

**The Isolated Children's Parents'**  
**Association of Australia**  
**ICPA (Aust)**



**2019 Federal Conference**

**PORTFOLIO REPORTS**

**31 July & 1 August 2019**

**Adelaide, SA**

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

**Caroline Robinson**

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate and support members whose children must attend boarding school in order to access their compulsory education as they live too far away from a school to be able to attend daily. For many families who live in rural communities as well as on rural properties, boarding is the only practical option for their children's secondary education.

**2018 Federal Conference** Following the "Country Kids in Capitals" 2018 Federal Conference in Canberra, ICPA (Aust) wrote letters pertaining to Boarding School motions to the Prime Minister of Australia, Minister for Human Services and Minister for Families and Social Services with copies to the Minister for Education, Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources as well as shadow Ministers and Greens representatives outlining the concerns raised in the 2018 boarding schools/school term hostels motions. In response to our letters we received several replies, including from the Prime Minister the Hon Scott Morrison MP acknowledging our request for the establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund and another from the Assistant Treasurer with regards to the complexities and difficulties associated with Fringe Benefit Tax issues.

**Rural Hardship Education Fund** Federal Council have spoken extensively on the need for a permanent program to assist rural and remote families with education costs in times of rural hardship, whether this is through fire, flood, industry impacts or drought.

ICPA (Aust) received a reply from The Hon Scott Morrison MP in response to the request for the establishment of a Rural Hardship Education Fund, outlining the outcomes from the National Drought Summit held on the 26 October 2018 and stating:

'As a Federal Government, it's our job to look after the families, individuals and communities to ensure that there is food on the table, kids can keep going to school and that the towns and regions can remain viable.'

ICPA (Aust) has also had representation at meetings with the Joint Agencies Drought Taskforce where we raised the urgent need for the implementation of a Rural Hardship Education Fund (RHEF) as well as highlighting the excessive educational costs faced by rural families in accessing schooling for their children.

Federal Council is gathering current case studies regarding flood and drought impacted families as they struggle to keep their children at boarding school. These provide credible insights to support our advocacy.

Following the catastrophic monsoon event in North Queensland the Federal Government via the Department of Human Services announced in March 2019 the *Flood Education Supplement* which provided a one-time payment of \$1,000 to eligible students as part of the North Queensland Flood Recovery Package. Families who are eligible to receive Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) or ABSTUDY living in flood affected Queensland shires received this supplement. ICPA (Aust) is grateful to the Federal Government for recognising the need for educational support after this horrendous event and appreciates the quick action in providing financial recognition to keep these geographically isolated children at school.

ICPA (Aust) is hopeful that while this funding was provided in a different platform than assistance for education being sought for drought affected families, that it might be seen as a precedence, and will possibly assist in bringing about realisation that educational assistance for drought impacted families is crucial as well.

**Mental Health for Boarders** Mental wellbeing, particularly for students who live away from home for schooling, has been a focus in our boarding discussions. Federal Council has been involved in several conversations with various organisations interested in the creation of resources designed specifically for rural and remote students and their families which will help address the unique challenges they face, whether they are boarding away from home, in a small rural school setting or distance education classroom.

A floor motion at last year's conference requested that boarding school/hostel staff have Youth Mental Health First Aid training. Options are being explored to take this motion forward with boarding schools and boarding school associations.

ICPA (Aust) also assisted UNICEF in coordinating a trip to rural NSW areas to talk with children to assess the impact the drought is having on them and Federal Council welcomed their report which contained very upfront comments, released on 18 February 2019. The report can be found at <https://www.unicef.org.au/our-work/unicef-in-australia/the-drought-report?fbclid=IwAR1lDzImmXE-7If0wOW4QQaG3OoFPNvckOQi69X2VhDSkTvRTB4Tg52ynA>

Further to the UNICEF report, UNICEF is initiating a Youth Summit to bring together young people in rural drought affected areas. ICPA (Aust) has been assisting with connections for this summit and suggestions for the initial committee and hopes that a number of rural and remote students will be able to take part.

**Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC)** Motions requesting an increase to the AIC and adjustment to the different components of the allowance have been raised through letters written to government, delegations and meetings with the Departments of Education and Training, Human Services and Social Services. While a sympathetic ear is often afforded, ICPA (Aust) is still working on having these changes come to fruition.

At the 2018 Federal Conference, ICPA members supported a motion asking ICPA (Aust) to seek the undertaking of a review of the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) and Federal Council raised this at our delegations in November. Interest in an AIC review was expressed by a number of government representatives and Federal Council were encouraged to hear that one Minister planned to formally request such a review. Our request for a review of AIC was also included in our briefing papers as part of our federal election campaign. Federal Council are still waiting to hear of progress on the possibility of a review.

Over the Christmas break, Federal Council supported ICPA members who received AIC payment duplications and cancellation letters. Federal Council also held discussions with the Department of Human Services regarding solutions for these situations and the effect these multiple payments and cancellation letters have on families. These issues further strengthen ICPA (Aust)'s call for online renewal and processing. ICPA (Aust) will continue to pursue an AIC online renewal process as an option along with other concerns associated with the AIC application, approval and implementation process.

ICPA (Aust) has been assured that AIC payments in 2019 will be paid on the dates published on the ICPA website which will assist families with planning.

**Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT)** ICPA (Aust) continues to raise in delegations with the Federal Government, the removal of the FBT incurred by employers who assist employees living in rural and remote locations with the huge out-of-pocket costs associated with boarding children away from home for their schooling. In October 2018, ICPA (Aust) also wrote to Federal Treasurer, the Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP expressing our members' concern of this issue. The Hon. Stuart Robert MP, Assistant Treasurer, replied to our request suggesting that ICPA (Aust) consider putting forth the information around this issue into a submission for the Productivity Commission Review into Remote Area Tax Concessions and Payments. This submission was lodged in May 2018 and can be found at this link <https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1198/federal-submissions/remote-area-tax-concessions-and-payments-productivity-commission-review-2019.pdf>. ICPA (Aust) also attended a consultation with the Productivity Commission in the process of this review.

**Bank Accounts and Boarding Students** At the 2018 Conference, a motion was presented requesting that ICPA (Aust) raise awareness with banks regarding young students and their need to have access to bank accounts and cash withdrawal cards from an early age as a result of some students 11 years old and younger being away from home for schooling. This resulted in an article being published in the January 2019 edition of Pedals magazine. A resource document, available on the ICPA (Aust) website, was also created which offers boarding parents some suggestions for consideration when discussing their students' banking needs including possible questions to ask when seeking to open an independent bank account for students. Follow this link to view the Banking and Boarding Students document on our website. <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/130/banking-doc-for-pedals-jan-19>

**Boarding Interest from the Media** During June 2019, The Australian Financial Review published a number of articles relating to boarding schools and the schooling option they offer to students. ICPA (Aust) was interviewed for the articles and have shared them on Facebook. Over the series there are comments on the benefits of boarding and effects of drought on boarding families. The articles make reference to ICPA and the Australian Boarding Schools Association (ABSA) which provided statistics, tables and figures around boarding that will be useful in future discussions with government.

ICPA Federal Council will continue to advocate strongly for geographically isolated families who must seek boarding schools to access their compulsory education and the many issues associated with this. We encourage all ICPA members to actively participate and share any concerns or issues that they feel Federal Council may assist with.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our dedicated and hardworking team of Federal councillors who have contributed to this portfolio: Kate Thompson, Alana Moller, Christie Goddard, Kristen Coggan and Nikki Macqueen and our President Mrs Wendy Hick.

# **COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

**Kristen Coggan**

With 19 Communications motions presented at the 2018 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 equitable educational outcomes.

## **The Regional Telecommunications Independent Review**

The 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review is now complete and [the Committee](#) delivered its [report](#) to the Minister for Regional Services, Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, on 30 September 2018. The review highlights many of our own communication concerns for education. The Australian Government delivered its [response to the review](#) on 20 March 2019. The report examines how people use telecommunications services in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia and makes a series of recommendations on how regional communities can maximise the economic opportunities of digital technologies and services. (\*Full links contained at the end of the report).

## **INTERNET**

### **NBN – Sky Muster**

The introduction of the new Sky Muster Plus product will enhance rural, regional and remote communications and educational outcomes. Sky Muster Plus is planned for launch in August 2019. NBN has listened to Sky Muster users and taken their feedback on board to develop this new product which will maximise the use of satellite capacity with larger, sustainable wholesale plans for remote end users who are reliant on satellite. Managing bandwidth hungry applications will maintain a low congestion experience for customers. Currently no beams are congested at the wholesale level. Possible future additional features are wholesale plans for large public interest premises networks e.g. multicast for distance education. Traffic tagged as “Unmetered Data” would be excluded from monthly data allowance and therefore can be excluded from speed reduction or “shaping” when metered data allowance is exceeded. “Metered data” traffic has a monthly data allowance limit that when exceeded is subject to “shaping”. Essentially this new product will offer the unmetering of essential services such as web-browsing, email and software updates. Metering will apply to streaming video and music, virtual private networks, file sharing and internet voice services.

