

## DISTANCE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO MOTIONS 2024

### **A 3. FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education (DoE) to work with the Schools of Distance Education (SoDE) to develop a program to support the needs of geographically isolated enrolled students with Specific Needs, including out of phase learners.”**

#### **Explanation:**

Since 2008, Schools of Distance Education (SoDE) in Queensland have experienced huge increases in enrolment. For example, from 2008 to 2018 Cairns SoDE had a 415% increase in enrolment and Capricornia SoDE a 505% increase. A large proportion of these increases are due to medical enrolments moving to distance education as they are not able to access suitable education to meet their needs in mainstream face-to-face school settings. For Cairns SoDE, in 2021 medical enrolments were 24% of total full-time enrolments and in 2024 are 32.5% of total full-time enrolments. SoDE are not equipped for this changing demographic in terms of the mindset of school leadership, school policies, level of understanding of medical conditions and their complexities, as well as suitably qualified staff, and access to disability workers and professionals to appropriately support the needs of these students, despite them making up a third of full-time home-based enrolments. Geographically isolated students with disability and specific learning needs are “doubly disadvantaged” in this system.

Education Queensland’s Every student with disability succeeding plan 2021–2025\* commits the Queensland government to transform the state education system to support the success and wellbeing of every student with disability through each stage of learning. The plan “includes actions to ensure every student with disability and their families are welcomed at their school, are heard and supported by confident and capable staff with high expectations that, with the right support, every student with disability can succeed”. This all looks commendable on paper, but it is yet to be seen how this policy will be embedded into practice in the distance education setting. This plan presents an opportunity for the DoE to work with the SoDE to develop a program to support the needs of medically enrolled students including out of phase learners to ensure every child’s learning and well-being needs are properly met at their level, building on their strengths, so that every student with disability can succeed, achieve their full potential, and live a life of choice.

\* <https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/every-student-with-disability-succeeding-plan.pdf>

**CARRIED**

### **A 4. FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education (DoE) to ensure that Schools of Distance Education (SoDE) are resourced and staffed in terms of suitably qualified teachers, teacher aides and counsellors, and have access to disability support workers and professionals, to support the success and well-being of those geographically isolated students who require additional learning support.”**

#### **Explanation:**

Since 2008, Schools of Distance Education (SoDE) in Queensland have experienced huge increases in enrolments. For example, from 2008 to 2018 Cairns SoDE had a 415% increase in enrolment and Capricornia SoDE a 505% increase. A large proportion of these increases are due to medical enrolments moving to distance education as they are not able to access suitable education to meet their needs in mainstream face-to-face school settings. For Cairns SoDE, in 2021 medical enrolments were 24% of total full-time enrolments and in 2024 are 32.5% of total full-time enrolments. SoDE have not been able to keep up with this changing demographic in terms of having suitably qualified staff including teachers, teacher aides, councillors and

access to disability support workers and professionals to appropriately support the needs of these students, despite them making up a third of full-time home-based enrolments.

For geographically isolated students, distance and isolation limits the choice of schools available to students, but for students with disability and specific learning needs, this choice can be further limited. Having both geographic isolation and learning difficulties can be seen as a "double disability"\*. All students have a human right to participate in education appropriate to their needs and at their level through rigorous, meaningful, and dignified learning programs, supported by special provisions and appropriately qualified teachers and staff, regardless of their geographic location.

\*ICPA Australia (2023) Specific Education Needs Portfolio Briefing Paper.

**CARRIED**

#### **A 5. FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education (DoE) and other relevant departments to develop a flow chart that provides details of support contacts and pathways for parents, families, carers and home tutors of geographically isolated enrolled students with Specific Needs to navigate the programs and supports available.”**

**Explanation:**

The diagnosis of medical conditions in children can be a challenging and stressful time for all involved. For school-aged children this is compounded by the pressures of a compulsory education, and for geographically isolated and rural and remote families, the isolation, and huge distances to travel to access medical services, education, and support\*. There is a lack of prioritized and clear pathways for intervention, diagnosis and management of special learning needs and the costs of accessing these services and supports are exacerbated by distance. Having a flow chart available as a visual guide for parents, carers and families would facilitate better understanding of the processes, resources, and support programs available to help them advocate for the needs of their child through each stage of learning.

\* Noted by ICPA NT in the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training - *Report on Education in Remote and Complex Environments (2020)*.

**CARRIED**

#### **A 6. ICPA QLD STATE COUNCIL**

**“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education and the seven Schools of Distance Education to ensure that Home Tutors/supervisors have a designated contact and support network at the school campus to assist with all aspects of the home classroom management and learning assistance to support the enrolled student.”**

**Explanation:**

Home Tutors of geographically isolated children require support on how to support their students in the home classroom, especially those new to the role, those supporting younger Kindy or P-3 students, those children who require learning support, are neurodivergent learners or have diverse disabilities. It is often difficult to access this support given the teachers inability to field questions due to their timetabled teaching commitments. In mainstream settings if a child is struggling with a concept the Teacher Aide can seek advice from the teacher how to best support the learning outcomes of the student. This barrier to support can leave the Home Tutor feeling further isolated and alone and can contribute to poor engagement and work

returns. Ease of access to an experienced and dedicated Home Tutor support contact within SDE's would greatly assist the support provided to the student by the Home Tutor.

