

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2021 FEDERAL CONFERENCE PORTFOLIO REPORTS

BOARDING/HOSTELS/SECOND HOME PORTFOLIO

Nikki Macqueen

The Boarding/Hostels/Second Home portfolio has continued to focus on key topics which concern our families, from recent issues brought about by the COVID-19 Pandemic to more longstanding issues, including the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance. The ICPA (Aust) Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Briefing Paper, found here gives an outline of the key topics being worked on at this time.

<https://icpa.com.au/au/federal-boardinghostelssecond-home-briefing-paper>

COVID-19 and Beyond

COVID-19 has continued to raise serious issues for boarding students and families right across Australia and we are looking at the likelihood of 2022 being similar. Due to the online platform of the 2020 ICPA Federal Conference only motions not already in policy were accepted on the agenda and four motions were carried in the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio. Two Pandemic related motions were tabled regarding the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) guidelines for boarding as well as the establishment of an Isolated Children's Pandemic Advisory Group made up of State and Federal Education Ministers, relevant authorities, the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and ICPA representatives to address the issue of boarders crossing state borders to access their compulsory schooling.

Interstate Boarders

ICPA (Aust) and State Councils, along with other stakeholders including the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) have worked collaboratively and tirelessly on behalf of families who need to cross state borders to travel to and from boarding schools, including a joint submission made in November 2020 to the Hon Andrew Gee MP, Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education indicating the vision of a National Framework to support interstate boarders. Thanks must go to every ICPA State President and their Councils for the commitment that they have given which was beyond impressive and certainly appreciated by Federal Council and duly noted by the Federal Government.

Due to a cabinet reshuffle, Senator Bridget McKenzie replaced Minister Gee and we continue to work proactively with the Minister and her staff to ensure the rural and remote voice is strongly represented when it comes to boarders and borders.

Following a year and a half of collaborative and united advocacy for the establishment of a nationally consistent and practical solution to provide certainty and clarity for families whose children board interstate, the news that the National Cabinet had endorsed a National Code for Boarding Students in September 2021 was very welcome. This Code sets forth a roadmap for nationally consistent, pragmatic, COVID-safe travel arrangements to help families navigate border

restrictions across all states for boarding students. Further information and the Code can be found at <https://www.dese.gov.au/covid-19/resources/national-code-boarding-school-students>

Our gratitude goes to Senator Bridget McKenzie, Senator Perin Davey, Minister Andrew Gee, Senator Susan McDonald and other Members of Parliament, Senators and stakeholders for their dedication to achieving this outcome for geographically isolated interstate boarding students and their families impacted by the pandemic.



Boarding schools across Australia have also been supportive and proactive in assisting geographically isolated families through some challenging times during the COVID-19 Pandemic. On behalf of our members, this message was published in the August 2020 ABSA magazine “Lights Out” which is sent to every Boarding School and Hostel throughout Australia to thank Boarding Schools for working closely with boarder families to deliver online lessons when the COVID-19 Pandemic resulted in temporary closure.

Religious Discrimination Bill

Following on from the 2020 Conference, ICPA (Aust) has also continued to monitor the introduction of the Religious Discrimination Bill to ensure that rural and remote students are not disadvantaged. Work had begun on this prior to last year’s Conference as this issue had been raised in early 2020. ICPA (Aust) has had several discussions with Members of Parliament, Senators and various individuals and organisations including ABSA regarding the Religious Discrimination Bill. At this stage, the Bill has been tabled, however we note there have been no further advancements from our reviews of the legislation. We shall continue our work in this area and monitor the situation closely.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC)

The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme continues to be a central focus of the Portfolio. ICPA (Aust) has welcomed the commitment by the Government to continue to pay the allowance in 2020 and 2021 even while some geographically isolated boarding students have been unable to access their schools. Federal Council encourages members to contact the AIC hotline 13 23 18 should they be impacted in any way in the future.

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate strongly for the AIC allowance to be increased across the board and to be aligned with the CPI Education Sub-index, rather than standard CPI rate, as this does not reflect nor keep pace with the ongoing rises in educational costs for boarding. COVID-19 has extenuated this issue, with the economic impact of the Pandemic resulting in negligible increases to CPI and therefore no increase to the AIC Boarding Allowance from 2020 to 2021 and only a limited increase to the AIC Second Home Allowance. This is very concerning as it will result in further increases to out-of-pocket expenses for geographically isolated families to educate their children, which are already proving unsustainable for many. ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise this issue at every opportunity in the coming months.

Following Canberra delegations in May, ICPA (Aust) sought to strengthen its AIC advocacy in an effort to better represent the experiences and needs of our geographically isolated children and their families. Ministers, Members of Parliament, Senators and Government Departments will receive a newly developed AIC Briefing Paper, which collates all the AIC issues in the one document. We have also supplemented this with case studies of members’ situations forwarded to us from State Councils. This AIC Paper can be found on the ICPA website at

To assist our advocacy, ICPA (Aust) has prepared the below table using available data to exemplify the changes in boarding fees in comparison to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Basic Boarding Allowance. While state to state the figures are quite diverse and we have not been able

Comparison of average Boarding fees and Assistance For Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme								
AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2015	AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2021	% Increase of AIC 2015-2021	State	Average Boarding Fee 2015	Average Boarding Fee 2021	% Increase of Boarding fees 2015-2021	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2015	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2021
\$7 897	\$8 557	8%	Vic	-	\$26 631	-	-	32%
			WA	-	\$22 730	-	-	38%
			SA	\$19 991	\$22 789	14%	39%	37%
			ACT	-	\$26 042	-	-	33%
			Tas	\$15 467	\$19 533	26%	51%	44%
			NT	\$14 233	\$24 830	74%	55%	34%
			Qld	\$17 288	\$20 430	18%	46%	42%
AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2014	AIC – Basic Boarding Allowance 2021	% Increase of AIC 2014-2021	State	Average Boarding Fee 2014	Average Boarding Fee 2021	% Increase of Boarding fees 2014-2021	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2014	% Boarding Fees covered by AIC 2021
\$7 667	\$8 557	12%	NSW	\$20 331	\$25 206	24%	38%	34%

to obtain all data for all states, there is no doubt that the trend is boarding fees are rising significantly more than AIC each year. Federal Council is immensely grateful for the AIC payment and acknowledge the growth in the payment over the years since its inception, however, we continue to harbour concerns about the impacts of the ever-increasing gap between boarding fees and the AIC payment on the ability for our families to access adequate schooling for their children. AIC online renewal has been a motion raised often throughout the years and it is something that we mention in every meeting we have with the Department of Social Services. We have been told it will be rolled out in 2022, and we shall continue to hold the Department to that. There have often been mistakes in AIC paperwork sent from the Department to families as well as erroneous payments, and we are hopeful that an online renewal/application system will alleviate these inaccuracies.

Socio-Economic Status Score Methodology for School Funding

At the 2019 Federal Conference, members raised concerns on the Socio-Economic Status Score Methodology for school funding and its impact on regional, rural and remote students and the schools they attend, especially those who must attend independent boarding schools to access their education.

ICPA (Aust) has been monitoring this topic closely and since March 2020, has lodged two submissions to the National School Resourcing Board (NSRB) in which Council accentuated the concerns of our members. We also took the opportunity to participate in a consultation with the Board where we raised the concerns of members and highlighted the unique circumstances of rural and remote families, especially around the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) methodology along with the disregard for boarding operations in the funding measure. This was also a key topic raised during delegations in Parliament House in May this year. The Hon Alan Tudge MP, Minister for Education has tasked Minister Gee with investigating the anomalies which have been raised by ICPA (Aust) and

other organisations to ascertain the impact on rural, regional and remote schools, and we hope that this will see this issue addressed.

Other Portfolio Activities

In May 2021 ICPA (Aust) President Alana Moller and myself were guest presenters on an ABSA webinar titled "Solving the Homesickness Challenge" directed at Heads of Boarding across Australia. We thank ABSA for the opportunity to put forward a rural and remote parents' perspective and for inviting us to be involved in such a great presentation. We look forward to participating in such forums again in the future. Federal Council is pleased to be able to work with ABSA on a range of topics and are grateful for their ongoing support and assistance for not only the boarding portfolio but for ICPA as a whole.

Thank you to the Boarding/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio Kristen Coggan, Nikki Mahony, Kim Hughes and Alana Moller for your assistance this year. This will be my final report as I shall be stepping off Council after this Conference. Over the seven years I have been on Council, I have either led or been a member of this portfolio, and I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute. During this time, I have seen the Portfolio change name, the launch of the Australian Boarder Parent Handbook by Dr Kate Hadwen, undertook the ICPA (Aust) AIC Application Survey and the Boarding School Access Research for Geographically Isolated Students, had countless phone calls and meetings with Department officials including the legendary Guy Mathews and Matt Ferguson plus attended three ABSA Conferences representing ICPA (Aust). I would like to express my heartfelt thank you to Richard Stokes, Tom Dunsmore and their team at ABSA for always being only a phone call away and for keeping their door open. The support they offer ICPA and our rural and remote boarding families across Australia is astounding. Thank you to the three Presidents I have served my term under: Judy Sinclair Newton, Wendy Hick and Alana Moller, and to every Federal Councillor during that time. As I have always said, ICPA has given me far more than I have given it.

COMMUNICATIONS PORTFOLIO

Kristen Coggan

ICPA (Aust) has continued to work closely with the Federal Government, telecommunications companies and other like-minded stakeholders to seek the maintenance and development of adequate, affordable and reliable communications services for families in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly for educational outcomes.

Throughout the past year we have continued our membership in the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC), attending regular RRRCC meetings and associated stakeholder forums. We have taken these opportunities to impart the experiences and concerns of ICPA (Aust) members across many communications issues. ICPA (Aust) is also a member of the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and have a representative on the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman (TIO) Consumer Panel where we further raise awareness of communication challenges for rural and remote students and their families.

Federal Council's work in the Communications portfolio has continued extensively this past year.

Internet

ICPA (Aust) maintains regular contact with NBN Co and Telstra to ensure that the data and other communications needs of geographically isolated students are at the forefront of their minds and that initiatives introduced such as the introduction of Sky Muster Plus are maintained and continue to be enhanced. Sky Muster Plus has been an exciting development whereby many educational sites are now unmetered content on these satellite plans and ICPA (Aust) are in the fortunate position to be able to liaise with nbn to continue the ongoing conversation regarding the unmetering of any sites that are needed for educational purposes. Federal Council will continue to ensure members are informed of the best choices for them in terms of accessing adequate and high-quality internet services for their children's education purposes. We are also working with Telstra and State Councils to establish increased unmetered data for educational requirements of geographically isolated students when mobile services are used.

In delegation meetings with the Minister for Communications, Urban infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP and Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, Federal Council highlighted that for many geographically isolated families, online learning is ongoing and the requirement for adequate and high-quality internet services in regional, rural and remote locations are essential to guarantee access to equitable education. We have sought assurance that the Government will ensure that the communications initiatives continue to be enhanced, improved and expanded for these geographically isolated students.