ICPA (Aust) encourages members who are eligible and may be considering a Sky Muster service to have the Sky Muster hardware installed while there is no charge for the equipment or installation. This government funded incentive is only guaranteed until 2020. ICPA (Aust) urges members to take advantage of this while they can. Information on providers and plans can be found here. <https://birraus.com/satellite/satellite-providers/>

### **Nbn Sky Muster Education Service (Education Port)**

ICPA (Aust) continues to strongly advocate for the nbn Sky Muster Education Port Service, which provides 50 GB of data with no peak or off peak regulation, to be available to all rural and remote students with a Sky Muster (nbn satellite internet) 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. At this time, we have not had any progress in seeing the Education Port expansion come to fruition however, we are hopeful that

the introduction of the new Sky Muster Plus product may assist members and their families with these issues.

Recently after concern had been raised that not every distance education student can access an education port, ICPA (Aust) had a meeting with NBN regarding this. Access and application for an Education Port does vary depending on whether or not a state provides internet to distance education students in their state. Currently if a student has a distance education student ID number, and they do not receive state provided internet service for their education needs, they can apply for an Education Port. This has been problematic for some students in NSW, NT and WA. NSW, NT and WA are classed as “decentralised”, meaning the state education departments supply an existing network for educational needs of distance ed students, e.g. STARS. However, if a student does not have a working service or access to the state provided service, they are eligible to apply for an education port. Affected families are encouraged to apply for a nbn Education Port to help reduce the cost of internet and provide their students with more data for education.

The process is as follows-

1. Contact a Sky Muster provider with student ID number and request an Education Port.
2. The provider will then apply to NBN for the service, NBN will investigate and ensure a state provided education internet service cannot be accessed for whatever reason.
3. NBN authorises the provider to supply the education port.

The Sky Muster Education Service is not a free service and families pay for each student’s education port, which is usually offered at a slightly better rate than standard Sky Muster plans. Families in some states must cover the cost of the education port themselves. In Queensland, an internet subsidy is provided by the state government to distance education families to help offset this cost. Recently, NT ICPA was successful in requesting similar assistance from the Northern Territory Government Department of Education which has agreed to an interim arrangement of subsidising \$50 per family, per month towards the cost of nbn internet. If eligible families are having difficulty ordering the Education Port, please contact the Communications portfolio leader and ICPA will raise it with nbn.

ICPA (Aust) will keep access to the Education Port in discussions wherever possible. Federal Council is hopeful that eventually the Sky Muster Education Service can be opened up to more students who have Sky Muster internet service at home to help them with their educational needs.

<https://birraus.com/2016/02/28/what-is-the-nbn-sky-muster-educational-port/>

### **Multicast Trial**

ICPA (Aust) has recently been advised by NBN that multicast trials have been successfully completed.

### **TELEPHONE**

Many motions this year were concerning the faults and restoration of telephone services. This was highlighted in the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee (RTIRC) Report. Members also raised concerns around the retention of landline services in rural and remote areas. Federal Council have been assured by the Minister for Communication’s office that regional, rural and remote landlines are to remain in place and will not be replaced by VoIP services in their current form. Landline services will continue to be maintained until another means of reliable, affordable and appropriate voice service is available. New technology and devices are currently being investigated to replace existing aging services.

Telstra Country Wide has now been rebranded as Telstra Regional Australia and some initiatives are in place to assist regional, rural and remote customers.

### **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 the Telstra Regional Australia page on Telstra.com, <https://www.telstra.com.au/coverage-networks/telstra-regional-australia>

Additionally, if you need further assistance you can contact Telstra Regional Managers:

#### **Telstra Regional Managers:**

##### **NSW/ACT**

**Northern New South Wales-** Michael Maron - [TelstraNthNSW@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraNthNSW@team.telstra.com) Ph 0437 452 487

**ACT & Southern New South Wales-** Reg. General Manager (TBA) [TelstraACTSth@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraACTSth@team.telstra.com)

##### **Victoria / Tasmania**

**North West Victoria** - Steve Tinker [TelstraNWVic@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraNWVic@team.telstra.com) Ph 0428 538 695

**Eastern Victoria-** Loretta Willaton [TelstraEastVic@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraEastVic@team.telstra.com) Ph 0428 368 041

**Tasmania-** Michael Patterson [TelstraTas@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraTas@team.telstra.com) Ph 0428 973 100

##### **QLD**

**Northern Queensland-** Rachel Cliffe [TelstraNorthernQld@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraNorthernQld@team.telstra.com) Ph 0448 636 560

**Southern Queensland-** May Boisen [TelstraSthQld@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraSthQld@team.telstra.com) Ph 0427 740 144

##### **NT/SA/WA**

**Northern Territory-** Nic Danks [TelstraNT@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraNT@team.telstra.com) Ph 0418 185 683

**South Australia** - Mark Bolton [TelstraSA@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraSA@team.telstra.com) Ph 0419 835 041

**Western Australia-** Boyd Brown [TelstraWA@team.telstra.com](mailto:TelstraWA@team.telstra.com) Ph 0418 748 197

Telstra has rolled out its regional call centre that it has created to specifically deal with rural, regional and remote customers. If a residential (not Business) customer calls 132 200 and their account is listed as an address 100+km from a Telstra Store they will be diverted to the Regional Call Centre team. Hours of operation are: 7.30am-9.00pm Monday-Friday, 7.30am-7.30pm Saturday, and 7.30am-5.00pm Sunday. If outside these hours or if all the team are on calls, the customer's phone call overflows to other teams to be answered.

#### **NGWL Customer Service Guarantee**

September 2018 saw the Customer Service Guarantee (CSG) applied to the Next G Wireless Link (NGWL) services. NGWL is used to provide fixed voice services to customers who do not have a fixed line connection to their premises. Historically, Telstra's NGWL customers opted for the service in place



of a USO standard voice service on a fixed copper line. These customers made an informed choice to take up NGWL as an economic alternative to copper installation, where part of the cost for works such as trenching on private property would have been borne by the customer. The application of the CSG to the NGWL means that any faults on NGWL services will now be repaired within set timeframes or the customer will be compensated. For context, NGWL services represent a small proportion of our regional fixed voice customers, accounting for less than 1.5 per cent of fixed voice services in regional areas. Under its USO contract with the Government, Telstra is obliged to maintain copper connections to premises that were already in place on 1 July 2012. This means the change does not have much impact on the USO voice service technology mix in regional areas.

ICPA (Aust) continues to be a member of the Regional, Rural and Remote Communications Coalition (RRRCC) and our members' issues are often discussed within the RRRCC forums. ICPA (Aust) also participates in the RRRCC delegations to speak with those in government and this affords opportunity to raise concerns in an additional capacity.

### **Faults and Universal Obligation**

As already mentioned, there were a number of motions at the 2018 Federal Conference referring to faults and restoration times. Stakeholders are aware of these issues and there are actions coming into play to hopefully improve consumer's experiences. Acknowledgement was made by the Minister for Communication's office with a Regulation Impact Statement Update and Universal Service Obligation assurance. ICPA continues to advocate that these guidelines and services be adhered to, and for penalties to apply when breached. Federal Council placed a submission with the *Review into Consumer Safeguards – Part B Reliability of Services* which highlighted concerns raised by members.

[https://www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/bridget-mckenzie/news/landline-works-and-reliable?fbclid=IwAR0X-cMQ87RCZoy0Frs9KkKofrv908DVMv72rBj139ShCP\\_6eiCvvKa9k1Q](https://www.minister.communications.gov.au/minister/bridget-mckenzie/news/landline-works-and-reliable?fbclid=IwAR0X-cMQ87RCZoy0Frs9KkKofrv908DVMv72rBj139ShCP_6eiCvvKa9k1Q)

### **Mobile Black Spot Program**

Round 4 of the Mobile Black Spot Program saw some schools that have been highlighted by ICPA branches benefit from the installation of small cells.

**Afterlee**

**Enngonia**

**Macdonald Valley**

**Naradhan**

**Wattle Flat**

**Mistake Creek**

**Rossville**

**Laverton, Cosmo Newberry**

**Laverton, Mulga Queen**

**Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Kiwirrkurra**

**Wattle Flat**

The Government has committed \$380 million to the Mobile Black Spot Program to invest in telecommunications infrastructure to improve mobile coverage and competition across Australia. This includes \$160 million in new funding for Rounds 5 and 6 of this highly successful program, announced on 20 March 2019 as part of the Government's response to the 2018 Regional Telecommunications Review. This Program is supported by co-contributions from state and local governments, mobile network operators (Optus, Telstra and Vodafone), businesses and local communities. The Guidelines for Round 5 were released on Grant Connect on 5 April 2019 and the Grant Opportunity (GO2529) was



opened for applications. Up to \$80 million in funding has been allocated for Round 5. Like previous rounds of the Program, Round 5 encourages the mobile industry and state and local governments to work together to address mobile black spots across regional and remote Australia. Interested communities are encouraged to contact the mobile network operators and state and local government authorities to make their needs known. A number of schools have now been flagged to get help through an ICPA/Telstra initiative.

