

**The Isolated Children's Parents'**  
**Association of Australia**

**ICPA (Aust)**



**2018 Federal Conference**

**PORTFOLIO REPORTS**

**1 & 2 August 2018**

**Canberra ACT**

## **BOARDING SCHOOLS/SCHOOL TERM HOSTELS REPORT**

**Caroline Robinson**

The greatest disadvantage faced by boarding families is the lack of access to an appropriate education where they live when compared to urban families who can access a wide variety of educational alternatives, sometimes at little or no cost. ICPA Federal Conference 2017 motions continued to request that this disparity be addressed despite growing governmental awareness in regional, rural and education.

Federal Council thanked the Federal Government for supporting families who need to board their children away from home with the 50% increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Additional Boarding Allowance, which began in 2017. However, we continue to remind the government of the ever increasing cost of boarding school education and that more needs to be done to assist all students who must live away from home to access schooling.

Other motions requested the Department of Human Services (DHS) implement an online AIC application option and streamline the processing of the AIC application and renewal. Once again Federal Council was alerted about difficulties families were experiencing in AIC Boarding and Second Home Allowances applications. Our members' situations were referred directly to the Department of Human Services, who were able to assist with many specific cases. The Department has informed Federal Council that while the online option for AIC is in the pipeline, it is still a few years from fruition.

In response to the difficulties reported by members with the AIC application process, Federal Council completed a survey of members to better understand the issues of the AIC application/renewal process and the phone and service centre assistance. The survey was publicised through the Branch Bulletin, Facebook as well as State and Federal websites and was well subscribed with 331 responses. The survey results and a cross-section of the 750 comments were presented to the Minister for Human Services' office and the Department of Human Services at the delegation trip to Canberra. They were extremely impressed at the survey response and grateful for the feedback which should identify opportunities to improve their processes going forth. ICPA (Aust) has offered some suggestions to the Department of Human Services to hopefully see improvement in the promptness and efficiency of the AIC payment as well as communication with families. We urge members to contact Federal Council if they have problems with their AIC applications or renewals so that these situations can be referred to the Department of Human Services for investigation. Federal Council will continue the positive collaboration with the Department and have thanked the DHS for their prompt and timely assistance whenever a query from ICPA is made.

In response to motions regarding the Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT), Federal Council has had discussions with other stakeholder groups, such as the National Farmers' Federation and Australian Boarding Schools Association. Federal Council asked for their support in advocating to have FBT removed from employers who assist employee families with the huge out-of-pocket boarding school costs. The FBT issue was further raised in the Pre-Budget Submission 2018-19 lodged late last year and during delegation to Government.

The Boarding Schools/School Hostels portfolio has continued to investigate strategies to raise a better awareness of the necessity of boarding school for a quality secondary education for rural and remote students, who do not have daily access to an appropriate government school because of geographic isolation. The portfolio is in the early stages of a project aiming to highlight the multitude of reasons why rural and remote students need to board.

Despite continued lobbying for an increase to the AIC Boarding and Second Home allowance through submissions, letters to Government and delegation, at times we have not been able to gain much traction due to misconceptions around why our rural and remote families pick the boarding schools that they do. Geographically isolated families choose the boarding schools their children attend for a variety of reasons, some of which can include: closeness to home, cost, transport links, availability of enrolments, family support and lack of availability of a school term hostel place. Families living in rural and remote areas need to be able to make these choices around where their children attend in order to ensure they can access schooling that meets their needs when they do not have an appropriate school nearby.

Federal Council has been pleased to see the government showing a significant focus on rural and remote education. An election promise from the 2016 federal election which was made by the former Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon Barnaby Joyce, pledged funding for geographically isolated families to help them access education. It also saw the announcement of the Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education lead by Professor John Halsey. In our submission to the Review, ICPA (Aust) stressed the widening gap between the allowances available to families and the actual cost of boarding for their students and how unsustainable this is for rural families. We also provided a link to our ICPA *Boarding School Access Research for Geographically Isolated Students* paper, which can be found on the ICPA website <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/94/final-boarding-school-survey-icpa-aust-with-comments-2016> which highlights many of the challenges our boarding students face when trying to access an education. While there are no specific recommendations from the Review with regards to boarding or AIC allowances, Federal Council is hopeful that with the Government accepting all of the recommendations put forward by Professor Halsey that more equitable opportunities are on the horizon for geographically isolated children who must live away from home in order to access schooling.

The cost of obtaining and education is felt even more intensely by families when they are dealing with difficulties such as drought. With large parts of Australia currently undergoing one of the worst droughts remembered, ICPA (Aust) continues to call for the immediate creation of a Rural Hardship Education Fund to assist rural families with the cost of their children's education in times of long-term drought, periods of recovery and other rural hardship. Such a fund may be provisioned for under the current Federal Drought Package or a special circumstances criterion within the AIC Scheme. Drought declarations are not made in every state, despite properties experiencing extremely dry conditions. This assistance, however it is distributed, must be available to all of those being affected by extreme rain deficiency events over a period of time.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Wendy Hick and my fellow Boarding School Portfolio Councillors Kate Thompson, and Judy Sinclair-Newton for their instrumental and considerable support, guidance and patience as we work towards better opportunities for boarding school families and improving the AIC process. I cannot thank these ladies enough for being there whenever they were needed.

## **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

**Wendy Hick**

With 28 Communications motions presented at the 2017 ICPA Federal Conference, telecommunications issues continue to be one of the major areas of concern brought forward by ICPA members.

ICPA (Aust) works closely with the Federal Government, telecommunications companies and other like-minded stakeholders to seek the maintenance and development of adequate, affordable and reliable communications services for families in regional, rural and remote areas, particularly for the purpose of educational outcomes.

ICPA (Aust) is a member of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) <http://accan.org.au/rrrc-coalition> and our members' issues are often discussed in the RRRCC forums. ICPA (Aust) participates in the RRRCC delegations to speak with those in government and this also affords opportunity to raise our members' concerns in an additional capacity.

### **INTERNET**

Once again at the 2017 ICPA Federal Conference, members brought forward numerous motions seeking an improved internet experience and two main areas comprised the majority of the motions: fault reporting/repairs, as well as expansion of the Education Port to include all rural students, especially those studying at the tertiary level.

ICPA (Aust) has discussed and continues to raise these issues by email, phone, written submission and in meetings with the Regional Minister for Communications, other members of government and nbn. One Sky Muster RSP in particular has recognised the need for additional data when students are home for school breaks and now offers increased Sky Muster data amounts during school holidays. ICPA (Aust) would like to encourage other Sky Muster providers to also offer their customers this service.

**Faults** - With regards to internet fault reporting and repair, we have noted the confusion and difficulty in reporting faults and Federal Council continues to advocate for a simpler, direct process along with the necessity for the creation of a Rural and Remote Communications Help Centre that understands rural and remote customers' needs and can assist them with troubleshooting problems in addition to providing correct information for securing communications products and services. Federal Council will be expressing the need for a dedicated Regional, Rural and Remote Telecommunications Help Centre in our submission to the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC). In an attempt to ensure customer's problems are tended to and resolved as quickly as possible, nbn has created "nbn Local" which allows stakeholder groups to escalate reports of nbn service difficulties on behalf of their members directly to a nbn Local area representative if the regular channels of reporting are not resolving the problem. ICPA is now able to facilitate for our members contact with the nbn Local representative for their area to assist if nbn service problems are unresolved after being reported to their RSP. Members are encouraged to contact either their State Council or Federal Council if they are experiencing difficulty in resolving their internet issues.

**Education Port** - ICPA (Aust) continues to strongly advocate for the nbn Sky Muster Education Port Service to be available to all rural and remote students with a Sky Muster service at home, regardless of whether they study via distance education, at a small rural school, board away from home needing to use the service when home on school breaks for assignments, or study at the tertiary level. We have spoken to a number of other groups who now also support this request. At this time, we have

not had any progress in seeing the Education Port expansion come to fruition however we have had interest in the issue from a number of people in government and nbn has been open to conversations on expansion of the Education Service. As the Sky Muster service has finite capacity, being able to identify quantitative figures showing the number of possible users if the Education Service was expanded would be very beneficial. ICPA (Aust) will keep the issue in discussions wherever possible.