Alternative internet services and technology

Members highlighted at the 2020 Federal Conference that the limited alternatives for internet connectivity and services in rural, regional and remote Australia continue to impede equitable access to educational opportunities for students in these areas. To that end, members sought to encourage the Commonwealth Government to work proactively and cooperatively with companies attempting to bring diverse universal broadband internet to Australia, including alternative satellite-based internet services and technologies. Federal Council contacted the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) as well as both Minister Fletcher and Minister Coulton, citing the importance of options and choice when accessing internet services, with the potential of alternative technology providing more affordable, practical and accessible solutions for geographically isolated families.

ICPA (Aust) understands there are already alternative solutions becoming available in Australia and that the Federal Government supports and encourages the development of these new technologies to provide increased choice for members. We will continue to watch this space and keep members informed of any developments in this regard.

ICPA (Aust) has been in meetings directly with alternative supplier Starlink and look forward to the prospect of what this could mean for our members. Currently Starlink are beta testing their product and service in Australia and have roughly 400 connections located in Southern Australia. Starlink are very keen to service more of Australia as they keep launching more satellites and build more ground stations. More information is available here

<https://birraus.com/starlink-in-australia/>

Portable internet supply for transient GI students

An ongoing concern for members is the lack of access to internet services for transient geographically isolated students who study via distance education, which is often reliant on connectivity to access the curriculum and other aspects of schooling. ICPA (Aust) has continued to raise this issue in a variety of forums, and we can reassure members that there is activity in regards to progressing a practical solution for these families. Federal Council would welcome any case studies from families who face this conundrum, so we are able to ensure your needs are recognised. We are pleased there have been some progress in this space, with trials being undertaken and solutions being investigated, however we will continue to highlight that families will require financial and possibly other support to access these solutions.

Telephone

ICPA (Aust) is acutely aware that access to adequate telephony continues to be high on the agenda for members.

ICPA (Aust) corresponded and met virtually with Telstra on a number of occasions requesting that Telstra provide a customer end technology roadmap for the transition from existing mobile phone configurations to country 5G due in 2024. We have been assured by Telstra that they are working earnestly in this space and we will certainly keep members informed of developments as they arise.

Federal Council have also sought from the Federal Government, in correspondence with the Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP and Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, consideration of financial assistance or a rebate for rural and remote customers who use mobile broadband for education to upgrade the equipment they may be currently using to access these services (including antennas, boosters that may be rendered obsolete) to ensure ongoing coverage and service in locations whereby alternative telecommunications may otherwise be unavailable. While our requests have been met with some understanding and empathy, we cannot say anything has developed in this space.

Alternative Voice Trials

The \$2 million Alternative Voice Services Trials program (or AVST) aims to identify new ways to deliver voice services (including by new providers) to assess their effectiveness and raise awareness of alternative solutions to provide better services and functionality.

Six AVST grants have now been awarded to Concerotel, NBN Co, Optus, Pivotel, Telstra and Zetifi to deliver up to 885 trial services in different rural and remote locations across Australia. ICPA (Aust) are disappointed that many of the “alternatives” are satellite based as we would like to see our families with access to at least two alternative sources of communications. In saying this, we have been

assured that nothing will change with regards to current phone service types unless the solutions are equal to or better than existing services.

Regional Tech Hub

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the launch of the Regional Tech Hub, a Federal Government initiative to offer free, independent advice to regional Australians on the best internet and mobile phone connection for work, study and lifestyle needs in late 2020. The establishment of the Regional Tech Hub comes as a direct result of requests from ICPA (Aust), its members, other stakeholders and organisations, for regional, rural and remote communications assistance to be made available. The Hub is being jointly operated by the National Farmers Federation (NFF) and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). ICPA are working closely with the Hub staff and are a part of the Regional Tech Hub Stakeholder Reference Group. Federal Council encourages members to familiarise themselves with the Regional Tech Hub and access their services when required via their website <https://regionaltechhub.org.au> through the Regional Tech Hub Facebook page, including a new discussion board initiative, Twitter, by email: helpdesk@regionaltechhub.org.au or contact the Hub's hotline on 1300 081 029. The Hub also has some provider contact details and a handy printout you can fill in for easy reference when you need it. <https://regionaltechhub.org.au/stay-connected/provider-contact-sheet/>

ICPA (Aust) has been involved in the development of the education section on the Hub's website and look forward to continuing to work with the Hub staff to ensure the needs of our members are recognised and considered. ICPA (Aust) believes that this service needs to be retained and expanded and urge the Government to provide surety of ongoing and secure funding for the Hub's continuation past the current 12-month commitment. We raised this during meetings with the Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP and then Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coultou MP and urged the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review Committee to recommend the Hub be retained and enhanced.

Distance Education Broadband Working Group (DEBWG)

ICPA (Aust) has been a member of this Federal Government initiative since it was first established in 2015 and it has been a welcome forum to represent our members in the field of communications for distance education. Federal Council are keen to see this group continue and develop so that we can maintain this direct connection with the Department of Communications in order to advance the needs of our members.

Regional Rural and Remote Coalition (RRRCC)

ICPA (Aust) continues to be an active member of the Regional Rural and Remote Coalition (RRRCC). We join together with many like-minded stakeholders as a Coalition to highlight our collective concern about the lack of equitable access to reliable and quality telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia. We represent the businesses, communities and families of rural and regional Australia. In the coming months ICPA (Aust) will meet with the RRRCC for delegations in Canberra.

2021 Regional Telecommunications Review

The Regional Telecommunications Review provided an opportunity for people living and working in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia to share their views and experiences using telecommunications services in their area. Every three years the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (the Committee) is appointed to conduct the review and to hear people's experiences firsthand.

The 2021 Committee was announced by then Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Honourable Mark Coulton MP on 2 June 2021. The Review will be held from June to December. The [five members appointed to the Committee](#) are: the Hon Luke Hartsuyker (Chair), Ms Sue Middleton, Ms Kristy Sparrow, Professor Hugh Bradlow and Mr Michael Cosgrave. The Review will examine the adequacy of telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote Australia, along with particular issues identified in the Terms of Reference <https://www.rtic.gov.au/terms-reference>.

From late July until 30 September 2021, the Committee held virtual public consultations and sought views through written submissions in response to an Issues Paper with communities and stakeholders around Australia.

ICPA (Aust) encouraged members to participate in the consultation process and Federal Council had the opportunity to attend a consultation meeting with the Review Committee to raise the experiences and needs of our members. We, along with a number of State Councils also lodged a submission to the Review. Within our submission we reiterated our belief that equitable educational opportunities in rural and remote locations are dependent upon the availability of high quality, reliable, affordable and adequate telecommunications.

As part of the Review, the Committee will deliver a Report and make recommendations to the Australian Government. The Committee has been asked to deliver its Report by 31 December 2021 or earlier. ICPA (Aust) looks forward to the release of the Committee's Report and the recommendations for future regional, rural and remote communications. Members can follow the progress of the Review at <https://www.rtic.gov.au/>

Mobile Black Spot Program

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate and discuss the Mobile Black Spot Program with government and stakeholders. The Government has committed \$380 million to the Mobile Black Spot Program to invest in telecommunications infrastructure to improve mobile coverage and competition across Australia.

The Program is supported by co-contributions from state and local governments, mobile network operators ([Optus](#), [Telstra](#), [TPG Telecom Ltd \(formerly Vodafone\)](#) and [Field Solutions Group](#)), businesses and local communities.

Under the first five rounds of the Program (Round 1, Round 2, the Priority Locations Round, Round 4 and Round 5), the Government's commitment has generated investment of more than \$836 million, delivering more than 1,200 new base stations across Australia. Round 6 is about to commence, more information can be found here

<https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/mobile-services-and-coverage/mobile-black-spot-program>

Telstra 3G shutdown

The Telstra 3G will be gradually shut down in June 2024. Telstra is committed to providing 4G coverage equivalent to their 3G coverage by the time of 3G closure. Telstra will be undertaking detailed checks of coverage outcomes as they upgrade sites to include 4G. 4G is more advanced than 3G so most customers will experience an upgraded service. The 3G spectrum will be repurposed to 5G. This will help expand 5G coverage in regional Australia more extensively. Most customers will migrate naturally, but all will be fully supported through the 3G closure. NGWL services will also be migrated to 4G. Reports of 3G coverage reducing are all investigated whenever reported and any reduction in coverage due to site upgrades is quickly resolved. For this to happen customers need to report faults to Telstra.

Helpful Contacts

In recent times it has been very encouraging to see providers and services acknowledging the need for rural, regional and remote customers to have access to specialised help for their communication needs. ICPA (Aust) has collated a list of useful communications contacts for members at

<https://icpa.com.au/au/useful-websites-news-and-resources-communications>.

While this is not an exhaustive list, we hope that it assists many members to gain assistance and support for their communications needs. This is currently being updated on the ICPA website.

As I finalise this report, ICPA (Aust) understand that there have been developments for New South Wales schools. Read more at <https://icpa.com.au/>

ICPA (Aust) has been well supported in our telecommunications issues by the State Councils, Branches and members and we will continue to raise concerns wherever it is possible to have them addressed.

CURRICULUM PORTFOLIO

Wendy Hick

With no Curriculum motions at the 2020 Federal Conference, Federal Council has focused on our ongoing relationships with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to ensure that the perspective of our rural and remote students is considered in decisions made with regard to the Australian Curriculum. We continue to participate in regular ACARA stakeholder meetings as part of the Parents and Principals Peak National Bodies group and have had the opportunity to provide feedback on a several topics and specifically NAPLAN recently. Federal Council has welcomed the Parent Updates we receive from ACARA which are shared in the Federal Branch Bulletin and hopefully members find these useful. Federal Council was pleased to assist in the “ACARA Parent Vox Pops re Australian Curriculum” during 2020, which provided feedback from parents in the format of one-to-two-minute short videos addressing questions related to the Australian Curriculum.

Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum Review

As part of Federal Council’s interaction with ACARA, we have been involved in briefings and consultations regarding the Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum Review and we continue to follow the progress of the Review.

This is the first time the curriculum has been reviewed in its entirety since its inception, with the intention of scaling back the Curriculum by about 20 per cent amid concerns it is too overcrowded. Further, the syllabus will be simplified in an attempt to ensure children have a solid grasp on foundational numeracy and literacy.

The Learning Area Review aims to declutter the curriculum, improve manageability and reduce content across the eight Learning Areas as well as improve the Australian Curriculum with some revision and updating of content.

On 29 April 2021, a slimmed-down syllabus was released for public comment and the public consultation phase of the Australian Curriculum Review began. A new Review of Curriculum website was used for the public consultation phase of the Review (28 April - 8 July 2021), to assist members of the public with resources, Frequently Asked Questions and other information.

