



Distance Education Portfolio

2024 Conference Report

Portfolio Leader: Louise Martin

Distance Education will always be a critical component of the educational journey for many rural and remote students and families. The advocacy around the equitable provision and delivery of distance education schooling continues to be a priority for ICPA (Aust), noting that the constitution states that free education is to be made available for all students.

The remuneration and recognition for geographically isolated distance education classroom supervisors has been on the ICPA agenda for 50 years. It has been presented in many ways and has had different names and iterations over the years, in an attempt to achieve traction with government, without success thus far.

A conjoined motion presented at the 2023 Federal Conference by four branches, Western Australia State Council, Alice Springs Branch (NT), Far North Queensland Branch (QLD), Goldfields Eyre Branch (WA), Katherine Branch (NT), requesting a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) continues to highlight that the need for home tutor recognition and recompense is high on the agenda. Post conference, a letter was written to the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner seeking her support for the Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA). The commissioner advised in her response that she had raised the issue of a DETA in her 2022 Annual Report and will continue to consider how best to assist with progressing this issue.

With no traction having been made, discussions this year have revolved around how the topic can be reframed and presented in a potentially more progressive manner in the current political and social climate. ICPA (Aust), alongside the State Councils have had lengthy discussions regarding DETA over many years, and again at the most recent Joint Council meeting in February.

At this meeting Federal Council provided State Councils with an overview of the federal advocacy currently, primarily that feedback continues to be that it is a state and territory government issue. The risk however if state and territory governments are approached separately is that they might fund at different levels, and some may not fund at all. ICPA (Aust) has also requested on several occasions that the topic be added as an agenda item at an Education Ministers Meeting (EMM), which is a periodic meeting of all state, territory and federal education ministers.

Given the current financial climate, complexity, and longevity around the DETA advocacy, it was agreed that the direction of the advocacy needs to be revisited, reconsidered, and adjusted with some fresh methodology in order to have more impact and certainty in the future. In particular, the distance education tutor role, terminology, and details on what an alternative to DETA would look like. Federal Council has also taken the feedback from the Joint Council meeting to our public relations and strategic planning consultants, C7even, and requested advice on ways forward with this advocacy. Federal Council is absolutely committed to resolving the DETA issue for home tutors all over Australia.

More recent discussions with Ms Nash to ponder the issue further and potential opportunities to reframe the lobby has taken place and the Commissioner is encouraging and supportive of refreshing the approach. At our recent delegations to Canberra, we had the opportunity to meet with Mr Tony Cook PSM, Secretary of the Federal Department of Education. Federal Council posed the thought of reframing the DETA to be a classroom supervisor subsidy, which was well received by Mr Cook.

It is a fact that all families must sign a compulsory document to secure enrolment in a school of Distance Education, declaring that all students under 12 years of age will be supervised whilst undertaking distance education.



It is noted that a subsidy in this format would be the responsibility of State Governments, however Federal Council will continue to advocate vigorously for a blanket result across the country for this very important recompense to acknowledge the work of distance education classroom supervisors.

A motion carried at the 2023 conference requested that ICPA (Aust) investigate the existing precedence of the Centrelink Jobseeker payment which is available to single principal carers with exemption from mutual obligation requirements because they are a home or distance educator of child/ren in their care, and its possible application, adaption and or leverage for the creation of an applicable Distance Education Tutor Allowance for geographically isolated families. Federal Council has had a response from the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, regarding this motion. The Minister stated that “Any extension to this provision, such as to all home tutors in rural and remote distance education classrooms where there are no other choices for schooling, as suggested, in your letter, would involve changing legislation.” This is due to the current eligibility criteria in section 40P of the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 not being fit for purpose. ICPA (Aust) will continue to investigate the possibilities and opportunities for legislative change.