

PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL

DISTANCE EDUCATION / SOTA / CURRICULUM REPORT

Tash Johns – Portfolio Holder, March 2018

There were a number of motions presented at the 2017 State Conference relating to the SOTA, Distance Education & Curriculum Portfolio. Issues raised by ICPA WA members were Schools of the Air (SOTA) cut due to coming onto the Student Centred Funding Model (SCFM), web conferencing options to improve the current online classroom application, SABA Centra and requests to ensure better access to in-term swimming lessons. State Council set to work promptly with raising these issues with the relevant Minister or Department.

SOTA & Distance Education

A letter was sent to the Minister for Education, Hon. Sue Ellery requesting that the Education Department reconsider the decision made under the previous Government, to bring each of the five WA SOTAs under the SCFM and recognise them as unique schools again, due to the extreme geographical location of each student's classroom and not that of the school itself.

The Minister made it very clear in her response that the SCFM was fit-for-purpose as a funding mechanism for the SOTAs. The Minister made mention that the average carry-forward for the SOTAs was \$230,370, with only two out of the five SOTAs meeting the Department's Minimum Expenditure Requirement, which obliges schools to expend 96% of their annual allocation. Even raising the point that students were experiencing a reduced number of vital face-to-face opportunities with their classes and with parents having to pay much more for students to attend camps was not enough. The Minister felt the model is supplying sufficient funds to these schools to provide these activities.

These five SOTAs are scheduled for a review into how they are managing on the SCFM in February 2018.

ICPA WA wrote to Mr Glenn Veen, Director of Infrastructure and Telecommunications at the Department of Education in relation to Motion A6, requesting that the Education Department explore other options other than the SABA Centra online interactive classroom application currently used by the SOTAs.

It was at the 2017 Federal ICPA Conference in Alice Springs, that we were shown a demonstration of the REACT application developed by Michael & Suzanne Wilson of M & S Consultants Pty Ltd and was developed from the input of teachers and Schools of the Air. REACT is a video conferencing application for Distance Education in real time. Up to 70 students at a time are able to attend an online classroom, it doesn't need expensive infrastructure to operate and is tailored to work over the nbn Skymuster Satellite Network.

In December 2017, the McGowan Government announced they were closing the five WA Schools of the Air due to the "duplication of services" and budget repair. It was the Government's plan to close all five SOTAs at the end of 2018, with all students transferring to the WA School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). After a very strong campaign to reverse these cuts, that engaged the whole Western Australian community, including people from the metropolitan areas, we saw, in mid-January a reversal in this decision.

Minister Ellery did say, when ICPA State Council met with her after the reversal, that she would still be looking

for possible savings and would like to have the conversation on ways of doing things better and that she was interested to get feedback from parents. The Minister also declared she had no pre-conceived ideas on possible changes and would wait for parents to come back to her with suggestions.

Another decision that was announced back in December that would affect SOTA students was the decision to close six of the Camp Schools throughout WA. These schools are located at Dampier, Geraldton, Bridgetown, Kalgoorlie, Pemberton and Point Peron. The Minister's reason behind the closures was that they are "not the core business of education and there are other government and commercial providers of similar services". These camp schools are utilised by all five Schools of the Air to accommodate students during face to face opportunities, such as seminars and sports camps. The Minister has not reversed her decision but did state however when ICPA State Council met with her on 17th January, that they would not be sold, just managed by another Department or Non-Government Organisation (NGO). This decision is still quite concerning to ICPA due to the lack of details released by the Minister and with time now being of the essence.

Curriculum

Supplementary Motion S4 was raised at Conference in relation to the lack of swimming lessons offered to students in regional areas. State Council raised this issue with Minister Ellery at our meeting on 7th August 2017, the Minister assured us that the Department of Education (DoE) was addressing the problems associated with the lack of programs. After our meeting, the Minister's office advised ICPA WA that the following initiatives would come into place for the 2017/2018 swimming season: -

1. **Fly-in-Fly-out coordinators and instructors** - Program has been approved with the intention for Fly-in Fly-out coordinators and instructors to be in place for 2017/2018 (Dec/Jan) and Term 1 2018 Interm Swimming.
2. **Attraction strategy** -Swimming and Water Safety branch (in DoE) has commenced work in this area by advertising for instructors for VacSwim and Interm through the data base of AUSTSWIM qualified instructors (6000 swimming instructors).
3. **Procuring services from other providers** - Planning has commenced.
4. **Increasing the pool of instructors** -Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA) qualifications have now been approved to for use in Department swimming programs. Swimming and Water Safety branch is meeting with ASCTA in Term 3 to develop strategies to transition ASCTA teachers into Department programs as soon as possible, with a focus on including regional and remote areas.

State Council will wait until the end of the swimming season to gain feedback from its members to see if these new initiatives came into effect during this period and to find out what programs were made available to students.

NAPLAN Online will be gradually rolled out this year with some schools moving online by May 2018 and by 2020 it is expected that all schools will be delivering NAPLAN online. There have been some transitioning schools who have completed readiness activities to ensure they are well prepared.

The Education Council (EC) recently stated that education ministers "welcome the many benefits that online testing can deliver to students, their parents and teachers through improved diagnostics and the faster turnaround of NAPLAN results". The EC have also said that automated essay scoring will not be used for the marking of the NAPLAN writing component. Research by The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), has shown that automated essay scoring has the potential to be a viable option for marking writing scripts; however, there are still concerns from stakeholders. It is because of these concerns raised and to help facilitate a smooth transition to the online model, the EC have decided not to include

automated marking for the writing component. All other components of NAPLAN will continue to be computer marked.

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In 2017, the WA Education Department announced that as of 2018 it will be compulsory for all public and private primary schools to teach a language to children in Year 3. This change will be phased in gradually, meaning that by 2023, all students from Years 3 to 5 will learn a language. There are many schools throughout WA who already teach languages to Year 3 students. It will however mean that for the 269 schools that do not currently offer languages, there will be a struggle to find qualified teaching staff. It will be left up to the individual schools to decide on which languages to offer. The School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCASA) has developed syllabuses for the six most popular languages, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, French, German & Italian. If schools decide to offer other languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Korean or an Aboriginal language, they will be able to use an alternative curriculum approved by SCASA.

Benefits of learning a language:

- Improves memory and brain function - strengthens the area of the brain responsible for memory, speech and sensory perception.
- Enhances literacy skills - children become more aware of grammar, conjugation and sentence structures.
- Enhances comprehension and accelerates ability to read and write.
- Develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills - better able to ignore misleading and irrelevant information.
- Improves overall performance at school - studies show bilingual and multilingual children outperform children who speak only one language.
- Fosters respect and understanding of other cultures

Source: WA Dept of Education