The Government has committed \$80 million for Round 6 of the Program. Round 6 is expected to commence after the Round 5 process is complete. More information can be found here <https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/mobile-services-and-coverage/mobile-black-spot-program/frequently-asked-questions-mobile-black-spot-program>

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. Thank you to my fellow Communications councillors: Wendy Hick, Caroline Robinson, Alana Moller and Jane Morton for their support and encouragement over this last year.

**\*Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee links**

<http://www.rtrc.gov.au/committee.html>

<https://www.communications.gov.au/publications/2018-regional-telecommunications-review-getting-it-right-out-there>

<https://www.communications.gov.au/publications/australian-government-response-2018-regional-telecommunications-independent-committee-report-2018>

## CURRICULUM REPORT

Wendy Hick

At the 2018 Federal Conference one Curriculum motion was presented which requested that ICPA (Aust) lobby for Primary Production to be included as a compulsory component of the national curriculum. While “Agriculture” is currently included in the Australian Curriculum, specific reference to Primary Production is being sought by ICPA members as “Agriculture” has been open to interpretation as to how and what is taught by individual states, schools and teachers. Members wish to see the actual process of growing Australian food and fibre taught in schools to create an awareness of where food and fibre come from as well as the process required in providing it.

Federal Council have had discussions with the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA) <https://www.piefa.edu.au/> to discuss their vision to create an understanding of and value for the primary industries sector in the Australian community. The discussions have focussed on how PIEFA initiatives, including their web portal “Primezone” which aims to provide teachers with single-point access to a range of primary industries educational supplies, may be used to achieve a more accurate and thorough primary production curriculum in schools across Australia. Federal Council has also raised and discussed with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) the need for the inclusion of specific Primary Production curriculum with it being acknowledged that Agriculture is not being effectively included in the current curriculum. However, while Agricultural materials have been a focus of improvement for ACARA over the past few years, it is up to the states how they offer certain subject units within the curriculum. Federal Council sees this as an area where State and Federal Councils can work together to try to initiate change within the respective systems.

ICPA (Aust) is encouraged to see where individual States have taken on board opportunities for Primary Production to feature accurately in their respective state curriculum. In April, the NSW Department of Education announced that beginning in 2020, an Agriculture and Food unit will be compulsory in public secondary schools alongside a range of other measures to increase agricultural education in their state. *Agriculture to Be a Mandatory Unit in New South Wales High Schools* – ABC 22 Nov 2018 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-11-22/agriculture-to-be-mandatory-unit-in-nsw-schools/10518776>

ICPA (Aust) is pleased to see the issue being raised in the media (*Push for Kids to Stay Close to Food Source*- the Australian 28-4-2019 [https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/push-for-kids-to-stay-close-to-food-source/news-story/9a09b76730c0c012ec4801749cf2a1eb?fbclid=IwAR2ZKCcwmPS7Wq71pv9GOsHW6llcbdv\\_dVr cwAvjkmxW9FdqWMkvfSvzho](https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/push-for-kids-to-stay-close-to-food-source/news-story/9a09b76730c0c012ec4801749cf2a1eb?fbclid=IwAR2ZKCcwmPS7Wq71pv9GOsHW6llcbdv_dVr cwAvjkmxW9FdqWMkvfSvzho))

The issue of primary production being taught within curriculum has been a “hot topic” in several states and has also been raised at ICPA State Conferences. Federal Council will continue to work with State Councils and to support one another to advocate for the accurate portrayal of Primary Production in the Curriculum across the country and a focus on the importance of teaching where food and fibre comes from in an unbiased platform.

Throughout the past year, ICPA (Aust) has maintained its relationship with ACARA, now under the Leadership of new CEO David de Carvalho and continues to attend quarterly meetings in order to keep abreast of Australian Curriculum developments. Assistance has been sought from Federal Council for ACARA to assess their relationships with rural and remote students and schools along with

investigating how they can improve engagement with rural, regional and remote stakeholders. ACARA is keen to reach out to new groups, identify new communication and engagement channels and show greater diversity in curriculum materials and outgoing communications. The hope is to have better contact and information regarding rural and remote students/families and they are considering a regular update that could be shared with our members or state councils.

ACARA has also sought assistance to encourage parent participation and interaction with the organisation and requested that the Peak Parent Bodies Group, of which ICPA (Aust) is a part, share information with our members. ICPA (Aust) included links to the ACARA website <https://www.acara.edu.au/> for parents to access in the May Branch Bulletin, along with the NAPLAN website which provides information on NAPLAN testing to parents. More recently, ACARA has referred stakeholders to the Australian Curriculum website <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/> as a useful resource for information on the National Curriculum.

Online NAPLAN continues to be discussed, with most schools seeming to be more comfortable with the transition. A glitch this year saw reports that arrangements had to be made for a number of students in several states to re-sit the exam when there was a problem with the online exams. Federal Council has not been contacted by any members or rural schools indicating that it was a problem for their students, but it is a space we continue to watch. Federal Council encourages members to explore the NAPLAN website <https://www.nap.edu.au/> to assist with understanding the NAPLAN model. We are also interested in hearing any concerns which may arise, especially as NAPLAN Online is rolled out.

A Media Release from the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan, on 28 June 2018 stated “An independent review has been commissioned to identify the issues with NAPLAN online this year. Just over one million students sat NAPLAN online this year and while 97 per cent of online tests were unaffected it is not good enough that some students and schools were impacted. All education ministers agreed to extend the transition of NAPLAN to online by one year to 2021 pending the findings and recommendations of the independent review.”

In the same statement, the Minister also announced that the Federal Government will be designing a free and voluntary Year One Phonics Check to assist parents and teachers to better understand a child’s reading level early in their education. The suggestion of a Year One Phonics Screening Program has received somewhat divided comment, however Year One Phonics Screening Checks have been reported as successful in the UK since the program began in 2012. The South Australia Department of Education ran a Year One Phonics Check Trial over 56 SA public schools in 2017 and in 2018, over 14,000 South Australian Year 1 students participated in the 2018 Phonics Screening Check. ICPA (Aust) was asked for input as to possible considerations for implementing Year One Phonics Screening for rural and remote students and we will watch this space to ensure that geographically isolated students are also able to adequately participate in beneficial programs.

# **DISTANCE EDUCATION REPORT**

**Alana Moller**

ICPA (Aust) is determined to ensure that recognition of the unique needs of geographically isolated distance education students, home tutors and their families are catered for and that resources and support are maintained or improved. At every opportunity we continue to represent and support our distance education members by emphasising wherever possible the distinctive nature of geographically isolated distance education and the major issues affecting its success.

## **2018 Federal Conference**

With a focus on the value of Distance Education Home Tutors and of Schools of Distance Education and Schools of the Air being based in rural and remote locations, the 2018 Federal Conference saw two motions presented and passed in relation to Distance Education.

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

A request for Federal Council to continue its lobby for a DETA was presented as a conjoined motion at Federal Conference. Following on from Federal Conference, ICPA (Aust) has continued to advocate for the establishment of a DETA. The topic was raised in a standalone motion letter, sent to the Minister for Education, the Hon Dan Tehan and other relevant ministers and rural senators and members with an interest in rural and remote education and included links to the DE Resource video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFqc0StaORE&feature=youtu.be> and the ICPA's Distance Education Research for Geographically Isolated Families survey results <http://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1022/federal-icpa-portfolios/federal-distance-education-portfolio/deta-survey-results.pdf>. Notably, this year we also sent this letter to the Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP, Minister for Women, with the view that this matter is one which affects the wellbeing of women in geographically isolated communities. To date we have not received responses to this correspondence.

The call for a DETA to be established was also included in Federal Council Briefing Papers and raised at every opportunity during delegation meetings. In our Federal Election campaign strategy, the need for a DETA was listed on our election infographic as one of our top four priorities and included in briefing papers sent to politicians and candidates across the country.

To this end we cannot say we have made any progress on this issue, however we continue to include the topic within submissions, meetings, delegations and other avenues, attempting to raise the profile of the distance education tutor and the extensive and essential role they play in achieving distance education success.

## **Location of Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education**

In 2017 the Western Australian Government made a decision to close regional Schools of the Air and to instead provide a single service from a central Perth (metropolitan) facility. Though later retracted, the proposal highlighted a lack of broader understanding and appreciation of why Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education are so important to rural and remote communities. On the back of this, a motion was presented at the 2018 Federal Conference requesting that ICPA (Aust) advocates the importance, value and critical need of Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education being based in and part of their respective rural and remote communities.

While decisions of this nature are principally state-based, Federal Council will support and advocate along with the States to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities. We are also prepared to promote awareness of the features of educating

children via distance education in a geographically isolated situation, such as the opportunity to host Central Station blogs focussed entirely on School of the Air and Distance Education experiences.

### **Central Station Blogs**

The Central Station Blog posts which ICPA (Aust) hosted, have been very well received. Circumstances which have eventuated in recent years, makes it clear that geographically isolated distance education is widely misunderstood and the opportunity to tell our stories to a global audience goes a long way to increasing the awareness in the general community of this unique educational experience. Sincere gratitude to all of those people who contributed to our two Central Station blog opportunities in 2018 and this year. We appreciate that you were able to take the time to tell your story.

