

ICPA Qld Presidents Conference Report

Adelaide - July 2025

Wendy Henning

Federal President, State Presidents, Life Members, distinguished guests, fellow ICPA members, ladies and gentlemen—

It is with great pride and gratitude that I present to you the 2025 ICPA Qld President's Report. It's been twelve months since we last gathered and, in that time, Qld has continued its strong, steady, and deeply committed advocacy for the education of children living in rural and remote areas.

The 54th State Conference, held in June in the welcoming town of St George, brought together members, stakeholders and guests in an atmosphere of energy and purpose. The conference was proudly hosted by the St George, Dirranbandi and Bollon Branches under the thoughtful coordination of Mrs Lisa Southern. The efforts of these branches gave us not only a smooth and warm conference experience but also a powerful reminder of the strength that lies in collaboration. Over 260 attendees from 37 branches were present, joined by key voices from across education sectors, including government representatives, boarding schools, early childhood experts, tertiary education providers, and many more.

The motions brought forward and debated this year reflected the ever-evolving needs of our members. Topics included access to early childhood services, school dental services, equitable support for teachers in rural and remote locations, and the importance of learning support and pathways into tertiary education and training. Members again reaffirmed their strong commitment to ensuring viable and accessible boarding options, including the pursuit of an immersive agricultural high school model with boarding—an initiative our state believes is long overdue in Queensland.

In reflecting on the year that's passed, I want to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of our State Council, both those in on-council and off-council roles. We have welcomed new councillors Jayne Cuddihy from Dawson Valley, Natalie Pampling from Augathella, Catherine Baker from Moonie, and Stacey Gall from Southern Downs. We also welcomed Kimberley Wilson from Julia Creek as the new *News & Views* editor. Our team continues to grow and evolve, with each new member bringing fresh energy, experience, and insights. The role of Fundraising Officer remains unfilled as council work to redefine the role to ensure relevance and a defined need and plan.

This past year, State Council engaged in important training and capacity-building initiatives. We undertook governance training with Directors Australia and media training delivered by Independent Schools Queensland. These sessions not only strengthened our individual and collective understanding of best practice but also pushed us out of our comfort zones, growing our capacity to lead effectively and advocate confidently. While a third training—Low Stress Speaking—was postponed due to Cyclone Alfred, we look forward to delivering this for the new Council in August.

State Council participated in governance training from Directors Australia and media training delivered by Independent Schools Qld. These two courses not only upskilled but also challenged every member of council and have ultimately helped grow the council's skills and capabilities. A third course, "Low Stress Speaking," was postponed due to Cyclone Alfred in March and will now benefit the new council in August. All of council will also further upskill with training from Directors Australia.

October saw a change of government following the state election. The election brought a new Director-General of Education and a new Minister. We welcomed Sharon Schimming into the DG role—a familiar face who has worked with us during her previous role in early childhood—and Hon. John-Paul Langbroek as Minister for Education, with whom we’ve already had two productive meetings. We thank former Minister Di Farmer for the respect and value she placed on ICPA Qld during her tenure and look forward to working with her in her new capacity as Shadow Minister for Education.

ICPA Qld has been actively engaged in numerous stakeholder sessions and reference groups, including representation on the Queensland Virtual Academy Stakeholder Reference Group, UniSQ School of Education Advisory Board, James Cook University Education Advisory Group, and NSSAFRI Working Groups on Boarding Standards and Wellness Standard. Being part of these groups is vitally important to council, ensuring that the perspective of rural and remote families and communities is always present in discussions that shape education policy and practice. Continued representation on the Hospital Schools Board also, highlighting the vital importance of ensuring access to education for children receiving medical treatment. The hospital school provides to children when they are at their most vulnerable.

Under the watchful eye of a new Publicity Officer, ICPA Qld branding and presence was adjusted and strategized. Council engaged with our members in a light-hearted way through the Pyjama Olympics, coinciding with the start of the Paris Olympics, to highlight the incredible talent on our team. This became a social media highlight for the year, though the children of the “showcased athletes” are still recovering from the fun and a video that went “viral”. With feedback from members and stakeholders, we know the importance of demonstrating that we are approachable and real is essential for our members but also professional and credible for our stakeholders – fortunately State Council are finding their many hidden talents along the way.

This year saw the creation of branch logos, giving branches their own identity within local communities, and in May we held our first webinar for branch executives to help with meeting processes and to support stronger local engagement. Moving forward, we will continue these efforts to ensure branches are connecting with their communities and building membership, as our advocacy strength relies on robust membership numbers. A “Branch Best Practice” presentation at conference proved to be not only invaluable but very much appreciated by branch representatives.