**ICPA - nbn Survey** - In January, ICPA (Aust) undertook a survey with nbn regarding customers' internet experience as well as the Education Port. We were encouraged by the number of survey completions and a number of respondents commented that they are not able to access the Education Service. Federal Council is hopeful that eventually the service can be opened up to more students who have Sky Muster internet service at home to help them with their educational needs.

ICPA (Aust) has also recently been made aware that some preschool age children relying on online portions to their early years programs have been unable to order the Education Service and Federal Council has raised this situation with the nbn Sky Muster Education Service team who acted quickly to try to resolve this situation.

**Multicast Trial** - The outcomes are yet to be finalised regarding the NBN Sky Muster multicasting trial undertaken with Schools of the Air in the Northern Territory. The trial finished in late April and the NT Government is currently preparing a report. It is expected that the Distance Education Broadband Working Group, of which ICPA (Aust) is a member, will reconvene to discuss the trial soon after the Department of Communications receives the Multicast Trial report sometime in July 2018.

#### **TELEPHONE**

ICPA (Aust) has had regular discussion with Telstra Country Wide (TCW) since the Federal Conference around the issues raised by the motions and other topics. ICPA members' issues around communications faults will be put forward in the upcoming Consumer Safeguard Review.

**Faults-** Telstra Country Wide (TCW) want to ensure that issues regarding phone line installation for Distance Education schoolrooms as well as for our members are attended to in a reasonable timeframe. ICPA can assist and take cases directly to Telstra Country Wide if any members are having difficulty with landline installation. Members can contact Federal Council to have their cases followed up with TCW. TCW has also provided ICPA with a list of their Area Managers and problems or questions with faults, installation etc. can be taken to them by members if they have attempted regular fault reporting without success. To try to improve the fault reporting process and outcomes for rural customers, in late 2017 TCW expanded the capacity of the RRADIO support team for those on radio system phones with more agents who are trained on these services and are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The RRADIO team can be contacted by either phone (1800 RRADIO) or email [rradio@team.telstra.com](mailto:rradio@team.telstra.com). TCW has also relaunched their defined range of network extension devices as well as conducting additional training in their regional stores on these products including how staff can help customers identify, purchase and install the right device for their needs.

**Next G Wireless Link (NGWL)** – NGWL customers are asked to get in contact with Telstra to discuss their current NGWL plans including options for accessing the current range of HomeLine plans (<https://www.telstra.com.au/home-phone/plans-rates>). There are also options for NGWL customers with an existing broadband plan to move onto a 25GB BigPond Mobile Broadband plan for 12 or 24 months with a \$70 monthly credit (data for use in Australia). Customers, if interested, can call the dedicated team on 1800 696 495 (1800-MY-NGWL) option3 (sales, accounts and payments) to find out more.

### **Telstra Faults Contacts 24 hours a day on 132203**

Telstra also has dedicated numbers for specialist items:

- 1800 696 495 (1800 MYNGWL) for customers using NGWL to report service difficulties or faults.
- 1800 772 346 (1800 RRADIO) for radio and satellite services to report service difficulties or faults. There is also a dedicated email address (rradio@team.telstra.com) for online fault reporting
- 1800 632 995 (Option 1) for Telstra Mobile Satellite
- For antenna installation and technical support call 1800 305 307 (select option 4).

Other questions / queries:

- **Call:** 132200
- **Visit:** If convenient, call in to the nearest store – all regional stores should be specially trained on Telstra regional products and services. Appointments can also be booked for a time that suits.
- **Online:** Visit our [Telstra Country Wide](#) page on Telstra.com, additionally you can contact:

**Platinum Technical Support** This subscription service can provide assistance for any non-network issues. Telstra experts are available 24x7 over the phone (13 75 87) support and online to help get technology working.

**Universal Service Obligation-** Since the release of the Productivity Commission's Report following a review of the Universal Service Obligation (USO), a key concern of members has been the retention of landline phone services. On 20 December 2017 the Federal Government announced that they will be implementing a new Universal Service Guarantee (USG), "which will ensure all Australians have access to voice and broadband services, regardless of where they live." The USG will cover both voice and data. The Federal Government expressed a commitment to ensuring that those living in regional and remote areas continue to have guaranteed access to voice and broadband services. <https://www.communications.gov.au/documents/australian-government-response-productivity-commissions-inquiry-telecommunications-universal-service> . ICPA (Aust) and RRRCC have met with numerous government representatives and strongly voiced our members' concerns over a potential loss of landlines and the possibility of landlines being replaced by VoIP services which do not adequately meet the need of those living in rural and remote Australia. ICPA (Aust) also maintains that Australians living outside of large metropolitan centres must have at least two methods of accessing communications (ie landline and satellite internet) due to distance to other means of communication and the implications for safety when one service fails. This message seems to have been understood and supported by many in government and we are hopeful that this consideration for voice services for those in regional, rural and remote areas will continue to be upheld. ICPA (Aust) met with the Minister for Communications office during our May delegations and were given the Minister's position that the new USG when put into place will need to ensure all premises have access to both voice *and* broadband services; be complemented by a new consumer safeguards framework; and be more cost-effective. We were also reassured to be told that the current USO arrangements will remain in place unless and until robust and workable alternatives that are more cost-effective are identified, proven and are able to be implemented.

### **MOBILE**

The need for expanded mobile coverage in mobile black spot areas, and recognition of areas which are outside mobile coverage where a rural school is located, requiring either an additional loading or a variance of eligibility criteria in any future Mobile Black Spot Program (MBSP) funding rounds has been mentioned by ICPA (Aust) in numerous forums including meetings with the Regional

Communications Minister, members of government, ACCC and Department of Communications. At the 2017 Federal Conference, Telstra Country Wide offered to investigate mobile possibilities in areas containing a rural school and they asked ICPA to provide information on rural schools outside the mobile service footprint. ICPA State Councils assisted in providing lists where possible of these schools and the lists have been passed on to TCW and we continue to have discussions with them on this.

Members also asked ICPA to request the Minister for Communications to investigate speeds being offered by mobile network suppliers. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) is currently running a broadband monitoring program and are seeking volunteers whose service can be monitored <https://www.accc.gov.au/consumers/internet-phone/monitoring-broadband-performance>. ICPA (Aust) has advocated for satellite broadband, which is not part of the monitoring, to be included. On 17 February 2018, the ACCC published guidance principals to help ensure RSPs do not mislead customers. The ACCC will publish a best-practice broadband speeds advertising guide for providers in the coming months. <https://www.lifehacker.com.au/2017/02/the-days-of-dodgy-broadband-speed-claims-could-be-numbered/>. The ACCC is also in discussion with the Federal government about the possible introduction of a fixed broadband performance monitoring and reporting (BPMR) program in Australia.

Round 4 of the Mobile Black Spot Program was announced by Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, Minister for Regional Communications on 8 June 2018. ICPA (Aust) continues to ask that rural schools that do not have mobile service be considered as priorities under this and any future MBSP rounds. A reminder that the “Blue Tick” still applies to Telstra mobile phones for identifying handsets that offer the best possible voice coverage in regional and rural locations. A list of mobile phones with the “blue tick” can be found on the TCW website <https://www.telstra.com.au/telstra-country-wide>

#### **Discounts on Antennae and Boosters/Repeaters for ICPA Members**

Telstra Country Wide offers ICPA members a discount for Telstra Mobile Smart Antennae, Yagi Antennae and their recently released Telstra Go Repeaters and Boosters (<https://exchange.telstra.com.au/new-telstra-go-repeaters-bring-mobile-coverage-to-more-places/>) ICPA members can call 132200 or go in store and place their order as per normal. Once members have placed the order, they will get a follow up call, where they need to proactively identify yourself as an ICPA member and possibly provide an email copy of their Annual Membership receipt as proof of membership in order to receive the discount. The following discounts apply for ICPA Members only:

- Telstra Mobile Smart Antenna \$50 discount.
- Yagi Antenna \$10 discount.
- Combined order (TMSA + Yagi) \$60 discount.
- Telstra Go Repeater or Booster \$50 discount.