### **Other Points of Interest**

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

Although not included in the Distance Education motions in 2018, Federal Council has continued to work on issues associated with AIC. At meetings with the Department of Human Services, ICPA (Aust) raised issues with the AIC application, approval and implementation process, specifically requesting an online application process. Concerns around the application process for distance education students were raised at the 2017 Federal Conference and our advocacy has been around improving AIC processes for distance education, boarding and second home allowance. Federal Council has been assured that an online application process for the AIC is being investigated and developed, however its implementation seems to continue to be a long way off. Comment and suggestions provided by Federal Council on the AIC application process were well received by the Department of Human Services, however, no commitment has been made as to when changes may occur. ICPA (Aust), in a motion letter to the Hon Paul Fletcher, Minister for Families and Social Services, has also requested an increase of the AIC, in line with the costs associated with educating geographically isolated children.

Federal Council has also been in contact with the Departments of Human Services and Social Services requesting an indication of the proportion of geographically isolated students who receive AIC – DE allowance. Federal Council feel that having a clearer understanding of these numbers would assist when advocating for issues around Distance Education to ensure our lobbies are well-informed and up to date.

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

After the demise of the former Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (VISE) program and concerns raised by our members around this, ICPA (Aust) is pleased to report that AHVISE has successfully taken the place of the former program. The AHVISE program has established additional support mechanisms this year, including a virtual classroom, where volunteers who cannot travel can tutor bush kids online. We would once again like to congratulate Aussie Helpers for their determination and dedication to helping educate geographically isolated students.

#### **Impact of Digital Technology on our Students**

Federal Council has been in contact with the Australian Council on Children and the Media who are combining with the Australian Council of Educational Leaders to host the first ever *Digital Environments and Developing Minds* Conference. These organisations are aiming to promote a recognition that while the advantages of technology use for children are well documented, any risks to their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development are not necessarily considered or understood. ICPA (Aust) are aware that there are concerns being raised by our members across Australia around student technology use, especially when many of our students' study via a digital distance education curriculum, with extensive online learning required. We are therefore very interested in keeping abreast of these issues and will endeavor to collaborate with these

organisations, as well as their Conference partners, to raise our members concerns and seek information which may be beneficial for members. Further information about this Conference can be found at

[http://www.ace1.org.au/ACEL/ACELWEB/Events/2019/Children\\_and\\_The\\_Media/About.aspx](http://www.ace1.org.au/ACEL/ACELWEB/Events/2019/Children_and_The_Media/About.aspx)

### **Sky Muster Education Service**

Issues have been raised around some distance education students being unable to access the Education Service on nbn Sky Muster, with access/eligibility varying across states. ICPA (Aust) can confirm that distance education students with a student ID number from their respective State education department are eligible for an education port, provided that they do not already receive a state based internet service for their schooling. If distance education students do not currently have a Sky Muster Education Port or access to a state provided service, ICPA (Aust) recommend contacting a Sky Muster provider to apply. This includes students in NSW, WA and NT that may not yet be receiving an internet service from their distance education school, perhaps due to a waiting period or some other reason. While the nbn Sky Muster Education Service (Ed Port) is not free, it is offered to eligible Distance Education families at a lower cost than similar regular service plans and can greatly assist families who do not have state provided internet with additional data for their schooling needs. Please do not hesitate to contact Federal Council if you have any queries or concerns around this issue.

### **Sky Muster Plus**

The long-awaited Sky Muster Plus service is due to launch in mid-2019. This will give rural and remote satellite users greater data capacity, with essential internet services no longer contributing to monthly data usage by Sky Muster users. ICPA (Aust) are optimistic that educational sites may be included in the list of services to be unmetered.

### **Distance Education Multicast Trials**

The **REACT** multicast technical trials with nbn Sky Muster in the Northern Territory were successful. Product trials will commence in the near future.

### **In Home Care (IHC)**

Although not specifically dealt with in the Distance Education portfolio, the changes made to IHC as at 1 July 2018 have had a significant impact on distance education families and their ability to use IHC to assist them with their situations. ICPA (Aust) remains abreast of developments around IHC and have been supporting members to manage the many issues associated with IHC for geographically isolated families.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate strongly for geographically isolated distance education students and their families. We encourage all ICPA members to actively highlight the valuable role of the geographically isolated distance education tutor and to participate in opportunities to raise the profile of the nature of geographically isolated distance education. If members have any concerns or issues which they feel Federal Council may assist with, please do not hesitate to request our assistance.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my fellow distance education portfolio members Christie Goddard, Caroline Robinson, Wendy Hick and Lisa Slade.

# **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC) REPORT**

**Jane Morton**

ICPA (Aust) is working hard to ensure rural and remote families can and will access high quality, affordable early childhood learning and child care; whether this is through Preschool or Kindy, Mobile Early Childhood Services including Mobile Playgroups, Long Day Care Centres in small rural towns or In Home Care (IHC).

## **Early Learning**

### **AIC Distance Education Allowance for Pre-Compulsory school students and Universal Access to Early Childhood Education**

ICPA (Aust) will continue to promote both the extension of the AIC Distance Education allowance for those children who are studying an approved preschool/kindy program by distance education the year before formal schooling, and for improved access to preschool in rural and remote areas. The Federal Government has again provided funding, this time \$453.1 million to states and territories for preschool until the end of 2020 under the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, see: <https://www.education.gov.au/universal-access-early-childhood-education>.

Parents with pre-compulsory school aged children attending a Preschool Program at a Long Day Care Service are eligible for the Child Care Subsidy even though they do not meet the activity test requirements and are entitled to 36 hours of subsidised care. This is a great incentive for families who need to travel many kilometres to town in order to access preschool and so it is rather disappointing that we cannot yet access assistance for our preschoolers studying by distance education. However, we will not give up!

Federal Council welcomed the recent news from the Education Council that Early Childhood Teachers have been given an extension of the transitional provisions in rural and remote areas to address the lack of qualified Early Childhood Teachers in Long Day Centres there. This is being worked out in the various states and territories, as from January 2020 where there are more than 60 children under school-age, a second Early Childhood Teacher 'or suitably qualified person' is required to care for those children. Federal Council is watching this with interest to see whether it will also mean an extension to the transitional provisions in In Home Care.

## **Mobile Early Childhood Services**

The [Community Child Care Funding](#) (CCCF) Round 2 opened for Child Care Services including Mobile Early Childhood Services in disadvantaged communities earlier this year, with the aim of improving access to early learning opportunities for vulnerable children and families. ICPA (Aust) hoped that this extra funding would have helped some Mobile Early Childhood Services providing child care. This was also accessible to In Home Care Services. Unfortunately, Mobile Playgroups do not qualify for the CCCF, though some funding for them has been provided by the Department of Social Services. Mobile services such as the Katherine Isolated Children's Service (KICS) are also partially funded through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). KICS needs a further \$40,000 to maintain their vital service to pastoral stations and communities in the Northern Territory by the end of the year. They would like to also increase their service to provide a mobile playgroup to properties and communities out of Alice Springs but unfortunately, at this stage, there is no funding available for new Mobile Early Childhood Playgroups in rural and remote areas.

## **In Home Care (IHC)**

Federal Council has received many complaints and concerns from member families since the new In Home Care model was implemented on 2 July 2018. Numerous letters have been written to the Minister for Education, rural politicians and the Department of Education and we have followed up



with this on delegations and whenever the opportunity arose. Hopefully the initial teething problems are now settling down.

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the announcement that the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) for IHC families increased from \$25.48/hour/family from 2 July 2018 to \$32.00/hour/family and up to \$38.40/hour/family for Additional CCS from 1 January 2019 as per the later version of the IHC National Guidelines, see: [https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ihc\\_national\\_guidelines\\_-\\_december\\_2018.pdf](https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/ihc_national_guidelines_-_december_2018.pdf). It has risen marginally again by the CPI at 1 July 2019. The Additional Child Care Subsidy is mainly used for children's wellbeing if they are at risk, for example. However, it can also be a temporary measure to help care for children in families experiencing financial hardship or disasters such as floods, cyclones and bushfires. Families are also encouraged to review their incomes to make sure they are receiving the correct percentage of CCS. Federal Council also welcomed the news that 200 more IHC places, an increase to the 3000 existing places, were made available, particularly for Queensland families.

The Department of Education informed IHC services in disadvantaged or vulnerable communities that they could apply for once-off Special Circumstances grants under the Community Child Care Fund (CCCF) to address any current lack of viability or natural disaster issues such as drought, the North West Queensland floods, Tasmanian bushfires etc. during the 2018-19 financial year. Funding to some IHC service providers was reduced in July 2018, the service providers then passed on the added costs as new levies to families. The CCCF Special Circumstances Funding and the CCS increase should have made IHC more affordable. ICPA has heard though that since 1 January, some IHC service providers have increased their fees and not removed the levies, whereas other services have reduced their fees.

