

## **PORTFOLIO REPORTS - STATE COUNCIL**

### **DISTANCE EDUCATION / SOTA / CURRICULUM REPORT**

**Tash Johns – Portfolio Holder, March 2019**

At the 2018 State Conference, there were a number of motions presented by branches in relation to the SOTA, Distance Education & Curriculum portfolio. The issues raised included; a reversal to the budget cuts to the five WA Schools of the Air (SOTAs), which were grouped under the Student-Centred Funding Model (SCFM) and a copy of the findings into the review be made available to the public, the Support Teacher of Learning (STL) and its funding continue well past 2018 and that the Minister of Education consult with advisory groups and parents collectively from each of the five SOTAs before making any significant changes in the future.

ICPA (WA) set to work and wrote to the relevant Minister and/or Departments in relation to the above motions.

#### **SOTA & Distance Education**

A letter was sent to the then Education Department Acting Director General, Ms Jennifer McGrath in relation to Motion A1 and the STL position and funding.

It was stated in correspondence to Ms McGrath the history of how the STL was initially created.

State Council stressed the importance of this very relied upon service continues well into the future and to seek a guarantee from the Education Department that the STL service and funding does not cease past 2018.

In reply correspondence received from Ms McGrath, she did not guarantee the continuance of the STL past 2019 and stated “No change has been made to the public-school funding model for the 2019 school year”

The Acting Director General continued in saying there had been an evaluation of the SCFM and that the findings will be made public when available. ICPA (WA) are still awaiting these findings.

In other correspondence sent to the Education Minister, Hon. Sue Ellery in relation to Motions A2, A3 & S15, State Council asked the Minister to reverse the decision to group the five SOTAs under the SCFM due to the increased costs put on parents and a request to view the findings from the SCFM evaluation. It was initially due to be undertaken in February 2018, but at the 2018 State Conference, Stephen Baxter, the then Executive Director, State-wide Services stated that it would now be completed by the end of the financial year.

Minister Ellery replied that the Government “understands that increases to costs, whether they are related to schooling or more generally to the cost of living, have an impact on family budgets”. The Minister also continued to say that she had recently announced funding for the 2019 school year that covers the increased costs schools need to address, the majority of which relate to staff salaries.

The Education Minister pointed out one school in particular, Port Hedland SOTA and that the increased costs to parents over three years to the annual SOTA Muster Camp were discussed and agreed by the school’s School Council. Minister Ellery continued by saying “The increased cost largely relates to increased external costs such as airfares and accommodation being distributed over a declining number of student enrolments at the Port Hedland SOTA and that “the school has been asked to explore opportunities for minimising camp costs for families in the future.”

ICPA (WA) sought a guarantee from the Education Minister asking that in the future, the Government and the Department, would consult with families, school communities and organisations such as our own, when deciding on changes to the five SOTAs. ICPA explained to the Minister that families and ICPA would be able to give the Department and the Government, useful insight and innovative ideas that could produce positive changes.

The Minister did reply that she had taken on board ICPA's suggestion that she should visit with families throughout the State who are enrolled in the five SOTAs to gain a better insight. The Minister replied that she had in fact visited one family in the Gascoyne area and that she would prefer to receive specific invitations directly from interested families, rather than imposing herself on them.

Minister Ellery did say that if she did receive an invitation, she would be happy to consider it, other diary and Parliamentary commitments notwithstanding.

The six Education Department run camp schools from around the State that would now not close but would be managed by a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) was another topic discussed with Minister Ellery.

The Minister announced on 10th September that Fairbridge WA had been selected through a tender process to operate and manage the six schools – Bridgetown, Dampier, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Pemberton and Point Peron.

Minister Ellery said that the conditions of use stipulate that the operator is required to provide public school students with access to camp experiences at an affordable cost. The Minister went on to say that the Department will continue to monitor the rates charged for each of the "camp sites" for the term of their respective leases.