A few examples of proposed Australian Curriculum changes include:

- The English curriculum remains mostly intact, although lessons on using software such as Word or PowerPoint are removed
- Students learning a foreign language will focus more on speaking and writing, instead of analysing cultural differences in English
- reading a clock (new suggestion year 2) and reciting times tables (new suggestion Year 4) won’t be taught until children are older
- physical education lessons will include more activity, games and sport, with less classroom theory

In our comments to the Review, ICPA (Aust) put forward curriculum issues which have been raised by members and in ICPA policy throughout the consultation process and also through the web form. Topics Including:

- Basic literacy, numeracy and computer literacy be regarded as essential to all students on the completion of primary school, regardless of location

- The development of Distance Education courses to be undertaken by those who have a working knowledge of the needs of rural and remote students and consideration for the time commitment required by distance education tutors for course implementation.
- That rural and remote students with specific learning needs be a vital consideration in curriculum development.
- National curriculum which contains relevant, accurate representations of agriculture, including explicit components on Food and Fibre production, to be taught and integrated into primary and secondary school curriculums.

Federal Council acknowledges State Councils also contributed to the Review and all councils encouraged members to provide feedback where possible, as on the ground experience of the curriculum is extremely valuable.

At the conclusion of the Review, explanations of the changes being made to the curriculum and the reasons for these changes in each learning area will be explained in a section on the ACARA website and each state curriculum authority will also decide how they wish to share their information as well. The current Curriculum Review website can be found at:

<https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum-review>

It has been indicated that the altered Curriculum should be available for implementation from early next year. However, whether the new version is implemented across jurisdictions will be dependent upon decisions made at state and territory level. ICPA (Aust) will ensure that any further developments regarding the Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum Review are passed on to members as available.

National Assessment Program- Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

Federal, state and territory education ministers have agreed that all schools will gradually transition from the current paper-based NAPLAN tests to the computer-based assessments, with the aim for all schools to undertake NAPLAN online by 2022. ICPA (Aust) continues to participate in discussions around how to manage the devices and ensure that the download and upload required for the NAPLAN Online platform will be obtainable as well as the necessary resources available for schools no matter where they are located. Several states have raised points around a shortage of devices to implement NAPLAN Online and concern for schools that do not have reliable (or any) internet at their school and Federal Council is closely following these conversations. Federal Council would welcome feedback from members as to the experiences of their students during the 2021 NAPLAN testing period.

The Federal Government signalled that the 2021 NAPLAN results will be used to measure the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and identify consequences associated with these effects. ICPA (Aust) welcomed this intent and were especially interested to keep abreast of impacts that may be specifically attributed to the move to online lessons and schooling from home, given this mode of learning for many geographically isolated children is used regularly and often their only option for education due to the remoteness of where they live. It was therefore pleasing that from preliminary outcomes released in August, there appeared to be limited impacts on students' results; these results being somewhat of a relief for those geographically isolated families who educate their children at home full time, regardless of the pandemic, that the quality of their school experience is not significantly less than others in mainstream situations. These preliminary results are detailed here <https://www.acara.edu.au/docs/default-source/media-releases/20210813-naplan-results-med-rel.pdf>

Further Australian Curriculum information and updates are regularly available on the ACARA and NAPLAN websites <https://www.acara.edu.au/> and <https://www.nap.edu.au/>

Primary Production in the National Curriculum

The Australian Government's Educating Kids About Agriculture: Kids to Farms grant continues to run over three years from 2019-20 to 2021-22 and will conclude on 30 June 2022. The program was announced in May 2019 as part of the Federal Government's Our Plan to Showcase Agriculture: Our Heritage Our Future where state farming bodies and organisations were encouraged to apply for grants to help run programs which connect students and agriculture by sponsoring government, Catholic and independent primary school visits to farms and other primary production worksites to learn about agriculture production, sustainability practices and land stewardship.

Federal Council is encouraged by the resources and programs being developed by other organisations as well as some state governments to assist schools and students (both Primary and Secondary) learn about food and fibre production, including:

- Kids to Farms
- Kids to Farms is a joint initiative between NSW Farmers and Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment as part of the Educating Kids about Agriculture: Kids to Farms program.

https://www.visitmyfarm.com.au/kids-to-farms-home?mc_cid=9c13c1fc23&mc_eid=f1883f5d1b

Cotton Australia

The Cotton Education Kit is a comprehensive digital platform that maps the information to the Australian Curriculum for Years 7-10 and to Years 11-12 in relevant curriculums from all states and territories. Cotton Australia has two Education Kits available for students and school classroom teachers: The Cotton Education Kit (digital resource) and the Cotton Sampler Education Pack (physical resource).

<https://cottonaustralia.com.au/education-kit?fbclid=IwAR2qWlr85fdth1zBoCzUbHKArXD5u5ayee7vcN6XKhGiGpucspCh9YyBG7c>

Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC)

The GRDC has invested in the development of a suite of user-friendly grain education resources and initiatives for students, teachers and families. Each curriculum linked resource incorporates a range of lesson plans which explore the latest science, technology, engineering, mathematics, nutrition, research and innovation in the Australian agricultural industry. A recent GRDC-supported study has provided new insights into how the story of grain growing can be incorporated into education through school subjects such as geography, biology, maths and home economics.

<https://grdc.com.au/resources-and-publications/all-publications/educational>

Australian Eggs

"All About Eggs" is a resources page for teachers with complete lesson plans, resources and links to videos that will support teaching students about Australia's Egg Industry.

<https://www.australianeggs.org.au/education>

Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)

MLA has been running their Schools Education program for more than six years which includes National Curriculum study guides, lessons and activity sheets, facts for students, digital lessons and virtual excursions. <https://www.goodmeat.com.au/education-resources/>

They also partner with others to offer online resources such as "Cattle and Sheep Farming today" <https://www.forteachersforstudents.com.au/site/themed-curriculum/cattle-sheep-farming/>

Dairy Australia

“Discover Dairy” was designed to provide tools and curriculum linked resources to better inform children of the story behind dairy products such as milk, cheese, yoghurt and ice cream. The site also offers engaging programs such as “Picasso’s Cows” and “Healthy Bones”.

<https://www.dairy.edu.au/>

AgForce Qld School to Industry Partnership Program (SIPP)

The AgForce School to Industry Partnership Program provides a range of events and programs for primary and secondary students, as well as teachers. The programs inform students about the origins of their food and fibre, engaging them with information from primary production and agricultural sectors and raise the profile of careers in agribusiness. At Beef Australia 2021, around 4000 students participated in a program designed through SIPP to provide information on agriculture and available career opportunities. <https://www.agforceqld.org.au/knowledgebase/article/AGF-01158>

ICPA (Aust) has collated a list of Food and Fibre learning resources which is located on our ICPA website. While this is not an exhaustive list, we hope that it assists members with information on some of the programs available to assist both students and teaching staff to bring food and fibre production into the classroom. This list will be updated on the ICPA (Aust) website regularly.

ICPA (Aust) continues to be a partner of Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA)- <https://www.piefa.edu.au/> PIEFA is a not-for-profit company which operates and manages several web portals and sites relating to Primary Industries Education:

- Primezone provides teachers, parents and students with an Australian Curriculum driven range of high quality vetted primary industries education resources from Foundation to Year 12. www.primezone.edu.au
- Primezone Academy which provides both teachers and students with access to a range of primary industries eLearning courses. www.primezoneacademy.edu.au
- Career Harvest- assists students in discovering rewarding careers in primary production. It provides students with career options, scholarships, opportunities and more. www.careerharvest.com.au
- Farmer Time- PIEFA is the Australian partner of the UK founded program “Farmer Time”. This program allows students to connect with a farmer, fisher or forester, ask questions, take a virtual tour and experience what a career in food and fibre looks like. Designed for years K-12, Farmer Time provides real-world context for food and fibre curriculum. www.farmertime.com.au
- Knowing Growing- This program facilitates teaching about primary industries in schools by providing quality professional development for all teachers. It is a joint initiative between Primary Industries Education Foundation of Australia, the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW, and the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

While the above initiatives are welcomed as an adjunct to enhancing the provision of agricultural education, we will continue to call for Primary Production to be included as a recognised essential component of the Australian Curriculum. ICPA (Aust) requests assurance be given that the actual production of food and fibre is taught in classrooms so that students gain an understanding of where food and natural materials come from as well as how they are produced.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to participate in discussions on the Australian Curriculum and provide information and background on the learning environments of geographically isolated students where possible.

DISTANCE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO

Jo Camilleri

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for recognition and support for families who must educate their children by distance education due to geographical isolation.

Over the past eighteen months, parents and caregivers across the nation have been intermittently faced with the challenging task of providing supervision, support and the implementation of online lesson delivery for students who have been forced to learn from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has given rise to an opportunity for ICPA (Aust) to build on a newfound awareness and appreciation of the challenges for geographically isolated families who educate children at home as a necessity.

Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

The ICPA (Aust) Distance Education Portfolio has continued to raise the need for a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) at every possible opportunity. A heightened awareness of the challenges associated with educating children at home highlighted the difficulties faced by geographically isolated families who, due to living in remote parts of Australia, have no choice but to educate their children by distance education. It has also validated the necessity of an adult tutor to be available to assist and supervise students while they participate in online learning and learning from home, drawing attention to the commitment, responsibility, time and financial impost required to facilitate children's full-time learning in the home environment.

On 1 December 2020 Federal Council launched the inaugural Geographically Isolated Distance Education (GIDE) Day to recognise and honour the ongoing plight of geographically isolated families who must educate their children at home at all times. ICPA (Aust) also used the day to call on the Federal Government to formally recognise the role that parents play in distance education. We look forward to continuing with the GIDE Day campaign again this year and encourage all members and supporters to get on board.

Following on from GIDE Day and well-documented acknowledgement by Governments of the challenges parents faced educating their children at home during COVID-19, Federal Council wrote to the Prime Minister urging him to consider, recognise and acknowledge GIDE families in this regard. Federal Council has since written to the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education and other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators imploring the Government to recognise the estimated 1500 families for who distance education is a way of life because of where they live. Federal Council appealed for the inception of a DETA as a way of acknowledging those who must undertake the role of the tutor in these contexts. We also raised this topic as a key issue during virtual delegation meetings and in meetings with representatives from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment.

The request for a DETA was again included in the 2021-22 Pre-Budget Submission earlier this year and is a key focus in our recently updated DE Briefing Papers. The topic was raised again in recent delegations, and discussions with government representatives including the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education. In light of the suggestion that the provision of such financial assistance should be the responsibility of State governments, Federal Council have been recently highlighting that where families are unable to provide a tutor or continue with geographically isolated distance education, they may instead move to a second home or send children to boarding schools, for which the Federal Government provides financial assistance which equates to significantly more costs than a \$6 000 payment per family to assist with the provision of a tutor would cost.

Table 1. AIC Allowances Comparison – Boarding, Second Home, Distance Education

Second Home		Boarding		Distance Education		
Up to three children	Up to \$19443.84 per family per year (2021)	One child	Up to \$11 011 per family per year (2021)	One child	Current	With addition of \$6000 DETA
					\$4278 per family per year (2021)	\$10278 per family per year
		Two children	Up to \$22022 per family per year (2021)	Two Children	\$8422 per family per year (2021)	\$14422 per family per year
		Three children	Up to \$33 033 per family per year (2021)	Three children	\$12633 per family per year (2021)	\$18633 per family per year

ICPA Federal Council has and will continue to appeal to the government at every given opportunity for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance. We also continue to seek updated numbers of geographically isolated distance education Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) recipients to assist with our advocacy around DETA and other topics.