Both Telstra Country Wide and nbn have launched “Regional” Website pages for their customers to hopefully provide information more suited to those living outside of city centres. ICPA (Aust) will pass on any suggestions of what can be added or changed on these regional pages to better assist members and we welcome feedback from members.

ICPA (Aust) welcomed at the end of April, the announcement of the Regional Telecommunications Review which reviews telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote areas every three years and has encouraged members and ICPA Councils to attend any consultations held in their area.

ICPA (Aust) has been well supported in our telecommunications issues by the State Councils, our branches and members and we will continue to raise these concerns wherever it is possible to have them addressed.



## **CURRICULUM REPORT**

**Judy Sinclair-Newton**

I am pleased to once again report on curriculum related matters and highlight areas of interest for families educating children living in rural and remote locations. In recent years ICPA (Aust) has welcomed a number of changes to the National Curriculum which have and will benefit rural students, many of which were highlighted in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education.

### **CURRICULUM**

**Phonics:** The use of phonics is well supported by many of our families who teach via distance education, so the news that the new curriculum would also mandate the use of phonics to teach children to sound out words and syllables, instead of making them learn by rote or guess words through the contentious “whole language” was most welcome. This year, Minister Birmingham announced the introduction of the assessment of phonological awareness in Year 1 to enable early identification of potential learning difficulties. Support for teachers to do this is most welcomed by rural and remote families who often struggle to get suspected difficulties recognised, especially in the distance education setting and small schools.

**Agriculture in Education:** In 2016, ICPA (Aust) welcomed the Australian Government’s commitment to investing \$2 million into developing Agriculture in Education. The materials were to showcase the diversity and economic importance of food and fibre production in Australia. The online teaching and learning resources are aligned to the Australian Curriculum learning areas including science and geography. However, despite these resources now being available, some parents working in the industry feel that what is being taught is not truly reflective (particularly in the early years) of the industry and are calling for more industry input on matters such as, where does our food come from.

**Further expansion of learning areas for high school students:** At the 2017 Federal Conference members supported the idea of including topics essential to safe driving practice in the high school curriculum. Stating that, *“The spotlight has been put on the increase of deaths on our rural roads. We believe that with correct training and making our new, young drivers aware of the perils found on rural roads. Rural students often have difficulty organising this education on their own because of boarding commitments or no services being available in rural towns.”* This issue was raised in the IRRRRE submission and discussed at a number of meetings. To date no progress has been made, however, the matter will continue to be raised when the opportunity arises.

### **NAPLAN**

**NAPLAN Assessment:** After a decade, Australia’s first national test of literacy and numeracy continues to be a powerful tool in measuring students’ achievement in core literacy and numeracy skills. The report produced in 2016 by the Grattan Institute (VIC), ‘Widening gaps: what NAPLAN tells us about student progress’, outlines a number of concerns for rural and remote students and how changes might be implemented.

**Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools:** This year the Turnbull Government established the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools, to be chaired by Mr David Gonski AC, to provide advice on how additional Commonwealth funding should be used by Australian schools and school systems to improve school performance and student achievement.

The review will examine evidence and make recommendations on the most effective teaching and learning strategies and initiatives to be deployed. In particular the Review will focus on the effective



and efficient use of funding to: Improve student outcomes and Australia's national performance, as measured by national and international assessments of student achievement; improve the preparedness of school leavers to succeed in employment, further training or higher education; improve outcomes across all cohorts of students, including disadvantaged and vulnerable students and academically-advanced students ('gifted' students). At the end of March, the final report was sent to the Prime Minister and Commonwealth Minister for Education and Training.

ICPA (Aust) lodged a submission into this review and took part in a panel via teleconference. The submission can be found on our website:

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1112/federal-submissions/federal-submissions-2017/review-to-achieve-educational-excellence-in-australian-schools.pdf>

**NAPLAN Online:** ICPA has welcomed consultations with ACARA throughout the development, trialling and implementation associated with NAPLAN going online. While problems around connectivity are a major concern for many of our members, we believe these concerns have been taken seriously and every effort is being made to overcome them. The fact that students will receive results to their tailored test in a matter of weeks, compared to the current process which can take months, should benefit students enormously. The test window for NAPLAN Online has been extended from three days to nine, to provide flexibility in scheduling and to accommodate schools that may have fewer devices.

In transitioning to NAPLAN Online, education systems have considered the appropriateness of utilising certain technologies, including automated essay scoring. Automated essay scoring allows for writing scripts to be assessed using sophisticated computer programming. In December 2017, the Education Council determined that automated essay scoring will not be used for the marking of NAPLAN writing scripts. Any change to this position in the future will be informed by further research into automated essay scoring, and be made as a decision of the Education Council."

**Autoscoring explained here:**

[http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/20151130\\_automated\\_essay\\_scoring\\_infographic.pdf](http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/resources/20151130_automated_essay_scoring_infographic.pdf)

State/territory education authorities make decisions about the logistics and timing to move NAPLAN online for their state/territory. These groups also lead implementation of NAPLAN Online in their state/territory. Federal Council would like to encourage members to ask their school when and how they plan to rollover to NAPLAN online.

At the June Education Council meeting, Ministers received an update on the recent NAPLAN Online program held in May. This year, a number of students in schools in the ACT, NSW, Qld, SA, Vic and WA completed NAPLAN assessments online for the first time. In participating schools, Years 5, 7 and 9 students completed online assessments in reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy, while Year 3 students completed assessments in reading, language conventions and numeracy. Year 3 writing was undertaken as a paper-based assessment.

NAPLAN online testing was a success with students participating in 668,529 NAPLAN Online assessments during the nine-day testing program, with 99.9 per cent of students able to complete the assessment online. Local internet connectivity and device issues saw a very small number of tests diverted to complete on paper. Schools in all states and territories will continue to transition from paper-based to online assessments over the coming years.

**Review of NAPLAN data:** The Education Council has agreed to a review of NAPLAN data presentation. A number of state and territory ministers advocated support for a broader review of NAPLAN and noted the review of NAPLAN currently underway in Queensland.

Federal Council looks forward to contributing to discussions that now sees the government focused on improving testing, reporting and streamlining the curriculum. Our advocacy continues to draw attention to the issues of “access and delivery” for geographically isolated students, making certain they are not forgotten during this new era in education reform.

## **DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT**

**Alana Moller**

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate and support its distance education members by emphasising wherever possible the distinctive nature of distance education and the major issues affecting its success. This year in the Distance Education Portfolio, six motions were raised at the Federal Conference in Alice Springs, four of which pertained to the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA), with two others referring to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance and Volunteers for Isolated Students' Education (VISE).

### **Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)**

The longstanding lobby for a DETA has certainly not taken a back seat for Federal Council. On the back of the immense campaigning and publicity undertaken over the past several years, ICPA Federal Council continues to lobby the government for the establishment of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) at every opportunity. The topic was raised in a motion letter sent to Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training and other relevant ministers and rural senators and members with an interest in rural and remote education. The topic was also comprehensively raised in the submission to the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education which was completed following the 2017 Federal Conference. Although the inception of a DETA was not actually acknowledged in Professor Halsey's report, one of his recommendations was "to formally recognise using Recognition of Prior Learning processes or similar the expertise and contributions of distance education home tutors." Federal Council has, in several other submissions highlighted the extensive and essential role the distance education tutor plays in achieving distance education success.