**CARRIED**

#### **A 7. FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education (DoE) to develop a policy with Schools of Distance Education (SoDE) to have Term 1 distance education school resources available for enrolled geographically isolated (GI) students to collect from the school mail room or to post to families before Week 1 Term 1.”**

**Explanation:**

In the 2024 school year a number of GI students enrolled in Cairns School of Distance Education (CSDE) in Far North Queensland did not receive their distance education resources until Week 6 of Term 1. This included families with students enrolled with the school and living at the same address for over 15 years and students from each stage of learning. Not having these resources on hand from the start of Term 1 disadvantaged these students and disrupted the functioning of the distance education home schoolroom.

The delay in receiving school resources this year and in previous years is due to a number of factors, some controllable (e.g. school mail room procedures, school enrolment and finance processes) and others uncontrollable (the wet season and severe weather events). Many GI families live on isolated properties which are cut off from town during the wet season (mid-December to April/May) therefore postal services are slow and sometimes unreliable. Many families receive mail only once a week via the mail plane and at times the plane cannot land due to the weather, so they have to wait a week or more to receive mail. If the school does not prioritise GI students when mailing out resources, their resources get caught in the backlog and when finally mailed out they can be further delayed by wet season disruptions.

This issue could be addressed by schools prioritising GI students when preparing school resources and ensuring that Term 1 school resources are available for families to collect from the school mail room at the end of the year for the following year. This would also save the school money on postage. Alternatively, if families cannot attend the school to collect resources, they should be posted to families before Term 4 ends, thereby arriving in advance of the start of Term 1. Several years ago, at CSDE this option was offered to families but is no longer available. It is important this option becomes policy across SoDE so it cannot be changed at the whim of school leadership.

**CARRIED**

#### **A 8. HUGHENDEN BRANCH**

**“That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education to review and/or rewrite the eTeach units being delivered to students studying Distance Education.”**

**Explanation:**

The current eTeach units provided to students undertaking distance education are in dire need of improvement. They suffer from various issues such as being outdated, prone to malfunctioning, and lacking engagement. These units play a role in distance education, serving as the primary means of delivering lessons to students who are unable to attend traditional classrooms however, feedback from students and home tutors highlights significant shortcomings in the current units.

One major problem is the outdated content. Many of the lessons within the eTeach units are no longer relevant or accurate and fail align with current curriculum standards. This not only hampers students' learning but also undermines the credibility of the educational material being presented.

Additionally, technical issues plague the accessibility of the eTeach units. Software glitches and compatibility issues frequently prevent students from accessing the content, causing frustration and hindering their progress. In an era where technology is meant to facilitate learning, these obstacles present significant barriers to education.

The lack of engagement within the eTeach units is a pressing concern. The content fails to captivate students' interest, leading to decreased motivation and ultimately poorer learning outcomes. Without engaging materials, students are less likely to retain information or actively participate in their own education.

In one of the music assessments, for instance, it required specific instruments to complete the assessment. However, as is often the case, these instruments are not readily available to geographically isolated students. Consequently, students find themselves in a predicament where they must resort to completing the assessment online using unconventional methods. Picture a scenario where a student, lacking access to a drum set, attempts to mimic drumming by using their mouse to manoeuvre a virtual drumstick on the screen. Similarly, another student, without access to a piano, struggles to produce notes by clicking keys on a digital keyboard interface.

Addressing these issues is paramount to ensuring the effectiveness of distance education. Content must be regularly updated to reflect current standards and advancements in knowledge. Technical glitches need to be promptly addressed to ensure seamless access to educational resources. And perhaps most importantly, efforts should be made to design engaging, interactive content that fosters a love for learning and encourages active participation from students.

**CARRIED**

## **S 1. MT ISA BRANCH OF THE AIR**

**"That ICPA Qld lobbies the Department of Education to fund an Early Childhood position at each of the Schools of Distance Education (SDE) where a significant portion of their students are classed as geographically isolated (GI) in order to increase face to face contact and interaction."**

### **Explanation:**

The current eKindy programme is offered by Brisbane SDE for GI young students who, because of distance, cannot attend kindergarten face to face. Whilst two other SDE's currently have an EC trained teacher providing eKindy, a significant portion of students are in remote regions not aligned with either of these and so Brisbane remains the only option. As a result of this, and the logistics/cost of travel associated with facilitating face to face visits, interaction with their teacher and fellow kindy students is infrequent and irregular. According to ACARA, some of the prime purposes of kindergarten are to:

- develop and improve social and cooperation skills
- build identity through connections with teachers, peers and community

These are most effectively done face to face through explicit teaching and opportunities for interaction, observation and listening to peers and teachers. To do so requires regular interaction which realistically and effectively cannot be undertaken from Brisbane. By decentralising eKindy, the opportunity for engagement with teachers and fellow students markedly increases as does the location where interaction can occur. This in turn leads to improved skills, attitudes as well as mental, emotional and social development in readiness for formal schooling.

**CARRIED**