six participating airlines to provide regional residents with access to capped airfares to Perth of either \$199 or \$299 one-way, when booked as a return fare for personal travel.

Route	Zone Cap / RAZC Fares Flown				
	Q4: Apr- Jun '23	Q3: Jan- Mar '23	Q2: Oct- Dec '22	Q1: Jul- Sep '22	Grand Total (12 months)
<b>Karratha</b>	11,253	10,581	9,840	6,404	38,078
<b>Kalgoorlie</b>	5,967	5,949	5,371	3,317	20,604
<b>Port Hedland</b>	5,926	5,951	5,200	3,013	20,090
<b>Broome</b>	4,371	3,201	5,103	4,052	16,727
<b>Esperance</b>	2,929	3,391	3,558	2,980	12,858
<b>Paraburdoo</b>	2,841	2,901	2,595	2,017	10,354
<b>Albany</b>	2,320	2,148	2,173	1,699	8,340
<b>Carnarvon</b>	1,334	1,619	1,742	1,459	6,154
<b>Exmouth</b>	1,730	1,328	974	964	4,996
<b>Newman</b>	1,262	1,233	1,077	933	4,505
<b>Geraldton</b>	1,384	968	886	710	3,948
<b>Kununurra</b>	736	813	720	529	2,798
<b>Monkey Mia</b>	243	229	212	159	843
<b>Leonora</b>	79	64	69	85	297
<b>Meekatharra</b>	76	85	78	58	297
<b>Laverton</b>	47	36	63	40	186
<b>Wiluna</b>	19	28	29	19	95
<b>Mount Magnet</b>	2	6	2	1	11
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>42,519</b>	<b>40,531</b>	<b>39,692</b>	<b>28,439</b>	<b>151,181</b>



The State Government has committed to running the scheme over three years to June 2025.

### **Airlines Appointed to Service Fully Regulated Regional Air Routes**

- Rex and Skippers Aviation to provide fully regulated regional air services following a tender process.
- New deeds will ensure continued air services for key routes in regional WA.
- New service commitments apply from October 2023 until July 2028.

Rex and Skippers Aviation were awarded exclusive rights to operate air services on select regional Western Australian routes, that are fully regulated by the State Government following an open, competitive tender process.

Rex was awarded the rights to operate services between Perth and Albany, Esperance, Carnarvon/Monkey Mia; and Skippers Aviation was awarded the rights to operate the air routes of Perth-Laverton-Leonora and Perth-Wiluna-Meekatharra-Mount Magnet, collectively known as the Northern Goldfields.

Rex and Skippers Aviation are the current service providers on the routes for which they successfully tendered. New agreements between the State Government and both airlines will come into effect in October 2023, lasting until July 2028.

As part of its successful bid, Rex has committed to 24 minimum weekly return services on the Albany-Perth route, 22 minimum return services on the Esperance-Perth route and 12 return services on the Carnarvon route (seven connecting to Monkey Mia).

Skippers Aviation will continue to operate three weekly return services in line with current schedules to Laverton, Leonora, Meekatharra, Mount Magnet and Wiluna, with potential for additional services dependent on demand.

Both airlines will also offer regional residents access to capped airfares for personal travel to and from Perth as part of the State Government's successful Regional Airfare Zone Cap scheme.

### **Nexus - Western Australia's Newest Airline**

- Nexus Airlines commences services on the Inter-Regional Flight Network (IRFN).
- Expanded and improved IRFN supported by State Government investment of \$4 million.
- The inaugural route to include the first direct flight service between Karratha and Geraldton.
- Zone Cap fares are available on Nexus Airlines Geraldton to Perth return service.

Western Australia's newest airline took to the skies on 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2023 for its first commercial flight on the expanded Inter-Regional Flight Network (IRFN).

Nexus Airlines departed from Geraldton on the newly expanded IRFN route, which operates between Geraldton-Karratha-Port Hedland-Broome and return. The route serves the needs of regional residents by allowing them to fly direct between regional centres, instead of having to travel through Perth.

A State Government investment of \$4.05 million over four years is supporting the new link between Geraldton and Karratha and has allowed the airline to invest in higher-capacity 76-seater aircraft to reduce airfares and increase passenger comfort.

Nexus Airlines has exclusive rights to operate the IRFN until June 2027 under a four-year deed of agreement with the State Government. The agreement outlines the requirements to operate on the route, including providing appropriate service levels and fares.





The State Government's expansion of the IRFN and the improved services offered by Nexus Airlines are expected to create significant new business and tourism opportunities for the Mid-West, Pilbara and Kimberley regions.

Nexus Airlines' Geraldton-Perth flights began on 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2023, with Geraldton residents able to access capped airfares on the route through the State Government's Regional Airfare Zone Cap scheme.

## **FEDERAL**

### **Survey**

Federal Council Travel Portfolio Leader Jen Ruska emailed members on 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 2023 with a questionnaire regarding flight routes and how members actively access the Qantas residents' fare program. This is in response to motions from the Federal Conference over the past few years regarding the need for concessional airfares for rural and remote students to access educational institutions. Federal councillors continue to have talks with Qantas senior staff.

### **Briefing Paper**

Federal Council has published the 2023-24 School Travel Portfolio Briefing Paper. Key areas for this report in summary are:

1. The inclusion of a Fares Allowance in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme similar to that of ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance.
2. Airfares and other travel concessions and dispensations are available for geographically isolated students.
  - Student concessions for airfares and other nationwide travel need to be made available for necessary boarding school travel and specific education appointments not covered by Patient Assisted Travel Schemes or the State equivalent available for medical specialist appointments.
  - Geographically isolated students who receive the Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance should be able to access corporate travel airfare program discounts, similar to recipients of other government allowances.
3. Implementation of a national funding program that would guarantee no young geographically isolated children are left on school or childcare buses by installing sensor devices that sense sound and movement, to detect and alert drivers if young children have been left in the vehicle.
4. Improvements are required to federally funded regional and remote road networks to ensure safe all-weather access standards for families who require these road networks in order for their children to access educational opportunities and support. Currently there are roads that have deteriorated and are in appalling condition and therefore not safe.

<https://icpa.com.au/au/federal-school-travel-briefing-paper>

## **RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (RREAC) REPORT**

### **Naomi Obst – Appointee, March 2024**

The Rural and Remote Education Advisory Council (RREAC) was established in 1997 to provide advice to the then Minister for Education on specific issues and needs of rural and remote Western Australians. ICPA (WA) has an appointed position on council. Jodie Hans, MLA is the current chair. Currently a review is being undertaken of the Terms of Reference and information regarding RREAC will be updated when available.