Research

Federal Council lent their support to a team from the University of Southern Queensland in 2020, conducting a study into distance education tutoring across Australia, with the view to “mapping the experiences and perceptions of Australian Remote Education Tutors”. The study commenced with a survey across Australia to gather data to inform their research. Federal Council have devoted an enormous amount of time and effort over many years to advocate for Distance Education tutors, including our own research in the ICPA’s Distance Education Research for Geographically Isolated Families survey:

<https://icpa.com.au/sites/icpa.com.au/files/inline-files/DETA%20SURVEY%20RESEARCH%20Final%20Nov%202015%20.pdf> through a range of other endeavours and this additional research and data will certainly be useful to support and build upon our work. We look forward to working together with the team into the future.

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

Federal Council has sought assistance from many Ministers, Members of Parliament and Senators in accessing up to date statistics regarding the number of geographically isolated families and students accessing AIC Distance Education Allowance to assist with our advocacy for this cohort.

Following concerns from members about the changing nature of Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education across much of Australia, with increased enrolments of non-geographically isolated students, Federal Council have continued to advocate for a separate category for geographically isolated students to be established within the AIC scheme. We have emphasised that geographically isolated distance education students are a unique disadvantage group who do not have any daily access to face-to-face appropriate schooling due to where they live and financial assistance needs to be maintained and assured to assist with the costs associated with educating these students, as per the original intent of the AIC scheme.

Within submissions, meetings and delegations, Federal Council has highlighted that geographically isolated students need to be recognised as a unique marginalised group who require specialised support and assistance in order to allow them to achieve equitable educational outcomes. Federal Council aims to use every opportunity to highlight and promote distinctive needs of geographically isolated students and hopes up to date data will assist in accurately advocating for the need for the AIC Distance Education Allowance to be maintained and indeed increased to better reflect the out-of-pocket costs incurred by geographically isolated families undertaking distance education. This issue was raised during delegations in Canberra in May 2021.

Location of Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

Federal Council continues to maintain the position that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education should remain in rural and remote communities. The importance of this is thoroughly understood and while decisions of this nature are principally state-based, Federal Council will support States however possible to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities and maintain the resources and support provided for geographically isolated students who have no choice but to be educated via these schools.

Appropriate learning resources for distance education students

ICPA (Aust) is aware that provision of learning materials and resources for distance education is the responsibility of state governments, however, requests the support of the Federal Government to ensure appropriate resources continue to be supplied to distance education students across Australia. Distance education students access their daily learning in a variety of ways, and most depend on a blend of learning materials determined by the school and communications infrastructure. Working, well-maintained landline phone services and internet access are also vital for geographically isolated distance education students as these services provide necessary access to distance education programs.

Support for volunteer remote educational support for rural and remote students' programs

Federal Council is working to ensure the continued support and funding for Volunteer for Isolated Student's Education (VISE) services across Australia. We are also pleased to welcome the newly established BushEd organisation created by former ICPA Federal Councillor Lyn French which provides similar services, which will help to ensure supply can match the demand and ongoing needs of geographically isolated families. From ICPA research, 85% of the geographically isolated distance education tutors across Australia are the mothers of the children who must study via distance education. This person receives no assistance, support, respite nor remuneration for this role as they are required to supervise and assist their students on an ongoing, daily basis in the schoolroom. Volunteer Remote Educational Support for Rural and Remote Students programs aim to support the education of rural students and in particular isolated families involved in distance education and we continue to support these programs however we can.

In closing, I wish to thank the incredible Distance Education Portfolio team, being Alana Moller, Briony Sinclair and Lisa Slade.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PORTFOLIO

Alana Moller

Early Childhood Education and Care has continued to be a busy portfolio and taking this on from the remarkable Jane Morton certainly gave me some big shoes to fill. The endemic inappropriateness of current Early Childhood Education and Care delivery models for geographically isolated families and the difficulties associated with accessing child care and education in rural and remote areas have been a key focus of our advocacy.

ICPA (Aust) maintains equitable and affordable Early Childhood Education and Care services and support for families living in rural and remote areas are critical. We have highlighted that specialised model/s need to be established for rural and remote families; programs designed to address the unique disadvantages and needs associated with caring for and educating children in geographically isolated locations.

In Home Care

While ICPA (Aust) acknowledges that the In Home Care program provides some childhood services to geographically isolated areas of Australia, we continue to highlight the gross inadequacies of the system for rural and remote families. It simply has not been designed to address the unique needs and circumstances of families in these areas. Advocacy has focused on the overarching recommendation that “an In Home Care Program (IHC), or sub-program thereof, be established specifically for rural and remote families”. In correspondence with then Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, Hon Andrew Gee MP along with other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators we provided an insight into the unsuitability of the current Scheme, highlighting the inappropriateness and unfairness of a blanket approach to Early Childhood Education and Care in rural and remote areas. This was exemplified and amplified by the issues arising from the implementation of the COVID-19 Relief Childcare Package. We requested amendments to the current scheme, or the inception of a new scheme to cater for the unique circumstances and needs of rural and remote families and to address specific circumstances, including those mentioned during our 2020 Online Federal Conference:

- Dispensation for families who must provide board and lodging for their educators, which would result in reducing families’ gap payments; and
- Amendments to the Scheme to allow an educator to care for children from more than one family at the same time, and to care for their own child whilst caring for children from another family or families.

We have also continued to emphasise the need for In Home Care, or another program, to be able to provide support for remote families who must educate their children at home due to being geographically isolated and who have no daily access to regular educational services; families also working in businesses or trying to maintain employment. Unfortunately, we are making little headway progressing this issue.

Federal Council have raised these topics during meetings and delegations as well as with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE). With recent staff changes within DESE, we have made contact with the new In Home Care team raising our concerns and sharing our updated Briefing Papers for their reference. DESE staff welcome case studies and stories exemplifying the experiences of geographically isolated families using In Home Care. My thanks to families who have passed on information to support our advocacy. The real-life, on-the-ground experiences really

capture the attention of people we meet with. Federal Council encourages members to send any case studies to us to pass on to DESE.

In December 2019, ICPA (Aust) welcomed the decision of then Minister for Education, Hon Dan Tehan MP to extend the Transitional Provisions for IHC for two years until December 2021 for remote families. Given this deadline is looming, Federal Council has again raised this topic with DESE. We have been informed evidence is being gathered on the usage of the Transitional Provisions for IHC educators and hope consideration will be given to further extension of these Provisions. Federal Council will keep members abreast of developments.

Federal Council was disappointed to learn that the long-running Longreach In Home Care provider, which had been servicing both Queensland and Northern Territory families, would be closing at the end of 2020. We have raised concerns with the Department on this closure and have highlighted the need for those providers who service remote families to be supported in order to maintain services for our families. Already we know that South Australian families are negatively impacted by the lack of providers for their locations. Certainly, we know the In Home Care Scheme is not ideal for geographically isolated families, however it does provide some level of access to a service in remote areas for some and this access needs to be maintained. The In Home Care team in the Department of Education, Skills and Employment are keen to garner an understanding of the impacts and experiences of families who were affected by the Longreach closure in order to better equip themselves to deal with these situations in the future.

Assistance for Isolated Children Distance Education (AIC-DE) Allowance for Pre-Compulsory School Students and Universal Access to Early Childhood Education

The longstanding pursuit for the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education Allowance to be extended to pre-compulsory geographically isolated distance education students has continued in earnest this year. In 2020 ICPA (Aust) took the opportunity to lodge a submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments¹. The ICPA (Aust) submission pointed out the challenges and expenses associated with providing a distance education pre-compulsory program and highlighted that ineligibility for AIC for this relatively small cohort of children is at odds with the Federal Government's commitment to "Universal Access to Early Childhood Education". The Final Report, released in November 2020, referred directly to our remarks in Section 3.2.7 and further made the following Recommendation:

"the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth support early learning programs through the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme Distance Education Allowance in the 2021 Budget."

ICPA (Aust) gratefully welcomed this acknowledgement of the need for AIC expansion to early learning students and implored the Government to accept and implement this recommendation, both through our 2020-21 Pre-Budget Submission and in meetings, follow-up correspondence with the Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education and other key Ministers, MPs and Senators and in a Media Release prior to the 2021-2022 Budget. While the 2021-2022 Budget did not address this recommendation, Federal Council were pleased to see the announcement of \$2 billion in support across the next four years to provide 15 hours per week of quality learning for children in the year before school, irrespective of where they live. Federal Council used delegations and another media release:

<https://icpa.com.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/ICPA%20%28Aust%29%20Education%20in%20Remote%20and%20Complex%20Environments%20Media%20Release%2017%2004%2021.pdf> following this announcement to appeal for part of this funding to be allocated to fulfilling this request.

¹ https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/RemoteEducation/Report

Mobile Early Childhood Services

We have been assured funding for ex-Budget Based Funded Early Childhood Services such as Mobile Playgroups is ongoing, and grants are available through future grant opportunities. Information on grants available to services can be found at:

<https://www.dss.gov.au/grants/grant-programmes/families-and-communities-programme>,
<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programmes-services/parenting/families-and-children-activity>, www.communitygrants.gov.au and www.grants.gov.au.

Federal Council continues to advocate for funding to expand and maintain Mobile Early Childhood Services in geographically isolated areas and communities where there is no Early Childhood service at all and have highlighted the need for guaranteed funding for organisations providing these services in our submission to the Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments and we were pleased to see this acknowledged by the Committee in their key recommendation:

“the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth modify funding arrangements for mobile early childhood education to provide flexibility and surety of funding for these services in the 2021 Budget.”

In our 2021-22 Pre-Budget submission, ICPA (Aust) appealed to the Government to implement this recommendation to assist in providing much needed early childhood education services to geographically isolated children. Following on from the aforementioned Budget allocation of \$2 billion over 4 years for preschool funding, ICPA (Aust) suggested some of these funds be allocated to mobile playgroup funding.

Given the finite and insecure nature of Federal Government funding for the provision of these services and the resources and activities required across vast distances in challenging geographically isolated contexts, Federal Council has also pursued the suggestion of an alternative solution. Members at the 2020 Federal Conference suggested geographically isolated children be recognised as ‘in need’ of benevolent assistance for early childhood educational purposes, allowing the Not-For-Profit organisations serving them to be considered for Deductible Gift Recipient status. This would allow these services to access additional funds from other sources and not be completely reliant on Federal funding. We were pleased to have received positive responses to this idea from several Members of Parliament and look forward to further developments.

Remote Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce

One of the most significant obstacles in the delivery of early childhood education and care services in rural and remote areas is the difficulty in attracting and retaining a quality workforce. Finding suitably qualified staff to deliver child care or early childhood education for rural and remote families is an ongoing and urgent concern and we have continued to request that amendments to Visa eligibility incorporate Early Childhood workers in remote areas, as well as for flexibility in attaining qualifications in geographically isolated locations and that the challenges of studying and training in these locations are considered.

