

DISTANCE EDUCATION PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT – June 2022

The hot topic of last year's conference was on site accommodation at Distance Education schools not meeting compliancy standards and families no longer being allowed to access purpose-built buildings whilst they were attending face to face activities. This issue was high on our priority list during delegations throughout the year and was raised with various stakeholders including the Minister for Education. We were delighted when the department advised us that they were committed to getting these buildings back to compliancy standards. The Infrastructure Services Division and the newly engaged Project Manager have had various meetings with school communities to find solutions to the safety issues and still meet the needs of families. Charters Towers, Emerald, Cairns, and Longreach families will be back in their accommodation facilities next year. Capricornia School of Distance Education are also receiving two new buildings at the Rockhampton Campus which will help alleviate some of the classroom space issues.

At last year's conference we also had several motions around the continuation of in-service activities such as minischools and field service activities such as clusters and home visits. These activities are vital in the social development of Geographically Isolated Students who only get a small window of opportunity to spend face to face time with their teachers and peers. As GI numbers within Distance Education schools become a minority, parents are concerned these activities will be reduced. We raised this issue with the State Schools Performance Department who informed us that the continuation of these activities is an individual school-based decision. This was also the response to several motions around the flexible delivery of curriculum. These motions are related to the bigger issue of Geographically Isolated students needing to be prioritised in Distance Education schools. ICPA reiterates this at every opportunity, and we were pleased that one of the first questions the new Director General of Education Michael De'Ath asked was about Distance Education Schools. Only 16% of Distance Education enrolments are geographically Isolated students. The Department is currently doing a review into Distance Education which we hope will have positive outcomes for our Geographically Isolated Students.

At our March delegation this year, ICPA Qld also raised the issue of the process of Distance Education Students attending another local school on a regular basis. This practice has been around for a long time and is a benefit to both schools and students. There is currently a pilot process in place called a Flexible Arrangement, Distance Education Principals have the template on hand and will need to share this with the partnering school. This process is in place to make sure mandatory reporting and resources are in place.

IT update – the rollout of Qlearn has now been extended again and is to be fully implemented in term 1 2023. All 7 schools of Distance Education are on the early adopter list and teachers are currently trailing the new platform. The CANVAS platform which sits within Qlearn is compatible with Office 365. This seems to be a constantly evolving area and ICPA will continue to meet with the IT Department and put forward our concerns around needing a fit for purpose user friendly and engaging online learning platform.

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