Federal Council will continue to advocate for and pursue the DETA through delegations and submissions, along with endeavouring to action further measures to raise the profile of the role of the distance education tutor. Since Federal Council compiled the Distance Education video offering an insight into the commitment and dedication of families undertaking distance education, it has been widely shown and has proven to provide a greater understanding of this mode of education and in particular the role of the tasks required by the home tutor. The momentum from the DE video and other actions must be continued and built upon. I urge all distance education home tutors to take every effort to highlight to whomever will listen, just how big your job is and what you have to do every day in your schoolroom. Until ICPA is able to get the message across just how immense the job is, Distance Education Tutors will continue to miss out on the support and recognition they deserve.

### **Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE)/ VISE**

Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE) is now up and running and Federal Council congratulates Lyn French and Aussie Helpers for getting this program off the ground. With the announcement of the wind down of the Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (VISE) program, disappointment was shared across Australia. AHVISE offering a lifeline to the many families who have benefited over the years from the program is a tremendous outcome. Although the program operates slightly differently to the old program, AHVISE will continue to bring valued support to distance education families. ICPA has offered any assistance and support we can to AHVISE, both now and into the future and will continue to pass on any further developments/information to members.

### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance**

The issue of streamlining the AIC DE allowance application process was raised in a motion letter to the Minister for Human Services early this year. The topic has also been discussed in conversations with the Department of Human Services. Federal Council has been given some positive feedback on the future of this lobby and believes that it is likely there may be some changes seen in the future. Further to this, in order to highlight the many difficulties faced by those in receipt of AIC (DE/Boarding/Second Home Allowance), Federal Council recently conducted a survey to gauge the experiences of those who receive AIC. The findings of this survey highlighted a range of issues both with the initial application process for AIC and ongoing issues with AIC renewal each year. These findings and relevant case studies were discussed with the Department of Human Services. The Department appreciated the case studies and the direct insight from past, present and potentially future AIC recipients and will use the data to find opportunities to improve the AIC application/renewal process.

### **Other work in the DE Portfolio**

- Late in 2017, the DE Portfolio put together a 'Go-to' fact sheet for families who may be new to DE with information surrounding how to access a DE tutor/governess. Often when families begin distance education and are searching for a tutor/governess it can be difficult to know where to turn for assistance or information. This document also aims to assist those who may wish to be a home tutor/governess to find the correct avenues for seeking a position. <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/76/distance-education-tutoring-document>
- The Federal DE Portfolio is working with the State DE portfolios to put together a snapshot of distance education across Australia and specifically geographically isolated student numbers. The aim of this is to provide federal and state councils with information to assist in advocacy around distance education resourcing, funding and other factors.
- Few members would not have heard about the situation in WA when the State Government announced a decision to close Schools of the Air (SOTA) in the state and centralise distance education services from a single metropolitan facility. Off the back of this announcement, Federal Council supported the WA ICPA team and other interested parties through a huge initiative and campaign against the closures which resonated across the country. Fortunately, the WA decision was reversed. Federal Council congratulates WA ICPA on their tireless efforts to gain this outcome for their School of the Air families. This situation arising has highlighted the importance of ICPA advocating for the SOTA and DE schools to remain in regional and rural communities. Federal Council is committed to ensuring this occurs.
- Federal Council keenly observed the multicast trials with nbn Sky Muster in the Northern Territory and will be interested in the outcomes of the report into these trials to be released in the near future.
- We are currently working with Central Station around a series of blogs focussed on DE/SOTA families and situations. The aim would be to raise the profile of our DE/SOTA families and their unique educational experience. It will give families the chance to highlight the distinctive nature of geographically isolated DE/SOTA and further emphasise the role of the distance education tutor. Watch this space later in the year.

It has been a privilege to have the opportunity to be involved in Federal Council this year and I have especially appreciated the chance to work in the Distance Education Portfolio. We need to build upon past momentum around the major issues faced in the distance education community, by continuing to highlight the unique way in which we have to educate our children and how this needs to be supported and maintained.

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE REPORT**

**Jane Morton**

I am pleased to be able to deliver my first Early Childhood Education and Care Portfolio Report here at our Federal Conference in Canberra. It has been a busy year, with the New Child Care Package commencing on 2 July which includes In Home Care and the previously Budget Based Funded (BBF) Mobile Early Childhood Services transitioning to either accessing funding from the Community Child Care Fund (CCCCF), Department of Social Services or through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS).

### **Early Learning**

#### **Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) for 4-year-olds**

One of Professor Halsey's recommendations in his Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE) report states, "Ensure Regional, Rural and Remote children start school with a strong foundation for learning." Participation in preschool enables this to happen and in order to assist the small number of students, of which there are only 189 at present who engage in preschool by distance education, the AIC Distance Education (DE) allowance must be extended to include this cohort. We included this extension to the AIC DE allowance in the breakdown of the Election Funding Commitment AIC proposal that we presented as a response to the announcement that the former Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce gave on 22 June 2016 and we will continue to advocate for this. We have received positive comments from those in government around this, but it has yet to occur. In seeking an extension of the AIC for 4-year-olds, ICPA (Aust) has consulted with the states to clarify the number of preschoolers studying via a distance education program to update federal politicians.

#### **Universal Access to Early Childhood Education and the National Partnership Agreement**

Universal access ensures that a quality preschool program is available for all children in the year before fulltime schooling. States and Territories are responsible for the provision of preschool with the Commonwealth funding a 'top-up' contribution to these arrangements.

On 3 February 2018, the Federal Government announced a further \$440 million for preschool education in 2019, in order to help provide 15 hours per week or 600 hours per year for a quality preschool program for all children in the year before full-time formal schooling. This is in addition to the Government's \$428 million investment for preschool in 2018. This will benefit over an estimated 348,000 children in 2019 across all preschool settings and brings the total Commonwealth investment in preschool to \$3.7 billion since 2008. Importantly, it will provide funding certainty for preschools and long day care centres as the government implements school and child care reforms this year.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to highlight the need for increased access to preschool in rural and remote areas where we can, especially as preschool is seen to be such a vital part of a child's education with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and the recent Early Learning Languages Australia (ELLA) program becoming parts of it. If our children miss out at this early stage, they will definitely not be school-ready and lag further behind their urban peers when they start school. We have also emphasised the need and support for play-based learning during the preschool year.

#### **National Quality Standard**

The Australian, state and territory education ministers agreed to changes to the National Quality Framework (NQF) to ensure quality education and care in Australia continues to improve in the most efficient and effective way. Most changes commenced 1 October 2017 in all states and territories

(except Western Australia, which will commence by 1 October 2018). The 2018 National Quality Standard (NQS) and some related changes commenced 1 February 2018 (including in Western Australia). Under the National Quality Framework an early childhood teacher is required to be always in attendance at preschool, however, this is not always possible in small rural towns. Unfortunately, we have not had success with requests of qualified teachers or Diploma qualified educators as alternatives so far.

### **Mobile Early Childhood Services**

Early childhood education and child care services in rural and remote areas which were previously provided by Budget Based Funding (BBF), have been assisted and supported in their transition to the New Child Care Package by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) through the Department of Education and Training. Some of these services have been able to access some of the \$61 million non-competitive restricted grant funding from the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) which was available to BBF Services who provided a fair proportion of child care to rural and remote areas. This has been a great help, although some services have had to also access funds from other sources.

Mobile Playgroups, despite being a vital resource in geographically isolated areas have also been supported by PwC in their transition to new funding either through the Department of Social Services, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PMC) and/or their states as they did not fit the New Child Care Package requirements. Although we have been given assurance that their new funding will continue for a limited time, these services face uncertainty for future funding and may have to look elsewhere. Federal Council would appreciate any further feedback regarding these Playgroups as they move into their new arrangements.

### **Child Care**

#### **The New In Home Care (IHC) Model**

ICPA (Aust) has attended several workshops, conducted an IHC Survey and participated in teleconferences to try to ensure that the Department of Education and Training have listened to us in preparation for the new model which commenced 2 July 2018. The Department has collated information from their Nanny Pilot Program trial and from the IHC Review and noted results from our IHC Survey. ICPA (Aust) has been able to provide comment on the IHC National Guidelines and the updated IHC Handbook. We have also encouraged our families to transition to the New Child Care Package, updating their details and applying for the new Child Care Subsidy by 2 July 2018, so hopefully those families concerned, or their Service Providers, are now receiving it on their behalf. Unfortunately, we are hearing that IHC member families are having many teething problems with the new system and unexpected large fee increases, contrary to what was expected.