ICPA (Aust) has also continued its pursuit for a National Working with Children Check (WWCC) as a matter of priority to ensure early childhood carers, teachers, educators and those assisting with education particularly in rural and remote areas can transition across states easily. We have taken the opportunity to include this call in a submission to the Review of the National Quality Framework <https://www.acecqa.gov.au/2019-nqf-review>. The process of obtaining a Working with Children Check (WWCC) in each state or territory is expensive, slow and impedes early childhood workers, tutors and teachers who wish to help various families across borders. A national WWCC certification would help resolve this and was recommended in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Final Report. A National WWCC would ensure effective and efficient assessment

for suitability to work with children and address the staffing challenges of recruitment and retention in rural and remote contexts.

Other Early Childhood Education and Care Activity

In 2021 we have welcomed the opportunity to work with Sue Kingwill from Contact Inc as well as to participate in the Thrive by Five campaign (website address), to ensure that rural and remote children and their families are not forgotten when it comes to Early Childhood reform. We have also contributed the perspective of geographically isolated ECEC in a number of submissions this past year, including the National Quality Framework Review, the Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and the NDIS Community Consultation on Supporting young children and their families 2021. We have also recently made contact with the team undertaking the National Quality Framework specifically requesting information on how the Review and recommendations that may come forward will impact rural and remote families and services, as rural and remote was not mentioned in previous Review documents. Indeed, our submission noted that this seemed to be missing from the Review documents and endeavoured to emphasise the unique circumstances and needs of rural and remote families. We received some assurance that the Decision Regulation Impact Statement (DRIS) recommendations will acknowledge the diversity of programs and the impact on services in rural and remote areas as a result of changes to the NQF.

Federal Council feels as though there has never been a better time to pursue the need for specific support to be made available for geographically isolated Early Childhood Education and Care, with welcome recognition of several key advocacies in this space and we will continue to advance members' needs at every opportunity. As I close, I wish to thank my dynamic ECEC Portfolio team, being Sally Sullivan, Jo Camilleri and Wendy Hick.

RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL PORTFOLIO

Nikki Mahony

Having joined Council in May 2020, it is astonishing to think I am meeting some of my colleagues for the first time face-to-face this week... 18 months in. It is indeed a brave new world that has forced us all to think a little differently, cherish our isolation a little more, shine a light on glaring gaps highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and prioritise what really matters for our families and communities. Naturally, for all of us here, education is right up there so it is a privilege to be able to deliver this report both as a “newbie” to Federal Council and as leader of the Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio.

Through the blips of 2020 and 2021, ICPA (Aust) has continued to advocate for access and equity in educational outcomes for families whose children attend rural schools and those with travel requirements for attending their places of education.

Together with motions carried at the 2020 Federal conference our advocacy has focussed on five main areas in this portfolio this year, namely:

- supporting the implementation of the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) recommendations
- maintaining the chaplaincy program in schools
- advocating for student concessional fares
- advancing the residential fares scheme in air travel
- requesting a reassessment of the PACER program.

An outline of all areas of advocacy can be found in the current ICPA (Aust) advocacy document <https://icpa.com.au/au/icpa-aust-federal-briefing-papers>

Briefing Papers and previous conference reports specific to the portfolio can also be accessed from our new website <https://icpa.com.au/au/portfolios/rural-schools-school-travel>

Rural Schools

While all Australian governments recognise the social and economic benefits of a high quality and equitable school education system, ICPA (Aust) continues to devote an enormous amount of time holding relevant governments to account to address inequities in rural schools.

It was heartening to see the Australian Government’s response to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) in 2019 placing regional, rural and remote areas at the forefront of the outcomes presented

<https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for all of the recommendations in this report to be implemented and in regards to Rural Schools we continue to call for the recommendation relating to the reduction of the impact of administration on workloads in rural schools.

Regional, Rural and Remote locations across Australia provide great challenges for delivery of education options and pathways for children and their families. A forced and sudden shift to online learning across the board has brought some glaring deficiencies in our rural school systems into stark relief. On the flip side the fortitude and creativity of rural schools and their staff teams has been just as impressive. Many managed to quickly reallocate resources and modify teaching methods to deliver a better fit education product for their small communities where technology and local skills allowed

and it is testament to the resilience of rural school staff, students and the community that in trying times they were able to continue to provide rural children with their education.

Chaplaincy Program in Schools

A commitment by the government to invest \$247 million over four years (2019-2022) to continue the National School Chaplains Program (NSCP) was welcomed in 2019 and a motion to seek assurance for ongoing funding beyond 2022 was carried at 2020 Federal Conference.

Following the 2020 conference Federal Council wrote to then Minister for Education Hon Dan Tehan MP and other relevant Ministers, MPs and Senators highlighting the important role chaplains play in rural and remote school communities especially given that other support services are not always easily accessible in these areas and requesting assurance that the program continue.

We welcomed a response from the Hon Andrew Gee MP, Minister for Decentralisation and Regional Education, confirming the current Government's commitment to permanent funding of the NSCP "in recognition of the valuable contribution it makes in our school communities". During delegations in 2021 Federal Council continued to reinforce the importance of the Chaplaincy Program for our rural and remote students.

Limited Program Schools

Schools deemed as limited program schools are also commonly referred to as bypass schools as families are able to "bypass" counting the school in question as their closest school for accessing allowances through ABSTUDY, Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and Youth Allowance for students and Australian Apprentices.

Limited program schools either don't:

- offer all year levels or grades
- have facilities or programs for students to get a Year 12 certificate or an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR).

While the allowances are administered federally, State and Territory education departments are responsible for which schools are determined to be limited program schools in their jurisdiction and therefore eligibility for allowances is determined by individual states. The limited program schools are reviewed by respective states and territories each year.

For more information the Services Australia website is a good starting point:

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/topics/limited-program-schools-abstudy-assistance-isolated-children-and-youth-allowance/30941>

If your branch has questions or issues relating to bypass schools or limited program schools, these should be directed to your relevant State or Territory Council.

SCHOOL TRAVEL

Regional airfares should be affordable and services adequate, consistent and reliable to better assist regional residents trying to provide equitable educational opportunities for their children. Air travel is often an essential mode of transport and unavoidable for rural and remote students with access to education institutions involving vast distances. Safety of students and poor road conditions also remains an ongoing concern.

Student Fares Allowance and access to the Corporate Airfares Program

Federal Council has taken forward member requests that rural and remote students should receive a Student Fare Allowance that reflects the actual costs involved to get students from their home to their place of education within Australia. The inequity that exists for school travel across Australia is to the detriment of rural and remote students, particularly given the limited options for education where they live.

The Federal Government has in place Fares Allowances to assist with student travel under the ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance Schemes, however there is no provision for travel in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme which is the assistance a large number of geographically isolated children receive to assist them to access compulsory schooling. We have also addressed the request made for AIC recipients to have access to corporate travel airfare program discounts, with our advocacy being a stepped process, in the first instance making contact with the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) and Services Australia to garner an understanding of the processes involved in the Corporate Airfares Program and its features.

Federal Council wrote to Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services, reiterating our longstanding request for a fares allowance to be introduced to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme. We also requested the option of access to the Corporate Airfares Program for geographically isolated students. With some concern that these fares may actually be considerably more expensive than families booking directly, we have reiterated that these only be made available as an option where those fares may be cheaper.

While we cannot say there has been any developments on the broader issue of the request for a Fares Allowance in the AIC, Federal Council will continue to pursue this along with access to the Corporate Airfares Program.

Student Concessional Fares

Federal Council continues to advocate for student concessional fares directly with airlines and also raised this issue at recent Parliamentary delegations. Unfortunately, opportunities for negotiations directly with airlines regarding discounted regional fares have been hindered this year due to limited service options and restrictions still in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic continues to have considerable effect on both the ability to travel and the availability of flights. The ongoing ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are still quite unknown however Federal Council will continue our advocacy with QANTAS and regional airlines, and raise issues wherever possible.

QANTAS is committed to maintaining open lines of communications with ICPA, and in recent discussions, indicated that they have worked on a few iterations of the “Discounted fares for residents program” <https://www.qantas.com/au/en/frequent-flyer/member-specials/discounted-fares-for-residents.html> which gives a closed user group (regional residents) discounted options to book fares that cannot be accessed by resource-sector customers.

Eligible residents can access discounts starting from 20 per cent off the Qantas-controlled component of all-inclusive return fares (i.e. excludes government taxes, security and airport charges) from regional airports to their nearest capital city or major town.

Currently Supported Routes in QANTAS Discounted Fares for Residents Program (May 2021)

Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roma (RMA) – Brisbane (BNE) – Roma (RMA) • Charleville (CTL) – Brisbane (BNE) – Charleville (CTL) • Cloncurry (CNJ) - Townsville (TSV) - Cloncurry (CNJ) • Cloncurry (CNJ) - Brisbane (BNE) via Townsville - Cloncurry (CNJ) • Moranbah (MOV) - Brisbane (BNE) - Moranbah (MOV) • Mount Isa (ISA) - Brisbane (BNE) - Mount Isa (ISA) • Mount Isa (ISA) - Townsville (TSV) - Mount Isa (ISA) • Longreach (LRE) - Brisbane (BNE) - Longreach (LRE) • Barcaldine (BCI) - Brisbane (BNE) - Barcaldine (BCI) • Blackall (BKQ) - Brisbane (BNE) - Blackall (BKQ)
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broome (BME) - Perth (PER) - Broome (BME) • Kalgoorlie (KGI) - Perth (PER) - Kalgoorlie (KGI) • Karratha (KTA) - Perth (PER) - Karratha (KTA) • Port Hedland (PHE) - Perth (PER) - Port Hedland (PHE) • Newman (ZNE) - Perth (PER) - Newman (ZNE) • Paraburdoo (PBO) - Perth (PER) - Paraburdoo (PBO)
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alice Springs (ASP) - Darwin (DRW) - Alice Springs (ASP)

Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER)

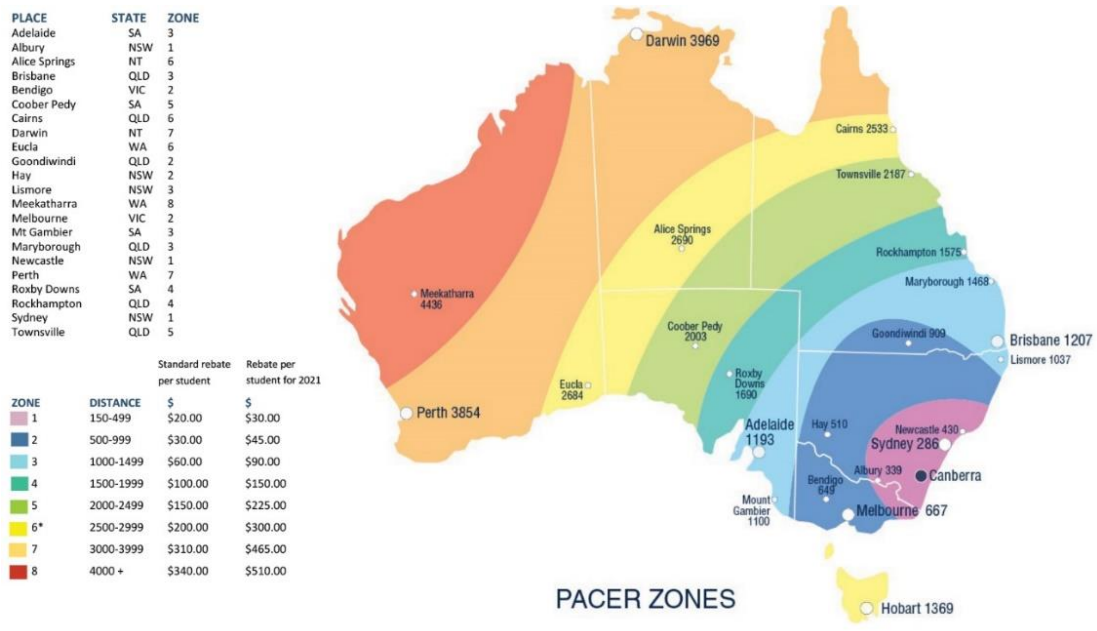
ICPA Federal Council has appealed to the Federal Government for an increase to the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) for students travel to Canberra to enhance their learning in civics and citizenship education. In February 2021 we were pleased to see an immediate 50% increase to the PACER rebate was implemented across all current rebate amounts.