IHC educators are required to have at the minimum, a Certificate III in ECEC or be working towards same from January 2020. There are two transitional provisions for IHC educators in remote areas prior to that:

- An IHC educator providing services in a remote or a very remote area will meet the qualification requirements for IHC educators if the IHC educator has access to, and utilises the expertise of, an educator with at least a Certificate III in early childhood education and care for at least 20 per cent of the time care is provided to a family. This may be by means of information and communications technology (ICT).
- An educator, who has been continuously working in a remote or very remote area for at least 15 years is exempt from the qualification requirements until 1 January 2020.

It was expected that these provisions would be available to all geographically isolated families but apparently the Remoteness ARIA index has been used as the isolated measure and so some families have been excluded.

ICPA (Aust) sought departmental clarification on the issue of IHC educators supervising distance education. The Department of Education pointed to Family Assistance Law; citing that only caring for children completing their homework in outside of school hours care, not supervising formal schooling, is permissible for the family to receive CCS for that care. ICPA (Aust) is seeking an exemption to this as distance education teachers are not physically present with their students during school hours, and as isolated children cannot access face-to-face teaching in a school like their peers due to the tyranny of distance, a supervisor has to be with them at all times. This is of particular concern with children under 13 years of age. The Department of Education has recommended that a private arrangement between a family and the IHC educator be made to ensure continued care during those 'formal schooling hours' but families will not be able to claim the CCS during that time.

Supervising children studying by distance education is counted as volunteering for the Child Care

Subsidy Activity Test, but only for a maximum of 36 hours per fortnight and as long as the IHC educator is employed for out-of-school hours care for the children and/or caring for younger members of the family (and the other parent is working).

### **Skills IQ Cert III & Diploma ECEC Update of Training Packages**

ICPA (Aust) provided feedback to Skills IQ earlier this year as they updated the Certificate III and Diploma for ECEC training packages. Note that students now have to gain their Cert III in ECEC before applying for Diploma training in ECEC and that work placements for Cert III in ECEC have been increased from 120 hours to 160 hours, of which 120 hours must be in a regulated ECEC service (only a maximum of 40 hours can be in the family workplace in IHC though). This means an IHC student educator in a rural/remote area would have to be released for at least 3 weeks to undertake work placement in a regulated ECEC service, often many kilometres away; a costly exercise for the student and a long period to leave the family without their IHC educator.

### **National Quality Framework (NQF) Review**

The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), held consultations in cities and regional centres in states and territories with stakeholders earlier this year to gather information for the National Quality Framework (NQF) Review which ICPA (Aust) attended. The NQF has not been updated since 2014. ACECQA are also considering whether to include ex-Budget Based Funded (BBF) ECEC services, Mobile EC Services and IHC in the NQF, (these are not currently in the NQF) which could impact affordability for families in the bush and involve much more regulation of ECEC services. ICPA (Aust) was able to participate in a NQF survey that was also conducted. We emphasised that special considerations such as flexibility were required in ECEC for rural and remote families and that educators need the option of being employed whilst working towards their Cert III in ECEC from January 2020 instead of families only being able to accept qualified educators, which are very hard to find and retain in remote areas. Findings will be presented to the Education Council at the end of this year and further consultations will be held early next year with the Review completed in 2021-22.

### **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 on this, but it will take some time to complete due to the different rules and regulations of states and territories. Unfortunately, we have received no further news regarding a national certification at this stage. An announcement is due and Federal Council will forward any information as it becomes available.

### **Working Holiday Maker Visas**

The Minister for Home Affairs confirmed through his department, the Working Holiday Maker Visa news of 7 November last year. Several changes were made regarding employers being able to retain trained and experienced employees doing agricultural (plant and animal cultivation) work for up to 12 months, rather than the previous 6 months, with the additional provision of a third-year visa enabling working holiday makers to work for longer in regional Australia. The media release can be read at: <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/news-media/archive/article?itemId=12>. Unfortunately, this does not apply to nannies and distance education tutors at this time, just seasonal workers, though the Minister has indicated that the government will see how these developments pan out before considering any more changes. ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for nannies and distance education tutors on Working Holiday Maker Visas in rural and remote areas to be considered as doing 'agricultural work'.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to work with the Federal Government and other stakeholder groups to advance the needs of the ECEC in rural and remote Australia. We encourage members to be involved by forwarding any case studies to us and we will continue to share developments as they arise.

## **RURAL SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL TRAVEL PORTFOLIO**

**Di Skene**

Before I begin, I would like to express my sincere thoughts to you all during the current hard times of drought and flood as things are tough, I know. I am very fortunate to be delivering you this report for the second year as the leader of the Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio in amazing Adelaide for 2019. The Rural Schools and School Travel Portfolio has been very busy advocating for our families by forwarding submissions, sending letters, many a phone conversation and email communication on current issues and previous motions. If you wish to review the 2018 motion updates you can view this from the following link on the ICPA website.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1192/federal-conference-motion-updates/federal-conference-motion-update-2018.pdf>

### **RURAL AND REMOTE SCHOOLS**

Federal Council works across a number of portfolios when it comes to rural schools' issues, particularly around the communications and curriculum topics and members should refer to those portfolios for more information on those matters. There have been no recent motions presented at Federal Conference regarding rural schools, however ICPA (Aust) continues to seek quality educational services be delivered to students in rural and remote schools.

Members schooling their children in remote schools may like to visit the **Schools Plus Website** <https://www.schoolsplus.org.au/> which offers eligible schools assistance with raising funds for programs that give students the best chance of success. The Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) is used to determine if a school is disadvantaged – schools must have an ICSEA value below 1000 to be eligible for support through Schools Plus.

### **RURAL SCHOOL TRAVEL**

Federal Council has taken forward members' request that rural and remote students should receive a Student Fare Allowance that reflects the actual costs involved to get students from their home, to their place of education within Australia. The inequity that exists across Australia is to the detriment of rural and remote students, particularly given the limited boarding options within some states.

The lack of consistent travel assistance for rural and remote students has been raised in the Operation, Regulation and Funding of Air Route Service Delivery to Rural, Regional and Remote communities ('Travel Inquiry') and through letters to Government and conversations with Ministers to alert them to the situation of different allowance schemes being offered in different states. This being so, the point was made that there is currently no Federal travel allowance under the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC), however there are fares allowances under both ABSTUDY and Youth Allowance which highlights a discrepancy in Commonwealth Allowances if they were tabled side-by-side. At the end of 2018, I was privileged to talk with various State Rural Schools and School Travel portfolio leaders to listen and learn about what states currently have, what is needed and how best to move forward.

### **BUS – GREYHOUND AUSTRALIA**

After our last Federal Conference, I hit the ground running with Greyhound Australia's announcement to 'no longer take children aged 15 and under being 12-14 years of age without a chaperone.' We contacted Greyhound to ask for an explanation and how they saw families being able to use their services with these new protocols. With Greyhound services no longer catering for children's travel requirements to and from schools, families that live a considerable distance and rely on bus services will have to make other arrangements. Bus services are often a rural or remote student's only practical

means of travel. Greyhound responded by voicing concern for the children's safety on board and at stops. These issues were at the forefront of their thoughts when changing the criteria. ICPA does support the safety concerns and through assistance from the Australian Boarding Schools Association, we found this decision by Greyhound resulted in affecting some 250 students, mostly in Queensland. Although Greyhound is a national company, other States have not seen the same impact, as Greyhound were not visiting a lot of areas or States make their own arrangements where they have dedicated buses for long distance school travel for this to cause the same detrimental effect that is currently happening in Queensland.

### **ROAD TRAVEL**

Moving onto roads and having conference motions seeking our regional and remote roads network be maintained at a safe standard for all to travel has seen Federal Council talk with Federal Government and stakeholder groups. We did receive a reply from the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and regional Development, at the time, the Honourable Michael McCormack. The Minister expressed that the "strengths of our roads continue to be the Government's core focus and have a number of programs in place to provide funding to regional and remote communities to assist with ongoing road maintenance". The Minister also stated they have 'Roads to Recovery' funding that will be given to councils to choose which programs they will direct this funding to, according to priority of course. He went on to say that his concern was with the National Road Toll and serious injuries and he believed the new programs have been a long time coming.

### **AIR TRAVEL**

It has been very encouraging to note that some airlines serving regional areas have announced changes and increased assistance for air travellers in regional areas.

Qantas, in response to the Inquiry into the Operation, Regulation and Funding of Air Route Service Delivery to Rural, Regional and Remote Communities, has increased some Residents' Fares locations. This has been detailed in Qantas' response and re-iterated that 'residents can book return leisure or personal flights from Cloncurry or Mt Isa airport to Brisbane or Townsville, or from Moranbah airport to Brisbane. All return travel is from eligible Western Australia ports are for leisure or personal travel to Perth only'. Qantas also went on to say that residents from surrounding councils and neighbouring regional, rural and remote communities can apply the discount as long as the residents are able to demonstrate that their nearest airport with Qantas service is one of the ten eligible ports in Queensland and Western Australia.