With mixed reports from the Department, parents, media and social media, ICPA (WA) sought to meet with the CEO of Fairbridge WA, Mr David Russell.

Mr Russell made the time to meet with State Council during our October Face to Face meeting in Perth.

There were several questions put to Mr Russell during the meeting, who was very willing to answer all of them.

As not many within ICPA knew much of Fairbridge WA's background, Mr Russell pointed out the following: -

- Fairbridge WA is a historic village with accommodation;
- It includes a care school that takes students with behavioural issues;
- Is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and runs pathways programs;
- Alcoa provides sponsorship for trainees and apprentices;
- Is a Registered Builder, Electrical and Registered asbestos removalist.

Key guarantees made at the meeting were: -

- No change in the accommodation, meals or activity costs for camp schools for 2019. It was noted that there would be CPI increases in 2020.
- Priority to be given to all schools for the term dates;
- Activities will be mapped to curriculum;
- Continuation of the Dampier Sea Trek program;
- All staff will have prerequisite clearance checks and up to date qualifications;
- Fees available to the public on the website.

Notable Points from the meeting with Mr Russell were: -

- They have a lease for three (3) lots of five (5) years

- Fairbridge has centralised all of its computer system and is now Cloud based. This means that all accommodation is centrally booked.
- During school holiday times, they will be changing the model on how accommodation is used. At the time, Fairbridge WA were in discussions with an overseas operator who is interested in bringing students in. This would help to increase the financial turnover.
- Staffing of the Camp Schools was still to be finalised.
- The Head Chef is employed to prepare all meal plans and ordering of food and is experienced in the different dietary requirements and needs.
- Employment of an outside company to do all background referencing checks on Fairbridge WA employees.
- Are committed to the Education Department to keep all six Camp Schools open.

ICPA (WA) State Council came away from the meeting feeling that at this stage, especially within the first year of Fairbridge WA taking over the management, that the operation of the six schools would not change too much.

It is the position of ICPA (WA) to keep Fairbridge WA and the Education Department accountable and that these six schools remain open, keep and improve current activities offered and to keep them affordable to all schools.

I would like to update members in regard to the online classroom platform used by the five SOTAs and SIDE. All schools are now using the Webex platform to host their online lessons and classrooms. In speaking with some members, they feel this platform is a lot better than the previous one used and implemented by the Education Department. It uses a lot less bandwidth than CENTRA and has better quality cameras to enable all students are displayed on the screen at the same time. The teachers have the ability to show their desktop to all students and simultaneously display YouTube videos which is imperative when teaching from a distance.

There have been some glitches with setting up class timetables etc. that teachers have been working through, but overall the view is very positive with this updated online classroom platform.

### **Curriculum**

By 2020, NAPLAN will be delivered entirely online. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has said that online testing provides more accurate and precise information about what students know and can do. 2018 saw the first year of transition, with around 20% of students taking the assessment online. 2019 will see a larger percentage of students undertake NAPLAN online, with the remainder sitting the paper assessment.

ACARA report that overall, the NAPLAN results for 2018 have shown that since 2008 there have been statistically significant gains in a number of domains and year levels, particularly at the primary level.

To view the 2018 NAPLAN summary data, visit <http://reports.acara.edu.au/>

Student performance nationally in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy has remained stable, compared to previous assessments sat in 2014. The National Assessment Program (NAP) sample assessment in ICT literacy tests students' general ICT skills and knowledge in a sample of schools across Australia. These sample tests are held every three years. The comparison since the last assessments held in 2014 show that the national results have remained stable for both Years 6 and 10. The geographic location of the schools were classified as metropolitan, regional and remote. For both Year 6 and Year 10, students from metropolitan schools had the highest scale scores, compared to those students from remote schools, who had the lowest. These differences were very significant. A copy of the full report is available at [http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2017napictlreport\\_final.pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://www.nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/2017napictlreport_final.pdf?sfvrsn=2)