The link to the latest news section of the PACER website can be found via the link below

<https://www.pacer.org.au/2021/02/12/rebate-increase-for-2021/>

Federal Council have highlighted however that a more pragmatic approach is needed to address anomalies associated with the methodology used to determine allocation of funds to schools. The sliding scale of distance from Canberra is unrealistic when applied to rural and remote schools who endure considerable extra costs associated with travel from a rural or remote area compared to a large urban centre.

For example, based on the sliding scale, Innamincka in north-east South Australia (821 kilometres north-east of Adelaide and 365 kilometres north-east from the closest town, Lyndhurst) is in the same regional zoning as Brisbane, Queensland. Innamincka is an 18-hour road trip to the ACT or a 13 hour road trip to Adelaide to catch flights to Canberra. Yet students from both locations receive the same rebate because calculations of the rebate is based on distance rather than accessibility to Canberra.



*Zone 6 (2500-2499kms) includes all students from Tasmania because of additional air/sea travel expenses.
 # A similar adjustment of \$120 per student will be paid to schools on other islands in remote locations as determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in its classification of Remoteness.

2021 and Beyond for Rural Schools and School Travel

We continue to encourage members to contact Federal Council to share real-life scenarios and case studies to help us to present the reality of what rural schools are facing in a meaningful and robust way and arm us with the pictures that will keep things relevant. Council will continue to look at ways to support State and Territory Councils in addressing disparities across the board.

Thank you to all representatives at Branch, State and Federal level for all the contributions you make to our regional, rural and remote children and not only imagining, but building a better future for them to walk into.

SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS PORTFOLIO

Briony Sinclair

ICPA (Aust) has continued to work on specific education needs motions passed at the 2020 conference as well as motions from previous years. Broadly, issues include early identification of learning difficulties, access to services, the cost of accessing services, mental health and disability provisions in boarding facilities.

Medicare Rebates and Telehealth

Motions from the 2020 Federal Conference focused on the continuation of telehealth MBS items initiated during the onset of the pandemic with a request to increase the scope and nature of the services provided to assist geographically isolated children with learning disabilities and disorders which affect their ability to learn, including vital Allied Health and Specialist Services.

Federal Council pursued this request with the Hon Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health and other relevant Ministers, Senators and MPs and correspondence we received from the Medicare Review Branch in response to our request was particularly heartening. The continued announcements by the Department of Health give us increased optimism that we are being heard in our delegations and submissions.

Since the 13 March 2020, more than 300 temporary COVID-19 Medicare Benefits Schedule items have been introduced to reduce the risk of community transmission of COVID-19. These measures will continue through to the end of 2021 at this stage. Among the temporary MBS Telehealth Services are, for example, eight new allied health items for early intervention services for children with autism, pervasive developmental disorder or disability and 20 new Focused Psychological Strategies items for services provided by a psychologist, GP, non-specialist medical practitioner, occupational therapist or social worker.

<http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/Factsheet-TempBB>

The Minister for Health stated his hope and intention for telehealth to be retained as a positive legacy of the COVID-19 response. Accordingly, the Department of Health is engaging with the community at all levels to plan a long-term and sustainable future for telehealth, including remote delivery of allied health services.

Minister Hunt recently said in a media release that "The government continues to work with peak bodies to co-design permanent post-pandemic telehealth as part of broader primary care reforms to modernise Medicare and provide flexibility of access to primary and allied healthcare services."

ICPA (Aust) looks forward to continuing work with relevant Ministers, Senators and MPs, the Department of Health and other organisations, to ensure that rural and remote families are not forgotten during these changing times.

Gifted and Talented

Federal Council continue to pursue adequate support and resources for geographically isolated gifted and talented students and their families. We welcomed the GERRIC centre of UNSW offering an online course for parents of gifted children in September of last year. Unfortunately, this course is no longer available, however Federal Council will continue to advocate for future availability of such programs.

Submissions

Specific Education Needs of rural and remote students were highlighted through five separate submissions by Federal Council in the past 12 months.

1. Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005
2. The Inquiry into Remote and Complex Environments Home Learning and Teaching during COVID-19 and
3. Inquiry into Adult Literacy and its Importance.
4. NDIS Community Consultation on Supporting young children and their families 2021
5. Quality Initial Teaching Education Review 2021

Submissions are available on the ICPA website when they are published if members wish to access them. <http://www.icpa.com.au/au/resources/submissions>

Quality Initial Teacher Education Review

ICPA (Aust) had the opportunity to progress past motions in a written submission and participation in an information webinar and consultation meeting for the *Quality Initial Teaching Education Review* which sought to identify issues relating specifically to teachers and teaching in rural and remote Australia. ICPA (Aust) sought the need for inclusion of modules specifically related to teaching in a rural and remote context and specific learning needs in undergraduate and postgraduate education courses.

The teaching of students living in geographically isolated locations with specific education needs and learning disabilities requires an increased awareness of student needs, an appropriate level of skills and knowledge, and access to appropriate programs and support staff, including allied health professionals. Schools of Distance Education and rural and remote schools must be afforded skilled teaching staff, teacher support, and ongoing professional development in the early identification, implementation, intervention strategies and teaching skills to meet the individual needs of all students.

Regular, timely, affordable and appropriate access to and collaboration with specific needs teachers, allied health professionals and specialists such as behavioural therapists, speech pathologists, ophthalmologists and psychologists will further support rural and remote teachers in recognising, referring, managing and supporting rural and remote specific needs students. This would enable the continuity of specific learning programs and take the pressure off teachers to develop management programs for students with specific needs.

Mental Health

"Resilience is based on compassion for ourselves as well as compassion for others." (Sharon Salzberg)
The past 12 months have marked devastating losses in our communities. Unfortunately, we cannot always be sure of why these deaths happen. Still, we do need to know that there are services available to those with depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts and other mental health concerns as well as support for their loved ones.

Since the advent of COVID-19, ICPA (Aust) has been particularly concerned about the mental health of boarding and tertiary students separated from their families when border closures have prevented travel between states as well as enduring isolating enforced quarantine measures which in some cases have been entirely unsuitable for the age group of the students and therefore putting their physical, mental and emotional safety at risk. Likewise, the stresses on their families have been immeasurable. Support for the ongoing mental health of students and their families has been one of the arguments for No Borders for Boarders campaigns conducted by State and Federal ICPA councils since governments began limiting people's activities and travel in April 2020.

The mental health of our families and young people is paramount to our rural communities to build strong and resilient futures. ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for school-based mental health programs for geographically isolated children and resources for families.

If you have any immediate concerns, please contact your local health service to access appropriate care for you or your family.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

ICPA (Aust) has had the opportunity to meet with Hon Mark Coulton MP, Minister for Regional Health on several occasions both face to face and virtually in the past twelve months as well as the Honourable Linda Reynolds, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and have used the opportunity to raise the topic of telehealth along with discussions on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). We have also been involved in several NDIS consultations, including attending webinars on changes to the early childhood approach to implementation of the NDIS, which included detail on a proposal to change the age group best suited to receive early childhood services from under seven years of age, to under nine years which should be a positive improvement to the Scheme. Further information on the NDIS and relevant information for our members can be found at <https://www.ndis.gov.au/>.

National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA)

ICPA (Aust) have continued to engage with the NRHA in the last 12 months and met in Canberra in March 2021 with CEO Gabrielle O’Kane and NRHA Board Chairperson, Nicole O’Reilly, with discussion focusing on telehealth and early identification of learning difficulties and intervention.

The NRHA has kept a close eye on the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on rural communities. NRHA provides factsheets which may be of interest to members e.g., Rural and Remote Mental Health Help Sheet, Rural Health scholarships, education and training.

<https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/factsheets/thumbs>.

National Rural Health Commissioner

The National Rural Health Commissioner Professor Ruth Stewart has been busy in her first year in the position and is currently supporting the governments ongoing rural response to COVID-19 and advising on the impact to the health workforce in regional, rural and remote communities. ICPA (Aust) hopes to meet with Professor Stewart soon to outline our shared interests in rural and remote communities for the future of our children.

As many of you will know, the wheels of change don’t always move as quickly as we would like but as Andy Warhol once said, "It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you don't stop."

If the last 50 years has shown us anything then it would be that ICPA does not stop no matter how slowly things might go. May the next 50 years be as industrious as the first and may our members continue to be the resilient, caring people they always have been.

TERTIARY PORTFOLIO

Kate Thompson

A tertiary education must be accessible, affordable and attainable for all Australians but the reality is that rural and remote students continue to be under-represented at the tertiary level due to a disparity in participation, retention and achievement. This adversely impacts rural and remote students and their communities.

Along with stakeholders and other organisations, the Tertiary portfolio continues to collaborate closely with relevant ministers and departments including the Minister for Families and Social Services, the Minister for Regional Education, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the Department of Social Services and Services Australia.

Excitingly, significant developments in the tertiary sphere over the last 12 months have addressed some long standing policy objectives, albeit only in part.

NATIONAL REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE TERTIARY EDUCATION STRATEGY (NAPHTHINE REVIEW)

Rural and remote tertiary education has been placed at the forefront of the Federal Government's mind following the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy Final Report (Naphthine Review) in 2019. The full report can be read here:

www.dese.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report.

Following the release of the report, the Government indicated they would accept the aims of the recommendations and specific actions would be considered. There were 33 actions which included expanding Regional Study Hubs, improving internet access, introducing a new tertiary education access payment, reducing earnings requirements of Concessional Workforce criteria, improving information on financial support and improving career advice in schools.

We will continue to follow up on these recommendations:

- **Independent Youth Allowance** - allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. This recommendation enables rural and remote students who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally, including at a Regional Study Hub, to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY if they then relocate their place of study for a minimum of one further year and are 90 minutes by public transport from home.
- **Independent Youth Allowance Concessional Workforce test** - recommends reducing the earnings requirements and a review of the recent changes to the parental means test cut-offs.
- **Practicums** – recommends an Away from Base payment for students who have to travel to complete parts of their course and are studying externally either at home or a Regional Study Hub.