Qantas expressed to Federal Council in writing on the 31 March this year, that there will be direct flights from Darwin and Adelaide to Uluru. The Darwin to Alice Springs route will be upgraded to a Boeing 737 with Business class. Also, the introduction of discounted fares program for Alice Springs residents has been welcomed, though on the downside, some routes to Cairns will cease and also a reduction in flights to Perth. On the upside, Jetstar has increased flights between Cairns and Darwin during peak season. ICPA (Aust) has raised in discussions with Qantas that members have requested further expansion of the Resident's Fares Program which we have seen some additions in recent times as seen below.

**The following return trips qualify for Qantas' discounted fares for residents:**

<b>Queensland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloncurry (CNJ) - Townsville (TSV) - Cloncurry (CNJ)</li> <li>• Cloncurry (CNJ) - Brisbane (BNE) via Townsville - Cloncurry (CNJ)</li> <li>• Moranbah (MOV) - Brisbane (BNE) - Moranbah (MOV)</li> <li>• Mount Isa (ISA) - Brisbane (BNE) - Mount Isa (ISA)</li> <li>• Mount Isa (ISA) - Townsville (TSV) - Mount Isa (ISA)</li> <li>• Longreach (LRE) - Brisbane (BNE) - Longreach (LRE)</li> <li>• Barcaldine (BCI) - Brisbane (BNE) - Barcaldine (BCI)</li> <li>• Blackall (BKQ) - Brisbane (BNE) - Blackall (BKQ)</li> </ul>
<b>Western Australia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broome (BME) - Perth (PER) - Broome (BME)</li> <li>• Kalgoorlie (KGI) - Perth (PER) - Kalgoorlie (KGI)</li> <li>• Karratha (KTA) - Perth (PER) - Karratha (KTA)</li> <li>• Port Hedland (PHE) - Perth (PER) - Port Hedland (PHE)</li> <li>• Newman (ZNE) - Perth (PER) - Newman (ZNE)</li> <li>• Paraburdoo (PBO) - Perth (PER) - Paraburdoo (PBO)</li> </ul>
<b>Northern Territory</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alice Springs (ASP) - Darwin (DRW) - Alice Springs (ASP)</li> <li>• Ayers Rock (AYQ) - Darwin (DRW) - Ayers Rock (AYQ)</li> </ul>

Qantas has also extended their discounted fare scheme to increase the number of flights that can be booked per year from four to twelve. The scheme has also been extended to Longreach, Blackall and Barcaldine residents for return travel to Brisbane, which keeping in mind does not incorporate Western Australia. Also, they have just recently stated that they are waiving the \$99.00 change fee for bookings made through the Discounted Fares for Residents Scheme in the program portal on [Qantas.com](http://Qantas.com), this is to provide flexibility for residents when booking return trips. Members have been apprehensive about booking a return trip through the residential fares scheme at times as return dates can be uncertain, particularly for students who may have different exam dates and school activities such as sports or music camps/workshops at the end of term. Having the change fee waived should offer families the ability to book a return trip at the start of school terms and adjust the return travel as needed with no additional cost. Remember to take advantage of these discounts you must book through the [Qantas.com](http://Qantas.com) portal.

Rex Airlines have been hugely supportive by committing a large amount of money to assist families in the North Queensland floods and offered students discounted fares to be able to return home for Easter. Regional airlines such as Rex continue to try and offer ways to help students travelling in regional remote areas for example pledging assistance for drought relief. Rex has also increased their Community Fare Scheme to include flights between Kangaroo Island and Adelaide, Narrandera-Leton and Sydney, Griffith and Sydney just to name a few.

ICPA (Aust) appreciates the announcements which may bring some benefits to members and our rural students, though we recognise the cost of air travel still significantly impacts families of students needing to travel by air to access educational opportunities.

**INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATION, REGULATION AND FUNDING OF AIR ROUTE SERVICE DELIVERY TO RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1118/federal-submissions/federal-submissions-2018/regional-air-fare-inquiry-submission-feb-2018.pdf>

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural\\_and\\_Regional\\_Affairs\\_and\\_Transport/RegionalAirRoutes/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Rural_and_Regional_Affairs_and_Transport/RegionalAirRoutes/Report)

As some of us have been apprehensive on the length of time it has taken for the Federal Government to release their final report, we can finally give this inquiry some light. The travel inquiry gave Federal

Council the opportunity to raise previous and current motions. It is with appreciation we receive their findings and know that the Government has been made aware of the difficulties our members face with regards to air travel, but also disappointment that only 9 recommendations have been handed down. We welcome the recommendation to upgrade regional airports which we believe will improve access to areas that are not currently being serviced. Some of these upgrades are the Oodnadatta airport, Yorketown airport, Port Lincoln Airport and the Elliston airport. On the other side of the coin we may be looking at increased costs for some shires, for example Charleville, where the Council owns the airport. This may have huge impacts and as some media are already reporting the situation may become inviable if the shire had to pay the running costs which could possibly force closure of some regional air services. We understand the safety issues as the Senate inquiry found, though regional areas of Australia rely on these services to be able to function. The inquiry recommended the Government consider providing ongoing financial assistance to a number of airports that will be affected.

An example of the cost difference for regional travellers- for a child to get home from boarding school in Adelaide to Alice Springs would cost in the vicinity of over \$500 and if they were to fly to Brisbane then it will only be approximately \$180. A similar trip from Alice Springs to Perth is about \$850 and to Brisbane from Alice Springs is over \$1000. These costs are outside the average person's understanding and we will continue to advocate for decreased costs to be able to get our children an education that they deserve.

I note that within the Inquiry there was a recommendation to the Federal Government to direct the Inquiry to the Productivity Commission for them to investigate the costs; we can only hope that this will happen.

We strongly encourage branches to continue to send in their case studies to form the foundations of our ability to advocate for our children, improved services and equitable future with the Government at every opportunity.

## **SPECIFIC EDUCATION NEEDS REPORT**

**Sally Sullivan**

ICPA (Aust) has continued to work on specific education needs motions passed at the 2018 conference as well as motions from previous years. Specific education needs continue to be a space where it is difficult to make perceptible progress. 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 2018/19. At the 2018 Federal ICPA Conference, three specific education needs motions related to:

- A need for travel and accommodation allowances for rural and isolated families travelling to access face-to-face allied health services,
- A need for equitable subsidies nationally for accommodation and travel for children with specific or special education needs to attend appointments with qualified specialists, and
- The establishment of mental health resources which specifically assist geographically isolated students and families, particularly around the issue of bullying.

### **Access to services for specific education needs**

ICPA (Aust) has written to the Ministers for Health and Education to explain the national need for rural, regional and remote families to access travel and accommodation assistance to attend appointments with qualified professionals in order to diagnose and manage specific learning needs. ICPA (Aust) has also promoted this issue at meetings of the National Rural Health Alliance which has rural representation from a wide variety of health professionals' organisations.

Travel and accommodation costs to attend appointments for early identification and intervention for special needs and learning difficulties can be very costly for rural and remote families; costs not subsidised by NDIS, patient travel schemes or education systems. ICPA (Aust) urges state councils to also pursue this issue with state health and education departments, though it is clearly a nation-wide issue

### **Medicare rebate for speech pathology**

Rural and remote students and young children with special education needs can benefit from access to appointments with Allied Health professionals. Families are grateful for advances in telehealth and the availability of Medicare rebates for occupational therapy and mental health consultations, for example. Still **no rebate** exists for Speech Language Pathology (SLP) via telehealth delivery despite demonstrated effectiveness. Parents can claim \$52 per session for 5 sessions a year for *face-to-face* consultations.

ICPA (Aust) has continued to pursue this 2017 motion through correspondence and meetings with relevant Ministers and the Treasurer, as well as through representation on the National Rural Health Alliance member council. In April this year, ICPA (Aust) submitted comments on the *Report of the Allied Health Reference Group: Review of the Allied Health Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items*. The report was recommending an MBS item number be allocated to speech pathology consultations by telehealth for severe speech disorders. ICPA's position is *any* speech disorders affecting education and wellbeing should be eligible to be treated by telehealth, with an MBS Item number, as they would be covered if the child lived in a city and could access face-to-face consultations.

### **Mental health, bullying/cyber bullying**

While mental health resources for parents and students, especially around cyberbullying, are being developed by many organisations and government, few target geographically isolated students or



boarding students specifically. ICPA (Aust) has written to the Ministers for Health and Education to garner their support for the development of such resources. The government recently launched the [Student Wellbeing Hub](https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/) <https://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/> which has resources for teachers, parents and students. Potentially, links to resources specifically for geographically isolated families might be on this site. ICPA (Aust) is exploring several lines of inquiry to find ways to develop the resources this motion is asking for.

Mt Isa School of the Air (MISOTA) has been working on a program starting with creating a “friends” program and sections on resilience. They had [“Eyes Open- Social Media Safety”](https://www.eyesopensocialmedia.com.au/) <https://www.eyesopensocialmedia.com.au/> attend their Home Tutor Week in May 2018 to discuss cyber bullying and found they tailored their presentation appropriately for their ‘audience’. Eyes Open does school consultations and offers resources. MISOTA purchased access to the resources for every family in their school. In Term 4 2018, MISOTA launched “Tips for Transitioning” around moving from distance education to boarding. This was the next phase of their program and also has an emphasis on cyberbullying.