The Department of Education and Training has employed In Home Care Support Agencies in each state to work with families and Service Providers to help prevent IHC being too expensive and provide more places for IHC educators, a total of 3000. The Activity Test has been widened to enable unpaid workers in the family business, volunteers, those studying /training or looking for work may also qualify to receive the new Child Care Subsidy (CCS) or the Service Providers on their behalf. The National IHC Guidelines, the IHC Handbook and various Minister's Rules and other relevant information have now been finalised and the IHC from 2 July 2018 webpage has been updated providing helpful information in all aspects of IHC. <https://www.education.gov.au/in-home-care>

ICPA (Aust) has been informed by the Department of Education and Training that IHC educators may continue to supervise DE students outside of 'formal school hours' when they complete their 'homework' but as this is not clearly defined and is a very grey area in the distance education schoolroom, many families have been unsure as to whether or not to engage an IHC educator. This

has been very concerning for them. The Department has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those 'formal school hours' but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time.

ICPA (Aust) has also written to the relevant ministers regarding the introduction of IHC educators turning 18-years-old through the year, instead of the minimal age being 18, as is the case with some gap-year students. As IHC educators will need to have a relevant Certificate III qualification or working towards one, this is problematic. The Department has now provided two ways for families in rural and remote areas where IHC educators can be exempt from having their Certificate III in ECEC, but only up to 18 months from 2 July 2018 until January 2020.

1. 20% of the time is spent with a suitably qualified person i.e. by emailing, Skyping or through phone calls
2. If having had 15 years' prior experience in Child Care

### **Working with Children Check (WWCC)**

ICPA (Aust) continues to work with the Federal Government in the implementation of a national WWCC certification. A national working party has started working on this and the *Australian Government Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Part Two: Working with Children Checks Report* includes the following:

"The Australian Government supports an approach that ensures greater national consistency of working with children check schemes and has adopted a leadership role to assist jurisdictions to progress nationally consistent standards. Significant progress has been made through the Australian Government chaired working group. It is anticipated that the standards will be put to relevant State and Territory Ministers in 2018."

### **Working Holiday Maker Visa**

The requirement for the extension from six months to twelve months being spent on one property of the 417 'Working Holiday Maker' visa to other remote areas besides Northern Australia as well as the need for distance education tutors and nannies to be included in the 'specified work' list, has been highlighted to numerous federal politicians and we have had a couple who have supported us in this. Unfortunately, the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, the Hon Peter Dutton MP, feels that the shortage of workers in rural and remote areas has been addressed. We will continue to promote this when we can, especially as the bush is so short of willing tutors in the schoolroom.

Federal Council will continue to work with the Federal Government and other bodies available to us to further your concerns and share developments with you.



## **RURAL SCHOOLS AND TRAVEL REPORT**

**Di Skene**

I feel very fortunate to be able to deliver you this report for the first time as leader of the Rural Schools and Travel Portfolio here in Canberra for 2018. It has been a productive year for advocating Rural Schools and Travel which has seen Federal Council submit many submissions, send letters and have a great many discussions with regards to current and previous motions. The 2017 motion updates can be viewed from the following link on the ICPA website:

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1124/federal-conference-motion-updates/federal-conference-motion-update-2017.pdf>

### **RURAL SCHOOLS**

Remote and isolated locations in Australia provide the greatest challenges for improving provision of education options and pathways for children and families. The financial cost to families educating children in rural and remote locations continues to rise and can be attributed to many leaving these areas. An increasing number of rural and remote families are separating, with the mother and children relocating to larger cities and towns during the years of schooling. A drastic measure such as this by families to reduce educational expenses, negatively impacts the family unit, small communities and rural schools.

While all Australian governments recognise the social and economic benefits of a high quality and equitable school education system, ICPA (Aust) continues to devote an enormous amount of volunteer hours holding relevant governments to account to address inequities.

Recommendations highlighting the need to focus on inequities in the educational outcomes of rural students which report them to be at least one and a half years behind their metropolitan peers can be found in documents dating back many years. They mention the endemic problems facing rural and remote education, including significant studies providing guidance and direction to those formulating policy. Despite this, very little action has followed to ensure improvement in educational outcomes for all students in rural and remote Australia. Consequently, Federal Council was thrilled when government called for the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE), led by Emeritus Professor Halsey.

Federal Council met with Professor Halsey during the 2017 conference in Alice Springs, attended many forums around Australia and lodged a comprehensive submission which can be viewed on the ICPA website or the link below. However, the following report details what opportunities that could assist rural and remote students to be able to access high quality education, addressing low enrolments and access pathways for students without separating families, moving from small communities to improved access whilst also being affordable.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1130/federal-submissions-1/irrrre-final-report.pdf>

The Australian Government response into the IRRRE saw regional, rural and remote areas at the forefront of the following outcomes: <https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education>

*The Australian Government recognises that it generally costs more to educate students going to school in regional, rural and remote areas than it does for students in city-based schools. That is why the Quality Schools package increases Commonwealth funding for those students from \$3.9 billion in 2017*

*to \$6.8 billion in 2027 - an increase of 74.6 per cent. This will mean per student funding for students in these areas will grow by 4.9 per cent per year over that period.*

With the above excerpt from Federal Government and the IRRRRE, Professor Halsey's eleven recommendations have been accepted and with hope this review will see improved outcomes for regional Australia once implemented.

## **TRAVEL**

Currently there are inequities in Student Travel Allowances offered by the Commonwealth. Whilst Federal Government has in place Fares Allowances to assist with student travel under the ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance Schemes, there is no provision for travel in the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme which is the assistance a large number of geographically isolated children fall under.

## **AIR TRAVEL**

Numerous letters, emails and telephone conversations with airlines have taken place over the year in order to action travel motions through Federal Council. Members are also benefitting from the efforts of our State Councils, who are also working with airlines to make travel between home and boarding school more affordable.

Congratulations to Northern Territory ICPA who in recent times have successfully met with some of the major airlines and been able to sit around the same table to discuss travel. Let us hope their discussion opens many more doors. Currently, Federal Council are pleased that QANTAS has two state trials in place for the public with one in Queensland and the other in Western Australia that offer a 30% variable discount. Rex Airlines have the 'Bush to Boarding' scheme available in North Queensland between any Gulf port and Cairns and Brisbane to Mt Isa via Toowoomba, Charleville, Quilpie, Windorah, Birdsville, Bedourie and Boulia in western Queensland. Local residential fares in regions such as Charleville and Longreach in Qld where local government has worked with state government and airlines to offer residents reduced fares. Patient Assisted Travel Schemes (PATs) in WA, SA, NT and Qld and similarly named schemes in NSW and Tasmania provide financial assistance with travel and accommodation where rural and remote patients need to seek medical specialists. Although this does not include specific needs consultations with allied health professionals, Federal Council recognise that these schemes are being utilised by our members where possible but need a much wider concessional scheme to include all geographically isolated boarding children from all over Australia to ease the monetary pressures that compulsory education has on families.

Queensland Senator Barry O'Sullivan, as Chair of the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee, instigated an inquiry into the operation, regulation and funding of air route service delivery to rural, regional and remote communities in the final months of 2017. Federal Council provided a submission and was fortunate to receive an invitation to address this panel, allowing the opportunity to express the social and economic impacts that lack of supply, dependability and costs involved in living in rural and remote areas has on many families. The implications this has for travelling to and from boarding school include, access to medical assistance, travel for rural/remote school students for camps and learning activities, inequities in Commonwealth student travel allowances is just a broad overview. The full submission can be viewed on the ICPA website: <https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1118/federal-submissions-1/regional-air-fare-inquiry-submission-feb-2018.pdf>

Recently, Senator O'Sullivan indicated that 'ongoing concerns regarding the impact of high airfare prices on bush families was a major factor in his decision to initiate this inquiry'. He went on to say 'while he cannot anticipate the outcomes of the final report as there are still public hearings planned

in the future, the contributions from groups such as ICPA would play a significant role in the final recommendations’.