The Report from the *Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments* included two recommendations that by May 2021 the Minister for Education publish a comprehensive implementation plan for the recommendations and actions outlined in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey review) and the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Naphthine review). The measures recommended in these two reports would ensure access, participation, retention, completion and success for rural and remote tertiary students for which ICPA (Aust) has been advocating for many years.

Also identified in the Naphthine Review was the necessity to improve the availability, quality, delivery and range of appropriate support services for rural, regional and remote students. Research

commissioned by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) aimed to gain a better understanding of the range of support services provided by tertiary providers, identify the improvements required with a view to developing a range of information for tertiary providers on best practice for delivering support services to rural and remote students. In July 2021, Federal Council took part in the consultation process.

JOB-READY GRADUATES PACKAGE

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the announcement by the Government on 19 June 2020, outlining the implementation of measures from the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy*. In October 2020, the Job-ready Graduates Package passed Parliament.

This Package contained important changes to Australia's Higher Education System providing some additional support and opportunities for regional and remote students by:

- bridging the gap in participation and attainment between regional and remote students and metropolitan students,
- improving opportunities for regional and remote students to attend university,
- driving productivity for the regions,
- increasing facilities in regional areas,
- improving opportunities in regional communities,
- investment in regional campuses, and
- increased financial support for regional and remote students.

Details can be found at:

<https://www.studyassist.gov.au/news/job-ready-graduates-package-higher-education-reforms-0>

Job-ready Graduates Package measures applicable to rural and remote students include:

1. Tertiary Access Payment

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a \$5000 one-off payment that aims to improve tertiary education attainment and retention rates of students from regional and remote communities by assisting students with the additional costs of relocating to undertake tertiary study including start-up expenses, costs of living, direct costs of education or training and the cost of traveling home in semester breaks.

Eligibility criteria for school leavers:

- must be from outer regional, remote and very remote areas (as per the ASGS remoteness classifications),
- must be relocating more than 90 minutes by public transport from their family home,
- must be enrolled in an eligible full-time higher-level tertiary education, Certificate IV or above qualification of at least one-year duration, and
- parental income must be below the threshold of \$250 000.

The TAP commenced in 2021 and applications remain open with students encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Students relocating to study at a university should apply through their participating university and students relocating to study at a non-university higher education provider must apply through Services Australia. The TAP can be claimed in addition to YA and Relocation Scholarship. Information on the TAP can be found at:

www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment

www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment

www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-university-students

www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-vet-and-nuhep-students

In August 2021, Federal Council provided feedback to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) during the first-year evaluation consultations of the TAP which aimed to examine the program's appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency in meeting its intended objectives. Federal Council included data from a survey the tertiary and training portfolios conducted to determine knowledge, application and experience of the TAP.

Federal Council continues to advocate for the introduction of a **Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA)** for rural and remote students irrespective of eligibility for Youth Allowance. ICPA (Aust) proposes TAA amounts align with the Relocation Scholarship payments which would benefit Youth Allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students who are ineligible for Youth Allowance. This would address the continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided to help with relocation costs for rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance compared to dependent Youth Allowance assistance. ICPA (Aust) will closely monitor the TAP and will respond to ensure it is akin to our proposed TAA.

Members can find more information regarding the TAP and Federal Council's advocacy surrounding the program in the ICPA (Aust) Training Report 2021.

2. Rural And Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES) Program

The RRES program supports undergraduate, postgraduate and higher-level vocational education and training students in rural, regional and remote areas with the costs of studying at university or a vocational education and training institution. These scholarships continue to be:

- valued at up to \$18,000, and
- available to regional and remote students studying in any discipline from Certificate IV to PhD level at an eligible higher education provider or vocational education and training institution, with a duration of 6 months full-time and up to 8 years part-time, delivered on campus, or through online and distance education.
- There is an additional \$500 to support an internship.

More information can be found at www.dese.gov.au/rres. Round 5 of the RRES program opened 1 March 2021 for students commencing study at any time during the 2021 academic calendar year. Information and applications for the RRESP and the Creative Arts Scholarships for regional and remote students are through the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) www.qtac.edu.au/rres-program/.

3. Regional University Centres (RUC)

Regional University Centres provide tertiary students in regional and remote locations campus-like facilities and support including study spaces, video conferencing, computer facilities and internet access. They also provide academic support and pastoral care for students studying via distance at partner universities. This allows students to remain in their local community and study online. More information about the program can be found at:

www.education.gov.au/regional-university-centres.

The Federal Government has committed funding through to 2023-24 including the establishment of 8 new RUCs bringing the total to 32 across Australia.

4. Fares Allowance

From 1 January 2021, the Fares Allowance waiting period for Youth Allowance and Austudy will be reduced from 6 months to 3 months before the first claim can be made. This will allow students to access a return trip home from their place of study under Fares Allowance in their mid-year break. All other aspects and the eligibility criteria of the Fares Allowance remain the same.

www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/Centrelink/fares-allowance.

5. Reintroduction of the HECS-HELP Upfront Payment Discount

On 1 January 2021 the HECS-HELP upfront payment discount was re-introduced and can now be claimed. This discount provides an incentive for students to pay their student contribution either partially or fully before census date and receive a 10% discount providing the payment is \$500 or more, which will decrease their student debt.

6. Regional Education Commissioner

The Regional Education Commissioner, once appointed, will:

- oversee and coordinate the implementation of recommendations from the Napthine Review,
- work to address the complex factors driving the disparity in regional education outcomes,
- champion regional education across all education sectors from early childhood through to higher education, including both university and vocational education and training,
- oversee and coordinate projects that respond to the Strategy, and
- work with all tiers of government and other stakeholders.

QUALITY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION REVIEW

ICPA (Aust) had the opportunity to progress past motions in a submission to the *Quality Initial Teaching Education Review* which sought to identify issues relating specifically to teachers and teaching in rural and remote Australia. ICPA (Aust) sought the need for inclusion of modules specifically related to teaching in a rural and remote context and specific learning needs in undergraduate and postgraduate education courses. This would serve to prepare teachers for future rural and remote pathways, building capacity and support in these locations. Furthermore, it would assist the recruitment and retention of competent, committed, confident and highly effective teachers in rural and remote Australian schools who can deliver a consistently high standard of education for rural and remote students.

During August and September 2021, Federal Council participated in a webinar and a consultation with the Review Expert Panel and reinforced the challenges for teaching in the rural and remote context.

The submission to the *Quality Initial Teaching Education Review* can be read here:

<https://icpa.com.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Quality%20Initial%20Teacher%20Education%20Review%20Submission%20Final%20July%202021.pdf>

CENTRELINK - PROOF OF IDENTITY

During the height of COVID-19, provisions were made to streamline applying for Youth Allowance (YA). An applicant could use their myGov account to confirm their identity, receive a Centrelink Reference Number (CRN), create a Centrelink online account, link their Centrelink online account to myGov and make their claim online. The Department of Social Services have indicated that the COVID-19 proof of identity provisions will cease and the return of having to present to a Service centre or Centrelink office is imminent.

ICPA (Aust) would like to see the COVID-19 provisions continue for rural and remote applicants who are unable to reasonably attend a service centre due to the tyranny of distance. This would enable an application to commence with an online proof of identity. The applicant could then present at a service centre for confirmation of identity documents once relocated to their place of study prior to their commencement of Youth Allowance payments. This provision would address the difficulty many rural and remote students and families have with initial proof of identity that results in delays in applications, approval and commencement of YA payments.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE

COVID-19 and Gap Year Students

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the 2020-21 Budget announcements that support young people currently on a working gap year affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19 in relation to their ability to fulfil their working criteria to demonstrate independence for Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY. These measures address the tertiary motion brought to Federal Conference in 2020.

Two provisions were introduced:

1. Young people from regional and remote areas who were qualifying for Youth Allowance as an independent under the Concessional Workforce Independence Criteria (CWIC) will be automatically considered, for the six-month period between 25 March and 24 September 2020 to have:
 - earned 75 per cent of the National Training Wage Schedule weekly rate (unless in receipt of a higher income), or
 - worked 15 hours per week.
2. A temporary pathway for young people planning on taking a working gap year in 2021, who earn at least \$15,000 through agricultural work during the period 30 November 2020 and 31 December 2021 will be considered independent for Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY.

NATIONAL CAREERS INSTITUTE ‘YOUR CAREER’ WEBSITE

Federal Council collaborated with the National Career Institute (NCI) and Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) in the development and roll out of information and resources for school leavers on work and education options including university, vocational education and training (VET), apprenticeships or employment.

NCI has developed three additional resources for school leavers and their parents or guardians:

1. The **School Leavers Information Kit** (SLIK) provides information and support to assist with post-school career pathways decisions, work and education options such as university, vocational education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships), volunteering and community service, tips and resources to assist with job applications and resources outlining available government financial support and subsidies.
2. The **School Leavers Information Service** is a free phone, text or email support to navigate the School Leavers Information Kit and the website. The service also offers a free 45-minute personalised career guidance session with a qualified career practitioner
3. The SLIK is supported by the **Parents and Guardian’s Guide for School Leavers** to facilitate careers conversations at home.
www.yourcareer.gov.au/school-leavers-support/

These resources and information can be found on the Your Careers website www.yourcareer.gov.au.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE OVERVIEW 2021 DOCUMENT

The Tertiary Portfolio has updated the Youth Allowance Overview in consultation with the Department of Social Services and Services Australia as a guide to YA eligibility and application. This document summarises the lengthy YA website information for rural and remote students planning to study full-time and intending to apply for Youth Allowance and is available in the January 2020 Pedals and on the ICPA (Aust) website. For more information, advice, clarification and further assistance, please phone **132490** (dedicated Youth Allowance phone number) or visit:

www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/youth-allowance.

Thank you to State Tertiary Portfolios, my fellow Tertiary Portfolio members Nikki Macqueen, Jane O’Brien, Sally Sullivan and Kim Hughes and all of Federal Council for their ongoing support, guidance, knowledge and dedication.

We will continue to raise members' new and ongoing issues at every opportunity through all avenues available to us, to achieve measures needed to ensure our rural and remote students have the opportunity to access, participate and complete a tertiary education commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.

TRAINING PORTFOLIO

Kim Hughes

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate on behalf of members to ensure rural and remote students and young people have the opportunity to pursue courses, training and careers that best suit their interest and ambitions regardless of their geographical location.

At the 2020 virtual Federal Conference, a motion was carried requesting that ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to ensure assistance packages/schemes similar to the Coronavirus Supplement, which are established to support young people through times of specific economic impacts, include rural and remote apprentices and trainees receiving the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA).

At present only recipients receiving a social services payment e.g., Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY are eligible to receive the Coronavirus Supplement. The ineligibility of LAFHA recipients to this support payment has proven difficult for many rural and remote apprentices who have experienced reduced hours due to the pandemic. Diminished earnings have exacerbated the already high financial pressure that living away from home incurs.

Federal Council wrote to the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships, Hon Steve Irons MP, the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston and Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash.

Responses from both the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the Department of Social Services highlighted that LAFHA is appropriated under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program and LAFHA eligibility is not linked to the income that an apprentice receives as part of their employment nor subject to parental income tests.