Another organisation working in this space is [Dolly’s Dream Foundation](https://dollysdream.org.au/) <https://dollysdream.org.au/> In March this year, Dolly’s Dream partnered with the Northern Territory Government and the Alannah & Madeline Foundation to deliver the Dolly’s Dream eSmart program to ‘give teachers, students and parents tools and support to implement cultural change around bullying and cyber-bullying’. The Dolly’s Dream eSmart program includes: Delivery of the eSmart Digital Licence, an online safety tool for Grade 6 students, implementation of Dolly’s Dream eSmart framework for 10 schools in high priority regions, two parent, teacher and student Dolly’s Dream Connect workshops for 50 NT Government schools.

In March 2019, the Australian Government launched a national awareness campaign and developed resources to help keep children and young people safe online. The national campaign aims to raise awareness and to help parents, carers and teachers to ‘Start the Chat’ about online safety. Media activities will build on the awareness messages from the advertising campaign and direct people to where they can get more detailed information, including for Indigenous and NESB communities and people living in regional and remote Australia. For more details and resources go to [esafety.gov.au/start-the-chat](https://esafety.gov.au/start-the-chat).

Drought and the Queensland floods have generated much concern about the mental health of children/students at home in rural and remote areas and in boarding schools. UNICEF’s February 2019 Drought Report *In their own words: The hidden impact of prolonged drought on children and young people* highlighted the impact of drought on children and the need for psychological help. ICPA (Aust) networked with UNICEF in initial discussions for their report and we support calls for additional resources and mental health assistance for children, families and schools in rural and remote communities who are struggling through unprecedented challenges because of drought and other occurrences such as the monsoonal event that impacted North Queensland in early 2019.

#### **Workshops for rural and remote parents of gifted students**

Earlier in 2019, ICPA (Aust) obtained an indicative costing from the Gifted Education Research, Resource and Information Centre (GERRIC) at the University of New South Wales of \$14,000 to run three two-hour interactive webinars for parents and educators of rural and remote gifted and talented students. The cost of running face-to-face seminars across a multitude of locations (as was done some 12 years ago) is now considered prohibitive. If ICPA (Aust) or another party can secure sufficient funding, GERRIC should be able to develop the workshop resources and deliver the webinars for rural and remote families. GERRIC regularly runs workshops for parents and students in Sydney. This proposal stems from a 2016 motion and funding options are being explored.

## **TERTIARY REPORT**

**Kate Thompson**

The challenge to address the under-representation of rural and remote students in higher education remains a high-priority. Multiple factors are responsible for this under-representation: financial challenges, social-economic status, school experiences, low aspiration, distance, ad hoc preparedness and loss of family and community support networks. All students who have the desire to pursue a university education at an institution of their choice, must be supported to achieve their goals and to succeed regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location

Rural and remote tertiary students' issues continue to be heard through ICPA (Aust)'s persistence and continued lobbying. Federal Council have addressed the tertiary motions through correspondence to government and departments, delegation, submissions and meetings highlighting key issues and challenges faced by our rural and remote students. There have been some positive announcements, commencement of programs and outcomes over the last twelve months.

The Australian Government continues to invest in the rural and remote tertiary cohort. Post the Federal election in 2019, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education said "Every Australian child, no matter where they live, should have access to the best educational opportunities. It is why continuing the work we have begun with higher education providers to lift Australia's attainment rate outside of our capital cities will remain a paramount priority."

### **REGIONAL EDUCATION PACKAGE**

On 12 November 2018, the Government announced a funding package over four years to provide students from rural and regional Australia with greater choice in and access to higher education. The measures included funding for expansion of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarship Program, the Regional Study Hubs and the development of a National Regional, Rural and Remote Higher Education Strategy.

### **RURAL AND REGIONAL ENTERPRISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (RRESP)**

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program (RRESP) supports students in rural, regional and remote areas with the costs of studying at university or at a vocational education and training institution. Successful students can receive up to \$18,000 depending on course length (minimum of six months full-time or up to eight years part-time) and type of study or training (on campus, or through online and distance education) and for qualifications from Certificate IV to PhD courses. A further \$500 is available to support an internship.

Visit <https://www.qtac.edu.au/scholarships/benefits> for more information. The Federal Government expanded the Program in November 2018 with the announcement of an additional 1,955 Scholarships. In April 2019, the third round of Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships opened and now includes all fields of study. While the uptake of scholarships has been encouraging and greatly appreciated by recipients, members have reported issues with the ad hoc timing of payment of the scholarship affecting their financial planning for the semester and causing angst.

### **REGIONAL STUDY HUBS**

On 12 November 2018, the Minister for Education announced the successful grant recipients of 16 community-owned Regional Study Hubs (in 22 locations). The regional study hubs will be supported and funded over four years to "provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access, as well as academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities".

<https://www.education.gov.au/news/minister-education-announces-16-regional-study-hubs>

Regional Study Hubs support regional students to study courses locally, delivered by distance from any Australian university, by providing greater access to study, support and infrastructure; part of the Government's strategy to support regional, rural and remote education.

### **NATIONAL REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION STRATEGY**

ICPA (Aust) responded to the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy* highlighting the key issues and challenges raised by ICPA members concerning access to tertiary and training education for rural and remote students and regional communities.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1186/federal-submissions/national-regional-rural-and-remote-education-strategy-submission-january-2019.pdf>. The development of a ***National Regional, Rural and Remote Higher Education Strategy*** aims to increase participation in post-secondary education and address the ongoing education and training needs of regional communities and is in response to the recommendations from the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education. The final report is due for release in July after being provided to the Minister for Education at the end of June 2019. ICPA (Aust) looks forward to the outcomes and recommendations of this review.

### **VIRTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ADVISORY GROUP**

ICPA (Aust) has been represented on the Virtual Work Experience Program (VWEP) Advisory Group, an initiative being delivered by Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) for the Department of Education. The twelve-month pilot program seeks to develop and test a work experience model providing an opportunity for students to undertake Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) projects in the virtual environment. The pilots have commenced, and the preliminary outcomes will be available for release at Federal Conference.

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

The TAA remains one of our highest priorities and ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby as opportunities present for this allowance to be introduced. The TAA amount is aligned with the Relocation Scholarship amount: 1st year - \$4,553; 2nd or 3rd year - \$2,278; 4th or subsequent years - \$1,138. In a response from the Minister for Education, the TAA has been passed onto the Minister for Families and Social Services for future policy consideration.

There is continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided to help with relocation costs for rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance compared to dependent Youth Allowance assistance. ICPA (Aust) see the Relocation Scholarships as a way to alleviate the burden for rural students who relocate to pursue tertiary education regardless of which type of Youth Allowance they qualify for. Aligning the TAA with the Relocation Scholarship amounts will benefit the youth allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students' ineligible for Youth Allowance.

### **YOUTH ALLOWANCE (YA)**

Since the 2018 Federal Conference, another legislative change to Youth Allowance (YA) benefited those rural and remote tertiary students applying for YA as an independent. As of 1 January 2019, the parental income cut-off for regional, rural and remote students applying for YA under the *Independent through work: Part-time work or earnings for rural and remote students'* criteria, increased from \$150,000 to \$160,000, plus \$10,000 for each eligible additional child in the family. There is also greater flexibility in the choice of financial year used for parental income. This change has further resulted in YA being more accessible to rural and remote students.

### **INDEPENDENCE CRITERIA**

ICPA (Aust) is adamant students who have to relocate from rural and remote areas to access their tertiary education **must** be recognised as a separate disadvantaged group and be considered

financially independent of their parents for the purpose of qualifying for Independent Youth Allowance. ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government on this issue.

ICPA Federal Council has continued to address further aspects of Youth Allowance (YA) including: rural and remote students being classified as independent, relocation scholarships, raising the parental income limit for dependent YA, removing parental income from rural and remote Independent YA criteria, adjusting the qualifying amount for rural and remote students applying for YA under part time work/earnings criteria, rural and remote students who do not receive dependent YA but live away from home for tertiary education be eligible automatically for YA as an independent at commencement of their course, and reinstatement of the HECS-HELP upfront and HELP voluntary repayments. ICPA (Aust) has had no further commitment for change but will continue to pursue these issues.

### **YOUTH ALLOWANCE OVERVIEW 2019**

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 2018, aims to complement the Youth Allowance website and can be viewed on the ICPA (Aust) website - *Youth Allowance Overview* <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/129/youth-allowance-overview-2019-for-website>. The document aims to interpret and summarise the lengthy Youth Allowance website information for rural and remote students planning to study full time and who intend to apply for Youth Allowance. It is also available in the January edition of Pedals each year. **It is a guide only.** For more information, advice, clarification and further assistance please phone **132490** (dedicated Youth Allowance phone number) or visit: [www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/youth-allowance](http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/youth-allowance). Again ICPA (Aust) would like to thank the Department of Human Services and the Department of Social Services for their invaluable assistance with clarification of information for this document.