## **ROADS**

Many families in rural and remote areas travel large distances on roads that are in disrepair. Motions carried last year raised concerns for many who must travel on such roads to access educational opportunities (some of which are compulsory). As some roads in rural and remote Australia are funded by the Commonwealth, Federal Council have voiced concerns regarding the deterioration and appalling conditions that remote residents face daily to be able to access education, schools, boarding, health appointments and general everyday travel needs. This issue was highlighted in the ICPA (Aust) submission to the Economics References Committee Inquiry into Regional Inequality in Australia in April of this year. ICPA sought urgent commitment from the Australian Government to a long-term maintenance strategy with adequate funding to bring national roads back to all weather and safe trafficable surface. Federal Council welcomed the Turnbull Government’s 2018 Budget which brought about a promise of \$3.5 billion dollars to upgrade regional roads which is very encouraging for our members and their future road safety.

Regional airfares should be affordable and services adequate, consistent and reliable to better assist regional residents and strengthen regional communities. Air and road travel are essential modes of travel for rural and remote living as long distances are not avoidable and most times difficult with current challenges for families and Federal Council continues to lobby for these services.

## **SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS REPORT**

**Sally Sullivan**

At the 2017 Federal ICPA Conference, two specific education needs motions were presented:

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Education and Training to ensure all rural and remote students have access to early identification and intervention for learning difficulties.”

“That ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training to collaborate for equitable subsidies nationally for accommodation and travel for children with specific or special learning needs to attend appointments with qualified specialists.”

The number of motions is not a true reflection of the magnitude of the challenges of educating children with specific needs in rural and remote areas. Broadly, issues include: early identification of learning difficulties, access to services and the cost of accessing services. These issues have been pursued by ICPA (Aust) in submissions to Inquiries, delegation briefing papers and by correspondence with relevant Ministers during 2017/18. While successful in raising awareness of these issues, much work remains to be done.

A teleconference was held between Federal and State Specific Education Needs portfolio holders in November 2017. The meeting served to reinforce the view that the issues above are nation-wide and very serious for affected students and their families.

### **Early Intervention**

Students in rural and remote areas often have little or no access to early intervention services and therefore families have no indication of why their child continues to struggle at school. For Distance Education (DE) students, undiagnosed learning difficulties lead to stress and frustration in the DE schoolroom. Through submissions and further correspondence, ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for screening of phonological awareness by teachers to identify at risk students to be done in their first term at school and to stress that the single most important factor and predictor of successful literacy acquisition is phonological awareness.

In May 2016, the Australian Government released Quality Schools, Quality Outcomes (QSQO), an evidence-based approach to school reform to improve learning outcomes for all Australian students. As part of this reform, a national Year 1 check of all children in the areas of reading, phonics and numeracy was announced. This reform aims to ensure that students who are behind in their schooling are identified early and can receive the extra support they need. QSQO stated: *Reforms such as assessing children in reading, phonics and numeracy during Year 1 and reporting annually to parents against agreed national literacy and numeracy standards for every year of schooling, will ensure students who are behind are identified early and can be targeted with interventions before the achievement gap grows.*

The Federal Government indicated it is looking at working towards implementing that recommendation. Many states implement early years' assessments. For distance education students, access to testing, timeliness and then management if required, can be problematic.

### **Travel and accommodation assistance for students with specific learning needs**

Rural and remote families can incur considerable costs accessing face-to-face consultations with allied health and other professionals for the diagnosis and management of specific learning needs. Telehealth enables remote consultations in some instances. Medicare rebates are now available for video-conferences with mental health professionals and occupational physicians but not for speech therapists. The NDIS does not even cover travel and accommodation for NDIS-qualifying students. State health departments may assist with travel and accommodation for medical issues but not learning issues. State education departments may assist with travel and accommodation to access education but not for learning difficulty related travel. This issue highlights a glaring inequity for which ICPA (Aust) will continue to seek redress.

### **Specific Education Needs and the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (IRRRRE)**

Please find following some excerpts from the IRRRRE Final Report, Halsey (2018), relating to specific education needs. The recommendation and actions are well-aligned with ICPA (Aust) policy.

#### *Students with specific learning needs (p49)*

*Responding to RRR students who have specific learning needs and interests continues to be a very topical and often problematic issue. Government, the community and community organisations play a very important role in this. Notwithstanding efforts made by governments to provide a strong foundation for at-risk students when they commence schooling, consultations confirm that more needs to be done.*

*Of particular concern is obtaining timely, appropriate and affordable early identification of potential learning difficulties, and disabilities, as well as exceptional talents and abilities. Some of the forums held in small towns stated that it could take 12 months or more from the time a school lodged a request for advice to receiving a first visit and a report on how to meet a specific learning need. As is well known, the early years are especially critical in terms of a child's cognitive and emotional development. It is unacceptable that a 6-year-old, for example, has to wait a year or more for an initial diagnosis so that targeted learning and support can commence.*

*Related to ensuring that individual situations are addressed in a timely and affordable way so students can optimise their learning and experience success from a young age, issues around 'readiness for school' were often raised during consultations. There is quite widespread concern about the level of readiness of some school commencers, particularly in relation to children starting school with undiagnosed 'basic' health issue problems like vision, hearing and poor nutrition, and the impact these have on 'getting the grounding' needed to enjoy life and be successful.*

*[Consultations found health services where nurses worked with families and] helped link families into specialist services such as occupational therapists and speech therapists. Such services were dedicated to working very pro-actively with families, often in partnership with pre-schools, schools and volunteer community support groups run by churches and others, to ensure children were healthy and well prepared to start school. As one person commented, "investment in the early years is really building the foundations for life."*

*Recommendation: Ensure RRR children start school with a strong foundation for learning.*

**Actions to progress this recommendation:**

*Ensure that early intervention trained personnel and programs are in place to help families and to connect them to relevant support agencies substantially reduce the waiting time (say to a maximum of three months) for specialist assessments of students with learning difficulties and disabilities and the subsequent development of specific learning plans for them.*

The full IRRRRE Final Report can be found at:

<https://www.education.gov.au/independent-review-regional-rural-and-remote-education> .

**Specific learning needs and mental health**

ICPA (Aust) made a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Accessibility and Quality of Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia. The ICPA submission provided information under the following headings:

- A National Rural Mental Health Strategy
- Mental health and rural and remote boarding school students (including student hostels)
- Bullying, cyber-bullying and mental health
- Special Learning Needs and mental health
- Medicare rebate item number attached to relevant Telehealth providers
- Rural hardship and mental health – Education perspective.

In relation to specific education needs, ICPA (Aust) stated:

*Students with special learning needs, including gifted children, are especially vulnerable to mental health problems, and those in rural and remote areas even more so because access to diagnostic and management support services is notoriously difficult. Difficulties obtaining a diagnosis is probably due to a shortage of staff in rural and remote areas and bureaucratic processes. Families who can find the resources will often end up seeking help in major centres from private consultants, at considerable cost to the family. Once a diagnosis has been obtained, access to ongoing consultations for management is likewise difficult.*

The full submission can be found on the ICPA Federal website under

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/browse/96/federal-submissions> .

## **TERTIARY REPORT**

**Kate Thompson**

ICPA (Aust)'s persistence and continued lobbying for equity of access to an appropriate and continuing education for rural and remote tertiary students is paying off, albeit slowly, with some further positive outcomes. Federal Council and the Tertiary Portfolio have addressed the motions presented at the Federal Conference in August 2017 and unresolved motions from previous years, on a number of fronts: correspondence to government, delegation, submissions and meetings.

### **COMPONENTS OF THE 2016 ELECTION PROMISE:**

The three election announcements in mid-2016 impacting our tertiary cohort have been implemented and are assisting in improving educational opportunities for regional and remote students and addressing the under-representation of rural and remote students at tertiary level.

