



Progress Report

2023 Federal Conference Motions

Boarding Schools/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio

Compiled March 2024

In 2023, thirteen Boarding Schools/Hostels/Second Home Portfolio motions were carried at the Federal Conference. All of the motions related to educational affordability and financial assistance for geographically isolated students including the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance, the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) School Funding Model, Fringe Benefits Tax on boarding fees, the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program and funding for students with disability in boarding facilities.

Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance

Once again, a number of motions seeking an increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance – Basic Boarding Allowance (BBA) were presented at the Federal Conference, indicative of the ongoing and increasing affordability challenges geographically isolated families face to provide an affordable, equitable compulsory education to their children.

While this has been high on the agenda for many years, since conference Federal Council has continued on a dedicated campaign appealing for an AIC-BBA increase, citing that geographically isolated families are faced with unique costs to educate their children, not felt by those in metropolitan locations and these are ever-increasing. With the support and guidance of C7even who were engaged last year as communications and advocacy consultants, Federal Council has employed a variety of strategies aimed at compelling the federal government to restore the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance to its original value of 55% of average boarding fees. This has included the launch of an [e-petition](#) which now has nearly 4000 signatures and an open letter endorsed by other stakeholders, both directed to the Minister for Social Services, Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, who has jurisdiction over the AIC. We have also included this request, with supporting information, in the ICPA (Aust) [2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission](#) for the budget to be handed down in May 2024. Federal Council has also had two delegations to Canberra with ministers, members of parliament and senators since the 2023 Federal Conference at which the request for an AIC increase was the central advocacy and were pleased with the support received across all parties.

This campaign is ongoing, though unfortunately to date, we are unable to report success. However, at the time of writing Federal Council is pleased to have secured a virtual meeting with Minister Rishworth to raise the issue with her directly for the first time since she became the minister responsible for the AIC Scheme.

Alongside this advocacy, Federal Council also corresponded with Minister Rishworth to raise the request for AIC eligibility criteria and in particular criteria associated with the Limited Program Schools to be expanded to allow more disadvantaged rural and remote students to be eligible for assistance to access equitable educational opportunities. In our correspondence we noted the potential for an expansion of eligibility criteria to include students from those remote and very remote locations identified as severely educationally disadvantaged, in the “Educate Australia Fair”, Bankwest Curtin Economic Centre Study, as cited in the conference motion presented on this topic. We highlighted that due to the nature of the educational facilities in some very remote and remote towns, students face limited subject choices and reduced educational opportunities. The expansion of the Limited Program Schools criteria to facilitate increased AIC eligibility for rural and remote students would address the educational disadvantage some students face in these very remote and remote contexts. At the time of writing we had not received a response from the minister; however we will endeavour to raise this in future discussions.



While these long-term advocacies are ongoing for Federal Council, it is pleasing to report that a supplementary motion carried at conference requesting that Federal Council seek an update to the AIC Renewal Form to allow 'Assessment for Additional Boarding Allowance' to be selected when students transition from Distance Education to Boarding School has been actioned and the request fulfilled. Federal Council works closely with representatives from Services Australia and were able to raise this with them soon after conference. Pleasingly, the form was reconfigured to encompass this request, which members would have noticed when completing their AIC Renewal Forms at the end of 2023. Federal Council is tremendously grateful for the continued support and assistance we receive from the Services Australia team, along with Department of Social Services personnel.

Direct Measure of Income (DMI)

The impact of the Direct Measure of Income (DMI) funding model for non-government schools and the flow on effect that this will have on school fees, particularly for boarding families continues, to be addressed by Federal Council. Following conference we wrote to the Minister for Education Hon Jason Clare MP and other relevant ministers raising these concerns. In our correspondence, Federal Council suggested that an increase of the AIC Basic Boarding Allowance could be a solution to address the expected increase in boarding school fees incurred by families as a result of the methodology.

In a response from Assistant Minister for Education, Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm, it was noted that the DMI methodology is deemed to be a robust and accurate funding model. Concerns raised by Federal Council on the impact of the methodology were acknowledged by the Senator and he cited the Commonwealth Regional Scholarship (Pilot) Program as potentially helping to address these concerns. While Federal Council welcomes this Program, its scope in its first year has provided assistance to only a limited number of families. We firmly believe an increase to the AIC BBA would address the shortfall brought about by fee increases for the majority of families who must send their children to schools impacted by the DMI methodology.

As mentioned above, Federal Council is currently undertaking a dedicated campaign to the federal government requesting an increase to the AIC BBA and this is ongoing. Federal Council would welcome any further information or data related to the impacts of the DMI on schools and the families who must utilise them to access compulsory education which may assist our advocacy.

Commonwealth Scholarship Program

In 2023, the federal government announced a pilot program known as the Commonwealth Scholarship program which aimed to provide scholarships for low and low to middle income families from regional, rural, and remote areas to assist with boarding school fees and associated costs. ICPA (Aust) worked closely with the Federal Department of Education as this program was developed and had the opportunity to suggest criteria for eligibility including those requested in a motion carried at conference. The program eligibility and criteria were finalised in late 2023. More information can be found here:

<https://www.education.gov.au/commonwealth-regional-scholarship-program>. ICPA (Aust) understands that the first roll out of the scholarship saw 100 recipients gratefully receiving the assistance.

Federal Council looks forward to future developments and liaising with the Federal Department of Education regarding this program as its pilot year is reviewed. However, we have some concerns as to the limited scope of the program, particularly the modest number of scholarships available. We will continue to maintain and advocate that all rural and remote families who do not have access to equitable education require adequate financial assistance.

Fringe Benefits Tax

Members voted at Federal Conference for the removal of the Fringe Benefits Tax (FBT) for businesses who assist their employees residing in geographically isolated areas, by providing financial assistance to enable their children to attend boarding school. This topic was raised in a motion letter following conference to the



Treasurer Hon Jim Chalmers MP, along with other relevant ministers, members of parliament and senators, including the Minister for Agriculture, Senator the Hon Murray Watt. We followed up with a second letter earlier this year.

Federal Council highlighted that in many rural and remote locations, there is insufficient access to suitable compulsory education facilities and therefore boarding school is the only option available. Thus some employers offer valuable financial assistance to their employees to assist with the exorbitant expenses incurred to provide their children an equitable education in rural and remote locations, in order to retain staff. However this assistance is deemed a Fringe Benefit.

In our correspondence, it was noted that in recognition of conditions in rural and remote locations, the Australian Tax Office already offers certain FBT concessions and benefits such as for employer provision of housing where there is a lack of sufficient residential accommodation in remote locations and ICPA (Aust) requested similar concessions should be made for employers in geographically isolated locations to assist employees with the costs associated with expenses incurred for their children's compulsory education.

To date no response has been received regarding this issue, however we will persist in seeking a response and action.

Funding for students with a disability in residential boarding facilities

Following conference, Federal Council wrote to the Minister for the NDIS & Government Services, Hon Bill Shorten MP seeking additional funding for geographically isolated students with a disability who must live away from home in a residential boarding facility to access appropriate education, so that their needs can be met, and reasonable adjustments and accommodations can be implemented in accordance with The Disability Standards for Education 2005. In this motion letter we highlighted that it is imperative that boarding facilities be equipped to adequately cater for geographically isolated boarding students with specific education needs. We followed up with further correspondence regarding this issue earlier this year, however are still awaiting a response.

Portfolio Leader-Alana Moller

To view the full 2023 Federal Conference Motion Update Report click [here](#).