ICPA (Aust) also raised this issue with a number of Members of Parliament and Senators at recent delegations in Canberra including the Minister for Regional Education, the Hon Andrew Gee MP. We will continue to advocate for this issue at every opportunity.

Assistance for rural and remote apprentices and trainees

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for an increase to the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) and indexing to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to better reflect the cost of living for rural and remote young people who must move away from home to access their chosen pathway. We have made representation on this issue at every opportunity, conveying that although the LAFHA is greatly appreciated, it is simply not sustainable given the increased living expenses that come with living away from home, including rent, food, fuel and utilities.

Federal Council has also raised the issue with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment that the availability of the LAFHA payment needs to be more visible. As it is not a Services Australia payment and therefore not housed with other student payments (e.g., Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY) it can be easily overlooked. ICPA (Aust) continues to publicise links to available allowances for Australian Apprentices and trainees in its own publications in a bid to raise awareness of the financial support available to this cohort of young people.

Members are also encouraged to contact an Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (Apprenticeship Network) Provider to discuss eligibility for apprenticeship support. They are able to:

- help find an employer and registered training organisation to complete training
- provide a training contract
- assess apprentices for a financial assistance
- provide advice and support to during the apprenticeship.

Visit <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/search-aasn> to find your Provider.

The need for apprentices and trainees to receive relocation assistance remains a focus within the Training Portfolio. Federal Council continues to raise the concern that Australian Apprentices and trainees are not eligible to receive the Relocation Scholarship even if they are eligible for Youth Allowance as they are not participating in an approved higher education course.

The introduction of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) has been a positive development for rural and remote VET students. The program has made available relocation assistance to those studying a VET course, which can be any of the following:

- Certificate IV
- Diploma (other than a Higher Education Diploma eligible for FEE HELP)
- Advanced Diploma.

Currently the TAP is only available to students studying in the year after compulsory schooling and it has a parental income threshold of \$250,000.00. VET students are urged to visit for more information. <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment>

Unfortunately, Australian Apprentices are ineligible for the new Tertiary Access Payment (TAP). The Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) recently undertook a first-year evaluation of the TAP to examine the program's appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency in meeting its intended objectives. Federal Council had the opportunity to provide feedback to this evaluation process in August. Amongst the feedback given was the need for an expansion of criteria to include Australian Apprentices, given they receive no relocation assistance, are rarely eligible for Youth Allowance and also participating in a VET course as a component of their qualification.

Members can find more information regarding the TAP and Federal Council's advocacy surrounding the program in the ICPA (Aust) Tertiary Report.

2021 Budget

The 2021-2022 Budget included a further \$2.7b over four years to extend and expand the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy. This includes \$1.2 billion to uncap the program and extend the subsidy to 12 months from the date of commencement, and an additional \$1.5 billion to extend the commencement period for another six months to 31 March 2022.

Through the subsidy, any business or Group Training Organisation that engages an Australian Apprentice between 5 October 2020 and 31 March 2022 may be eligible for a subsidy of 50 per cent of wages paid to a new or recommencing apprentice or trainee for a 12-month period from the date of commencement, to a maximum of \$7,000 per quarter. There is no cap on the number of eligible trainees/apprentices.

ICPA (Aust) continues to reiterate to Government that whilst it welcomes investment in the Skills and Training sector to boost engagement of trainees and apprentices, this also must be balanced with financial support for the individual apprentices to ensure their cost-of-living expenses do not diminish their opportunities to access these apprenticeship opportunities.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) Skills Reform

The Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform signed by the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments, outlines the required changes to the VET system to ensure Australians can access high quality and relevant training with the skills to take on positions that emerge through the next decade and beyond.

Skills and Training Ministers are rolling out initiatives identified in this Agreement and as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, are delivering the JobTrainer Fund to provide up to an additional 340,700 free or low-cost training places in areas of identified skills needs. Participating states and territories are rolling out training places which will benefit and support job seekers and young people, particularly school leavers.

The Australian Government has also commenced work on immediate reforms identified by National Cabinet which include a review of the current standards for Registered Training Organisations, building Registered Training Organisation capacity and capability for continuous improvement and developing a VET workforce quality strategy. This work has been informed by priorities identified through the VET Reform Roadmap and builds on VET sector reviews, including the Braithwaite Review, Joyce Review and rapid review of Australian Skills Quality Authority's (ASQA) regulatory practices, governance and culture.

Consultation over recent months has sought feedback from stakeholders on how best to strengthen the role of industry engagement in the VET system and on the design of qualifications, with a particular focus on new approaches that will better meet the needs of employers and learners now and into the future. ICPA (Aust) has had the opportunity to participate in relevant aspects of this consultation and provided feedback from a rural and remote context on how best to support geographically isolated students in their endeavours to pursue VET pathways.

All Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are working towards a new National Skills Agreement by August 2021.

Agricultural Colleges

Federal Council has been in regular contact with the Queensland ICPA Tertiary, Trade and Training Portfolio leader to offer support in relation to the closures of Agricultural Colleges such as the Queensland Agricultural Training College (QATC) campuses in Longreach and Emerald.

Currently the Regional Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) hold the lease of the former Longreach Pastoral College campus and are investigating ways to utilise this asset in the future.

AgForce Qld have advised they have recently convened a meeting of the Northern Pastoral Companies with the Queensland Department of Education, Small Business and Training (DESBT), RAPAD, the Queensland Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA), the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and other interested agencies. Following on from this, AgForce Qld are now working with RJSA on a proposal to DESBT (including TAFE Qld) for livestock industry training at Longreach, with support from the northern pastoral group members to identify required entry level skills and industry pathways. AgForce Qld will also be working with peak industry bodies (Cattle Council of Australia, Sheep Producers Australia and Wool Producers Australia) as well as broader industry. The focus initially is to consider the entry level training required for the livestock industry employers and potentially expand from there.

Federal Council will continue to follow these developments and to offer assistance and support wherever possible.

National Careers Institute

Federal Council has been working closely with the National Careers Institute (NCI) to assist with the roll out of a range of resources to support school leavers to work through their next steps after school. The NCI has rolled out a School Leavers Information Kit (SLIK)

www.yourcareer.gov.au/media/xlcbghjw/school_leaver_information_kit.pdf

which has been especially developed to assist school leavers with education, training and work options. It provides:

- information and support to help with decisions about post-school career pathways
- information on work and education options such as university, vocational education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships), volunteering and community service
- tips and resources to help apply for jobs, and
- resources outlining government financial support and subsidies available.

The SLIK is supported by the Parents and Guardian's Guide for School Leavers to help start careers conversations at home.

www.yourcareer.gov.au/media/111fn3at/parentsandguardiansguideforschoolleavers.pdf

School leavers aged 15 to 24 can also access a 45-minute personalised careers guidance session with a qualified career practitioner to ask education, training or work-related questions they may have through **1800CAREER**.

More information can be found on the ICPA (Aust) website in the Training Portfolio.

I would like to sincerely thank Federal Training Portfolio members Alana Moller, Kate Thompson, Sally Sullivan and Jane O'Brien for their knowledge and support over the past year along with the State Training Portfolio leaders. Affordable access to training and career opportunities is the only way to ensure rural Australia achieves a skilled and qualified workforce into the future. ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for equity in opportunity for rural and remote young people who wish to pursue a VET pathway, to ensure geographical location is not an obstacle or hindrance to achieving their career goals.

RURAL HARDSHIP EDUCATION FUND (RHEF) UPDATE

ICPA (Aust) has continued its commitment to supporting and advocating for geographically isolated families in our community when they are suffering challenges and hardships. The impacts of flood, drought, fire and other difficulties that impact on the ability of rural and remote students to access their education have been at the forefront of our minds. While the pandemic has hampered progress towards the introduction of a Rural Hardship Education Fund which would ensure geographically isolated children can continue their education unhindered at any time of rural hardship, Federal Council continues to advocate regularly on this topic.

It was encouraging to see ICPA (Aust)'s call for a Rural Hardship Education Fund put as a motion by Senator Pauline Hanson in October 2019 and given unanimous support in the Senate. Following on from this, momentum built off the back of media coverage and through the ongoing support of members, State Councils and other supporters of ICPA Australia.

Immediately after the success in the Senate, Federal Council updated our Rural Hardship Education Fund Briefing Paper and created a one-page quick reference information sheet to help get the message out there about the desperate need for assistance to support families in rural and remote areas who continued to struggle with the severe drought conditions and other hardships. This infographic and supporting information were sent to numerous Senators and Members of Parliament to ask for their further support. ICPA (Aust)'s explanation of the Rural Hardship Education Fund was expanded to more clearly show the need for support across all areas of rural education in times when difficult circumstances impact a community.

In seeking the establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund, ICPA (Aust) asks for:

- Establishment of a permanent/long term Rural Hardship Education Fund that remains in place so that each time a disaster/hardship hits a rural area, funds are automatically available for geographically isolated students' education assistance programs.
- Supplementary payment made to the Assistance for Isolated Children allowance (AIC) for families identified as being in rural hardship. For example: living in drought affected areas/states. However, individual consideration should also be given for families in states which do not declare a disaster such as drought, where these families show the impact of a hardship on their children's education.
- Funding for Rural Schools, Early Learning/Long Day Care Centres in affected areas.
- Itinerant and specialist teachers made available to enable more support for Distance Education students and Rural Schools, including home visits in remote classrooms and other localised support resources.
- Adjusted rate/additional subsidy to assist affected families to access In Home Care for young children.
- Tertiary Access Allowance for rural and remote students enrolled in university, training courses, or apprenticeship.
- That the amount of assistance be:
 - At least \$2000 per student per year
 - Should be for Geographically Isolated/Rural students

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic stalled the progress of many things, and government attention had to be focused elsewhere, however our resolve to continue to advocate for the establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund has not diminished.

On 5 May 2021, the National Recovery and Resilience Agency was announced by the Australian Government to support local communities in responding to major disasters <https://recovery.gov.au/>

This new agency will assist communities with relief and recovery efforts following large-scale natural disasters. The Agency role will also include providing advice to Government on managing the impact of future disaster events. During Federal Council's delegations to Canberra in May 2021, (our first opportunity to visit Parliament since the October 2019 visit prior to Covid-19 restrictions), Federal Council followed up on the Senate vote on the Rural Hardship Education fund with various Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament. Then Minister for Drought and Emergency Management Hon David Littleproud MP encouraged ICPA (Aust) to discuss the need for a Rural Hardship Education Fund which would address the education needs of geographically isolated students in times of hardship with the newly formed National Recovery and Resiliency Agency. Federal Council had already passed our information on to key staff in the former National Drought and Flood Agency. Following on from the Minister's suggestion, Federal Council has pursued making contact with the new agency in order to discuss where the Rural Hardship Education Fund may sit within their program. ICPA (Aust) will also raise the topic in future correspondence and meetings with the newly-appointed Minister for National Recovery and Resilience and Emergency Management, Senator Bridget McKenzie.

ICPA (Aust) is committed to advocating for a Rural Hardship Education Fund to be implemented in order to support geographically isolated families and communities when students' ability to access appropriate education is impacted by challenges in times of rural hardship.