- a) On 1 January 2018, the time regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria (Part time work or earnings for rural and remote students) under Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY living allowance, changed to 14 months. This change allows students who meet the relevant earnings and associated criteria to prove their independence within one gap year, do not have to further delay commencement of university.
- b) Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships for undergraduate, post graduate and vocational education students to undertake STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) studies including agricultural and health fields commenced with the first round of scholarships up to a value of \$18,000 allocated in 2018 and the next round for 2019 will be advertised towards the end of 2018.
- c) The *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (IRRRRE) – this review enabled ICPA (Aust) to put at the forefront, the issues facing our tertiary cohort when accessing higher education: Tertiary Access Allowance, Youth allowance changes (Relocation Scholarship, qualifying criteria including age, parental income limits) and financial assistance for relocation costs to complete compulsory work experience. In January 2018, Professor Halsey, Chair of the IRRRRE delivered the final report to Government and at the end of May 2018 the Government's response accepted all the recommendations, many which aligned with the ICPA (Aust) submission, in relation to tertiary. Recommendations from the IRRRRE specific to our tertiary cohort include: reviewing current income support and arrangements for rural and remote students who have to move away from home to pursue a higher education or training to ensure they are able to commence immediately following school completion, provision of high quality career information and advice, provision of additional financial support to students for travel between university and home, in particular in a student's first year of study, requirement of universities to prioritise beds for rural and remote students, especially those coming from remote areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and improve the provision of accommodation and income support information for RRR students.

### **BUDGET ANNOUNCEMENTS 2018-2019**

In the 2018-2019 Budget, the Australian Government announced some significant initiatives to address the outcomes of the IRRRRE, which will further address the inequity faced by students from regional, rural and remote areas accessing tertiary education.

- Youth Allowance - Improved access to regional and remote students who must relocate to study by increasing the regional workforce independence criterion parental income limit from \$150,000 to \$160,000, an additional \$10,000 to the income limit for each additional child in the family and allowing students to use the financial year prior to their gap year as the year when parental income is assessed to provide additional certainty about whether they will meet the parental income limit



before taking a gap year. It's expected 75 per cent more regional students will qualify under this criterion for Youth Allowance. This will take effect from 1 January 2019, subject to the passage of legislation.

- Expand accessibility of sub-bachelor programs (including enabling), with additional places at higher education providers in regional areas, which will give students a better opportunity to obtain a relevant and recognised qualification more quickly.
- Expand accessibility for bachelor students at regional study hubs, for young people in regional, rural and remote communities to transition to further education, training and employment.

### **TERTIARY ACCESS ALLOWANCE (TAA)**

**The introduction of a TAA recognises the economic barrier that all** rural and remote students, who have to leave home, face when accessing a higher education; the high up-front set-up and ongoing costs associated with relocation: travel, securing accommodation set-up costs (rental bond, electricity connection or residential college fees), communication (telephone, internet) along with the rising costs of ongoing, basic living expenses (rent, food). The TAA will also alleviate the continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided for relocation to rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance compared to dependent Youth Allowance recipients.

### **FARES ALLOWANCE**

In the IRRRRE report, Professor Halsey identified that in order for rural and remote students living away from home to study, to make a successful transition from school to university, the fares allowance is vitally important to allow students to travel home and be with family and friends especially during the early stages when home-sickness can be a factor. Fares allowance for Youth Allowance recipients must be aligned with the ABSTUDY criteria in relation to the Fares Allowance 3 month eligibility criteria for the first return trip. Federal Council has brought this issue to the attention of the Minister for Social Services and Department of Social Services.

### **YOUTH ALLOWANCE**

ICPA Federal Council has continued to address further aspects of Youth Allowance (YA) including: all rural and remote students being classified as independent, reduction of the age threshold for automatic eligibility for YA, relocation scholarships, removal of the independent YA parental income limit, raising the parental income limit for dependent YA, reinstatement of the HECS-HELP upfront and HELP voluntary repayments and financial assistance for students who need to relocate for compulsory course practicums. ICPA (Aust) has had no further commitment for change but will continue lobbying and pursuing these issues.

### **RENT ASSISTANCE**

Federal Council consulted with the Department of Human Services in relation to the 2017 motions relating to rent assistance. The advice was:

- The circumstances when Rent Assistance (RA) can be paid to YA students varies depending on whether the student is dependent or independent and what their living arrangements are.
- The most common reason RA would **not** be paid for the duration of a rental agreement is where the student moves away from home before they are eligible for the Away from Home (AFH) rate e.g. they move 4 weeks prior to the commencement of their course. As the student is not eligible for the AFH rate they will not be eligible for RA until they commence study on the first day of classes.
- For YA students being paid the independent rate, RA is generally paid from the date they start living outside of the parental home.
- Student eligibility for RA over semester breaks depends on whether the student is maintaining their term accommodation during this period. If a student maintains their term accommodation

or college residence, that is, they are still paying rent and still have access to the property, they may still qualify for the AFH rate and therefore, RA.

#### **CENTRELINK:**

ICPA (Aust) has continued collaborating with the Department of Human Services in relation to the issues that members are reporting when applying for Youth Allowance. In November 2017 and May 2018, Federal Council met with the Department of Human Services, Department of Social Services and Department of Education and Training in Canberra and many Youth Allowance issues were discussed. In May 2018, Federal Council presented numerous suggestions to the Department of Human Services in relation to the Youth Allowance application online process and the current website. The Departments assured us that efficiency measures are reviewed constantly and improvements to the application platform implemented. The Department is keen to be informed of any issues as part of their quality and improvement processes and appreciate comments and advice from members.

#### **TEACHER EDUCATION**

The importance of high quality teachers in rural and remote schools is apparent, with more than 4,000 schools located in rural, regional and remote locations educating almost 30% of all students in Australia. Federal Council has continued to raise the inclusion of rural and remote education majors and modules such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders in teaching courses with Government, in the IRRRRE and at every opportunity highlighting the uniqueness and challenges faced when educating students in the rural and remote context. It has been identified that specific rural training aids in the recruitment and retention of teachers and assists in the sustainability and resilience of these rural communities.

Professor Halsey in the IRRRRE report, recommended the provision of funding and opportunities for teacher education students to undertake placements and the introduction of a unit on teaching and living in rural and remote schools and communities to attract and retain high quality teachers for rural and remote Australia.

#### **TRANSPARENCY OF HIGHER EDUCATION ADMISSIONS PROCESSES.**

The decision to apply for a university course can be a daunting process with a plethora of information which in the past, has not been consistent in its presentation. By the end of 2019, the reform of the admissions process will be complete and a transparent, consistent process will be available; standardised presentation of admissions information including study options, entry requirements and application processes, adoption of common admissions terminology, adoption by Tertiary Admission Centres of more consistent approaches, reporting and streamlining interstate application processes and a national admissions information platform.

These recommendations have been agreed to by all registered Australian higher education providers and will deliver to students, parents, teachers and career advisors, the knowledge and capacity to more easily navigate higher education admissions policies and processes. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) will continue to monitor and report on admissions transparency in the higher education sector and in 2020 will complete a comprehensive review and evaluation of the recommendations and implementation.

#### **REGIONAL HUBS**

The Australian Government has committed to assist in the establishment and maintenance of up to eight community-owned, regional study hubs with infrastructure including study spaces, video-conferencing, computing facilities and internet access as well as pastoral and academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities, to improve access to higher education for regional, rural and remote students. In May 2018, applications opened for the next stage with the

release of the “Regional Study Hub Application Guide May 2018”. The application process has commenced with the closing date 27 July 2018.

### **INDEPENDENCE CRITERIA**

We continue to lobby the Federal Government on behalf of students who have to relocate in order to access the most appropriate tertiary course for their needs and aspirations, be recognised as a separate disadvantaged group and be considered financially independent of their parents for the purpose of accessing financial assistance on course enrolment. In the IRRRRE report, it was identified that *‘consideration needs to be given to investigating how a bona fide post-secondary offer to undertake higher education and/or further training to a student could be used to qualify for direct financial support for the student...reviewing the parental income test rules in terms of whether they accurately reflect the ability of parents to provide support to their children who have moved away to study’* strengthening our policy.