### **CENTRELINK**

Unfortunately, members are still reporting issues when applying for YA: inconsistent information being given from different staff, staff being ill-informed about current criteria and long-wait-times on the 132490 support line. We continue to liaise with the Department of Human Services reporting issues from members as they arise. The Minister for Human Services, the Hon Michael Keenan, reported back to Federal Council that the 2017-2018 Budget had allocated resources to increase the number of Department's call centre operators and the 2018-2019 Budget allocated funds for the Department to target call wait times and improve service delivery. By December 2018, an additional 350 new operators had been allocated specifically to the Youth and Student enquiry line.

Applicants are encouraged to use the online *Claim Tracker*, a tool that provides graphic representation of the progress of a claim, notifications at points throughout the claim including electronic messaging to alert the applicant where tasks or actions remain outstanding and displays the estimated completed date of their claim.

### **UNIVERSITY COURSE WEBSITE**

Launched in late 2018, *Course Seeker* is the new national Higher Education information website. This website is a one stop shop allowing current and prospective students to easily research and compare higher education courses by course, study area, institution, admission criteria, state, delivery pathways, providers and application processes [www.courseseeker.edu.au](http://www.courseseeker.edu.au).

By the end of 2019, the reform of the higher education 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 the national website. Students, parents, teachers and career advisors will be able to more easily navigate higher education admissions policies and processes.

### **TERTIARY AND TRAINING WEBSITE DOCUMENT**

The "*Useful Tertiary and Training Websites*" document collated by the Tertiary and Training portfolio provides useful websites and resources for students to assist in planning their future whether that be at university, VET course, apprenticeship or heading straight into the workforce. It is available on the ICPA website <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/123/useful-tertiary-and-training-websites-december-2018>. The document was the basis of a "Speed Session" presented by ICPA (Aust) at the Australian Boarding Schools Association International Conference in October 2018.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise our members' issues, to achieve the changes and measures needed to ensure our rural and remote students have the opportunity to achieve a tertiary education commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.

I would like to thank the State Tertiary Portfolios and my fellow Tertiary and Training Portfolio members, Nikki Macqueen, Jane O'Brien, Kristen Coggan, Sally Sullivan and Suzanne Wilson for their continuing support.

# **TRAINING REPORT**

**Kate Thompson**

All Australian students must be able to pursue courses and careers that best suit their interests and capabilities. Traineeships and apprenticeships play a vital role in many students' career path. The Government continues to invest in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and apprenticeship sectors ensuring the sector is accessible, high quality and responsive to industry needs. Maintaining a high-quality skills and training system increases the number of available apprenticeships and traineeships with support for employers, students, job seekers, industry and the economy. There is recognition that the provision of readily accessible and affordable VET and apprenticeships in regional communities is vital in terms of sustainability and employment.

"The Liberal National Government is committed to ensuring that a Vocational education is seen as equal to a University education in terms of meeting the needs of our future workforce," Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Small and Family Business, Skills and Vocational Education.

## **2018 Training Conference Motions**

There were two training motions at the 2018 conference. While the response from correspondence that went to the Minister for Small and Family Business, Skills and Vocational Education, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash reinforces the Government's commitment to promoting, supporting and funding VET and apprenticeship career pathways, no commitment was made to the request for an immediate increase to the Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) for trainees/apprentices and an annual CPI increase or the request for apprentices to be included in the Relocation Scholarship Scheme.

## **VET Review Submission**

In November 2018, the Prime Minister, the Hon Scott Morrison, MP commissioned the *Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* to ensure Australians have the skills they need to succeed in the changing labour market, and businesses have access to the skills they need to grow their business and support economic growth. ICPA (Aust) responded to the Review including issues for rural and remote students accessing VET and apprenticeships.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1185/federal-submissions/vocational-education-and-training-review-january-2019.pdf> In April 2019, the final report *Strengthening Skills: Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System* was handed to government, endorsing a six point plan: Strengthening quality assurance, speeding up qualification development, simpler funding and skills matching, better careers information, clearer secondary school pathways, and greater access for disadvantaged Australians.

## ***"Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow"***

Responding to the VET review, the Government has committed to supporting the VET sector including those in rural and regional areas through the Skills Package, *Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow*. It ensures that the VET system can deliver the skills critical to the economy now and into the future, create stronger pathways for school students into quality training, apprenticeships and jobs in areas of skills shortage, create more opportunities for young people to access, develop and gain the skills they need to succeed in Australia's modern workplace, whilst providing employers with the skilled workers they require to run their businesses. It will deliver a VET system that is responsive, respected and flexible into the future through:

- Additional Identified Skills Shortage Payment – the introduction of an Additional Identified Skills Shortage Payment, available for both employers and apprentices. Additional support is provided by a streamlined employer incentives program targeting new apprentices particularly school leavers and young people in industries experiencing national skill shortages. These payments are additional to any



payments the apprentice or employer may be eligible for under existing Australian Government programs (including Trade Support Loans, which provides income-contingent loans of up to \$21,000 for eligible apprentices to assist with everyday costs including equipment purchases. There is a bonus of a 20% discount on the amount repayable if an apprentice successfully completes their apprenticeship. The Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program provides incentives of up to \$4,000 over the life of an apprenticeship to eligible employers. The apprenticeship incentive program will also be simplified, with 31 payment categories consolidated to just 14).

- Foundational skills - New programs and additional support for youth and those with low foundational skills, will ensure they can gain the skills they need to participate in current and future workforces. This will include four pilots providing tailored services in remote communities.
- Training Hubs - Ten Training Hubs will be established across Australia to support industry pathways in areas of high youth unemployment in regional areas and local skills shortages. Hubs will be developed in partnership with industry and state and territory governments.
- National Careers Institute and Careers Ambassador - The National Careers Institute will work with industry, governments, schools, employers and tertiary providers to develop a national VET Information Strategy. This is designed to reform careers guidance for individuals across their education, training and employment, ensuring information and guidance is high-quality, stream-lined, evidence-based, and accessible by providing a one-stop-shop career portal, overseeing partnership grants and raising the profile of VET nationally. The Institute will be headed by a National Careers Ambassador.
- The Skilling Australians Fund (SAF) – The SAF is a major commitment between the Government and states and territories from 2017 – 2022, working together to create an additional 300,000 apprenticeships and traineeships throughout Australia and prioritising projects which support apprenticeship and traineeships in high demand occupations.
- Commonwealth Training Scholarships for Young Australians will be available to young Australians in regions experiencing high youth unemployment and will target occupations identified in projected growth industries and occupations identified as in demand.
- National Skills Commission and Skills Organisations - The National Skills Commission will provide consistent national leadership and be responsible for the implementation of priorities for the VET sector and oversee the reforms identified including working with states and territories to develop a national approach to the funding of VET qualifications and the identification of future skills needed to ensure the VET system addresses national labour market priorities. Skills Organisations will trial new, industry-led methods of qualification development and assessment and develop standards for industry to accredit Registered Training Organisations and ensure training meets industry needs.

### **RURAL AND REGIONAL ENTERPRISE SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAM (RRESP)**

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program (RRESP) is available for rural, regional and remote students commencing study at a vocational education and training institution or at a university. The scholarships are valued at up to \$18,000 depending on course length (minimum of six months full-time or up to eight years part-time) and type of study or training (on campus, or through online and distance education) and for qualifications from Certificate IV to PhD courses. A further \$500 is available to support an internship.

Visit <https://www.qtac.edu.au/scholarships/benefits> for more information. The Federal Government has expanded the Program and in April 2019, the third round of Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships opened and now includes all fields of study. Unfortunately, scholarship uptake for training students has been low.

### **VIRTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ADVISORY GROUP**

ICPA (Aust) has been represented on the Virtual Work Experience Program (VWEP) Advisory Group, an initiative being delivered by Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) for the Department of Education. The Virtual Work Experience Program (VWEP) is a twelve month



pilot program which aims to increase access to work experience opportunities across Australia in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) related work in the virtual environment. The pilots have commenced, and the preliminary outcomes will be available for release at Federal Conference.

### **The Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy Trial**

The Australian Apprentice Wage Subsidy is available as an incentive for employers to engage more apprentices. The trial that commenced on 1 January 2019, continues until 30 June 2023 and will be available to employers who employ a new Australian apprentice in an occupation listed on the National Skills Needs List (NSNL) including in rural and regional workplaces. Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash, Minister for Small and Family Business, Skills and Vocational Education stated that “Through this incentive we are securing the skills our regional and rural businesses need to remain competitive and give local students new opportunities at home.” Subsidies will be provided at 75 per cent of the apprentice’s award wage in the first year, followed with 50 per cent in the second year and 25 per cent in the third year.

The Training portfolio will continue to raise the concerns of our members to ensure those who choose traineeships or apprenticeships have equal opportunity to reach their potential and follow their chosen career path.

Thank you to my fellow Training councillors, Jane O’Brien, Sally Sullivan, Kristen Coggan, Nikki Macqueen and Suzanne Wilson for their support and encouragement over this last year.