

RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL REPORT 2021

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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... 14 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 in 2020 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 was 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 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 please 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 has 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.

PLACE	STATE	ZONE
Adelaide	SA	3
Albury	NSW	1
Alice Springs	NT	6
Brisbane	QLD	3
Bendigo	VIC	2
Cooper Pedy	SA	5
Cairns	QLD	6
Darwin	NT	7
Eucla	WA	6
Goondiwindi	QLD	2
Hay	NSW	2
Lismore	NSW	3
Meekatharra	WA	8
Melbourne	VIC	2
Mt Gambier	SA	3
Maryborough	QLD	3
Newcastle	NSW	1
Perth	WA	7
Roxby Downs	SA	4
Rockhampton	QLD	4
Sydney	NSW	1
Townsville	QLD	5

ZONE	DISTANCE	Standard rebate per student	Rebate per student for 2021
1	150-499	\$20.00	\$30.00
2	500-999	\$30.00	\$45.00
3	1000-1499	\$60.00	\$90.00
4	1500-1999	\$100.00	\$150.00
5	2000-2499	\$150.00	\$225.00
6*	2500-2999	\$200.00	\$300.00
7	3000-3999	\$310.00	\$465.00
8	4000+	\$340.00	\$510.00



PACER ZONES

*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.