### **ACCOMMODATION**

Further to the motions from 2015 concerning the affordability and accessibility of accommodation for rural and remote students, the IRRRRE report recommended universities be required to prioritise beds for rural and remote students, the establishment of dedicated accommodation advisers and brokers, and improve the provision of accommodation and income support information for rural, regional and remote students.

In February 2018, the Department of Education and Training, commissioned Urbis to complete the *Regional Student Accommodation Assessment*, on the supply of affordable accommodation for regional, rural and remote students. This report highlighted the issues facing regional, rural and remote students: high rental prices for on-campus accommodation, lack of availability due to high demand and difficulty in the private rental market due to the students’ age and lack of rental history and recommended the provision a ‘one-stop-shop’ information platform to better inform students while making choices for their university studies and address some of the challenges including timing of offers, accessing private rental and accessing government support.

### **YOUTH ALLOWANCE DOCUMENT**

An overview of Youth Allowance has been collated by ICPA (Aust) with advice from Department of Human Services. This guide, updated at the end of 2017, aims to be complimentary to the Youth Allowance website and can be viewed on the ICPA (Aust) website - *Youth Allowance Overview*. <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/61/youth-allowance-overview-2018>

As responses to our lobbying has proven over the years, some very positive changes in the last 12 months which, off the back of the previous changes especially with Youth Allowance, have progressed some long-standing issues and motions. Along with following up on issues we have not yet had a response to, ICPA (Aust) will continue to lobby and raise the profile of our members’ issues through the avenues available to us to see the implementation of changes and measures beneficial to our tertiary cohort and to ensure rural and remote students who aspire to a tertiary education, can do so.

## **TRAINING REPORT**

**Jane O'Brien**

It is with great pleasure I present my third report as leader of the Federal Training Portfolio.

While not a high volume of Motions were presented at Federal Conference 2017, the Portfolio remained firmly committed to ensuring students who choose traineeships or apprenticeships, have equitable opportunity to access tertiary training. The number of motions is not necessarily reflective of the difficulties this cohort faces in accessing tertiary education.

Financial assistance for students who relocate to complete compulsory work experience remains a high priority lobby.

The Government has reiterated commitment to maintaining a high-quality Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector and growing the number of apprenticeships in Australia. Once again, steps have been taken to promote the VET sector in the Australian community as a real and positive choice for Australians with around \$3 billion committed towards the VET sector in 2018-2019.

The release of *Apprentices and trainees 2017: December quarter* shows that at the end of last year there were 256 140 apprentices and trainees in-training across Australia. (Source: Assistant Minister Andrews Press Release 5 June 2018) [www.ncver.edu.au/publications](http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications)

**The Skilling Australians Fund, (SAF)** is a major commitment between the Government and states and territories working together to create an additional 300 000 apprenticeships throughout Australia. The Skilling Australians Fund is a \$1.5 billion commitment from 2017 - 2022 with traineeships and apprenticeships in rural and remote areas amongst the priority projects, ensuring the needs of rural and regional Australia are met. "The Government is making sure the needs of rural and regional Australia are addressed." (Source Assistant Minister Andrews. Joint doorstep 30 May 2018) States and territories signing onto the new SAF National Partnership Agreement will also meet the Government's commitment dollar for dollar.

**The Government's Revised National Standards for Group Training Organisations (GTO)** introduced in 2017, ensures apprentices, trainees and host employers receive consistent, quality support from GTOs Australia-wide.

**The Government's VET Student Loans (VSL) program** which replaced the VET FEE-HELP program has shown early promising results. Since July 2017 only fully-approved providers are allowed to offer VET Student Loans with the Government introducing student progression measures and the VET Student Loans Ombudsman. The three loan caps for 2018 have increased in line with CPI to \$5 075, \$10 150 or \$15 225 with the Government monitoring the program to ensure it continues to meet the needs of students and industry.

The list of VSL eligible courses are updated in line with requirements: they must be current, on at least two state or territory skills lists, or are science, technology, engineering or mathematics related or are tied to a licenced occupation requirement. Follow the link to access VSL eligible courses.

[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/20180604 -  
vsl approved course providers list.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/20180604_-_vsl_approved_course_providers_list.pdf)

**Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships** which include vocational education students undertaking STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) studies including agricultural and health fields commenced with the first round of scholarships up to a value of \$18 000 allocated in 2018. The 2019 round of scholarships will be advertised towards the end of 2018.

**Youth Allowance.** Apprentices and trainees may be eligible to claim Youth Allowance for Australian Apprentices provided they meet the criteria which includes proving they are registered with the Australian Apprenticeship scheme, enrolled in a full-time apprenticeship or traineeship and are aged between aged 16 – 24. Australian Apprentices, providing they meet eligible criteria, may be able to claim Austudy if aged 25 and over or ABSTUDY if Indigenous Australians. Please do not self-assess. Further information can be found at:

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/payments-and-services-australian-apprentices>

“Regional kids deserve the same opportunities as kids in the cities”. (Source Hon Michael McCormack joint doorstep 30 May 2018)

### **VET Review**

In June 2017 The Hon Karen Andrews MP, Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills announced a major review of the framework which governs the regulation of Australia’s VET sector.

The report from this Review was released on Friday 15 June. The Australian Government will progress 10 recommendations and support in-principle a further 11 recommendations.

Grouped into 5 key areas the Australian Government has responded that they will continue to liaise with key stakeholders as they work towards implementing the review recommendations.

The 5 key themes: engagement between the regulator and the sector; strengthening registration requirements of RTOs; teaching excellence; improving the collection and the sharing of data; and information and protection for students.

The report aims to strengthen the Australian Skills Quality Authority’s (ASQA) regulatory approach and improve the quality of the VET sector.

<https://www.education.gov.au/nvetr-act-review>

[https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/australian\\_government\\_response\\_to\\_the\\_nvetr\\_act\\_review\\_0.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/australian_government_response_to_the_nvetr_act_review_0.pdf)

### **Trade Support Loans**

Trade Support Loans offer loans up to \$20 420, paid in instalments, throughout the apprenticeship, to assist apprentices cover daily expenses including equipment purchases associated with completing an apprenticeship. Similar to the HECS system, the loan is repaid through the tax system once the minimum income threshold is reached. In 2017-2018 the minimum threshold is \$55 874. As an added incentive, a 20 percent discount on the loan amount is offered to apprentices who have successfully completed their apprenticeship.

Useful websites include:

- **My Skills** website provides information on training providers, courses, campus facilities and services. [www.myskills.gov.au](http://www.myskills.gov.au)

- Australian Apprenticeships provides up to date information including a comprehensive FAQ section. <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>
- Australian Apprenticeships Referral Phone: Line 13 38 73
- The Australian Apprenticeship Support Network website lists a state by state guide to some financial incentives and benefits for apprenticeships. [www.apprenticeshipsupport.com.au](http://www.apprenticeshipsupport.com.au)
- <https://www.education.gov.au/skills-and-training>
- Australian Skills Quality Authority <https://www.asqa.gov.au/>
- <file:///C:/Users/User/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/7Y5B94BP/Full%20article.htm> the full joint doorstep interview with Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham MP, The Hon Michael McCormack MP, The Hon Karen Andrews MP and The Hon Dan Tehan MP.

The Tertiary and Training Portfolios work closely together during the year with joint teleconferences and collaboration with our Reports. Thank you to Kate Thompson and the Tertiary Portfolio.

The Portfolio looks forward to listening to members concerns in the coming year and continuing to raise the profile of these concerns to ensure this cohort has equal opportunity to follow their chosen career.

Thank you to the States who have raised issues during the year.

Thank you is also due to Wendy for her constant support and encouragement and my fellow Training Portfolio Councillors, Sally Sullivan, Kate Thompson and Suzanne Wilson for their support and advice.