Delegations were held in August, December, March, and April in Brisbane, and we extend our thanks to St Peter’s School and Catholic Schools Parents Qld for hosting State Council’s face-to-face meetings. These meetings are critical for planning, preparing for stakeholder engagements, ensuring motions are progressing, updating policies, and strategising for the best outcomes. There is no greater motivation than having the entire council together in the one room.

Each delegation involved a packed timetable, combining meetings with the Department of Education and numerous other key stakeholders, including Qld Catholic Education Commission, Independent Schools Qld, the Qld Curriculum and Assessment Authority, QTAC, DTET, C&K, Play Matters, the College of Teachers, TAFE Qld, Queensland Farmers’ Federation, AgForce, LGAQ, Autism Qld, Telstra, and NBN, to name a few. These meetings ensure that the voices of rural and remote families are heard and considered across all areas of education and support.

Following the retirement of Dr Grant Webb, the Rural and Remote Team within the Department of Education saw new leadership within the department. Working with this team led to a first-of-its-kind webinar, hosted by the department, for members to provide feedback on the Small School's Plan. This was particularly important, given the accumulation of motions over the years raising concerns about small schools, especially the overburdening of teaching principals and staff. With the new government's focus on red tape reduction, ICPA Qld is hopeful that the benefits and impact of this work will soon be felt in all schools across the state. Working closely with the Department of Education is based on respect, honest representation and a mutual desire to understand and create solutions for rural and remote education.

The Tertiary, Trade and Training portfolio had an equally busy year, advocating across many fronts, from school-based vocational education and training to post-schooling. One key focus has been the push for an accredited course with recognition of prior learning for home tutors, who play a vital role in delivering distance education across Queensland. Continuing a 51-year tradition, the Financial Assistance portfolio has also advocated for recognising home tutors as integral to the delivery of education to geographically isolated students. These home tutors—whether they are mothers, tutors, or governesses—deserve financial recognition for their work, which is both essential and legislatively required for the delivery of education. ICPA Qld calls on the Queensland Government and the Federal Government to ensure that this recognition is finally achieved.

Council also continued work on the motion calling for an immersive agricultural high school, with boarding in Queensland, seeking equity with other states such as NSW and WA, where immersive secondary agricultural schools operate from Year 7 to 12. Council has worked hard to unite government, industry, and stakeholders on this issue to ensure the agricultural industry—so vital to the economy—is supported through education and workforce pathways.

Our partnership with Digital Child remained strong, with representation at the Digital Childhood Summit in Canberra helping us stay connected to national discussions around technology and young people. Similarly, our involvement in the Joint Parent Network led to the delivery of two highly successful webinars: "Unpacking NAPLAN" and "Unpacking VET," with over 750 registrations and more watching on replay. These collaborations continue to add significant value for families.

In October, the Executive met with the Winchester Foundation's Mr John Formosa, seeking advice to ensure that the constitution is the most up-to-date and relevant guiding document for the organisation. Also Macrossan and Amiet Solicitors for their guidance in preparing the constitution for Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status, which council will continue working towards over the next twelve months, with the goal of passing relevant motions at the 2026 conference.

It was a personal privilege to represent ICPA Qld at Government House for International Rural Women's Day, surrounded by women whose work continues to shape our communities and organisations. I also extend my deepest thanks to the Tim Fairfax Family and the Tim Fairfax Family Foundation for their support of ICPA Qld and for the opportunity to complete the Executive Leadership Program through UQ Business School. This program offered professional and personal development that I've been able to bring directly back to Council.

Qld State Council, every member currently on and off council along with those who have recently stood down, deserve to stand proud, be proud of not just the organisation that you volunteer for but also of

yourselves. With your commitment we are able to inform, educate and grow ourselves. This year we have participated in over 110 Stakeholder Meetings online, 104 Stakeholder Meetings face to face, 11 monthly meetings, 3 face to face meetings, 1 midyear meeting, 2 training courses, 1 executive gathering, mentor branch meetings, emails, messenger conversations and telephone calls. If we expand that out and very conservatively say each of those meetings went for half an hour – this is in excess of 238.5 volunteer hours, if we say 3 hours a day, that is 79.5 days on top of your everyday lives. Not back for volunteers with the same 24 hours in a day as everyone else. Every minute dedicated to ICPA is time taken from family and business, and over the past year, those minutes and hours as you have heard have added up, reiterating a significant family commitment to the organisation.

ICPA Qld have not only ensured that doors are open, we have them wedged open and with a seat waiting.

Warm regards
Wendy Henning
ICPA Qld President