

PORTFOLIO REPORT – STATE COUNCIL

Student Accommodation Report

Kym Ross – Portfolio Holder, March 2020

At the 2019 State Conference a motion was submitted requesting that ICPA (WA) lobbies the Minister for Education and Training for a review into the varying and inequitable fee structure at the Geraldton Residential College.

As a result of this motion the Minister advised the Director General, Department of Education to immediately conduct a review of arrangements with non-government schools to access places and the variety of agreements that existed; and invited ICPA (WA) to consult on this review.

This review examined the:

- Historical context for the current arrangements.
- Equity, fairness and suitability of the current arrangements for all parties.
- Current practices in relation to Abstudy payments, if applicable.
- Possible modifications to legislation arrangements or practice; and
- Financial implication for government of any proposed changes.

To ensure a comprehensive report be presented ICPA requested individual case studies and supporting information from members. As ICPA advocate for all rural and remote students who attend a residential college, it was imperative that the outcome achieved would not be to the detriment of families in other regions around the state; and that ideally no additional levies or charges be incurred.

Delegates from ICPA (WA) State Council met with Minister Ellery on 3rd July 2019 to discuss our concerns in relation to the fee structure. Additionally, at this time, our submission and comments into the review were presented and we were advised that the anticipated date for a final decision on the outcome of the review was expected to be released during Term 3 2019.

Shortly after on 19th July 2019 State Council received notification that the review had been completed and the key findings were:

- Parents in regional locations value highly the opportunity to place their children in regional boarding facilities, rather than having to send them to Perth.
- The School Education (Student Residential Colleges) Regulations 2017 gives equal access to regional Student Residential Colleges for public and non-government school students.
- There is ample capacity at the regional Student Residential Colleges to accommodate non-government school students.
- The additional costs to non-government school students are influential in parents deciding to send their children to Perth because of the low-cost differential. This results in loss of income to the regions and exacerbates family separation.

With the final decision being *“that from 2020, all students, both public and non-government, will be able to access the regional student residential colleges in accordance with the criteria outlined in the School Education (Student Residential Colleges) Regulations 2017”, and that “all current financial agreements requiring the payment of maintenance levies will be discontinued. Non-government school students will pay the same costs and charges for accommodation as public school students”.*

ICPA (WA) welcomed this positive decision and acknowledges the work undertaken by both our State Council and members of the Midwest Branch.

On 27th September 2019 work commenced onsite on the redevelopment of Moora Residential College, the expected completion date for the project is October 2020 and we await further information from the State Government.

For the 2019 academic year a comprehensive list of all:

- Secondary government and non-government boarding facilities; and
- University student accommodation options

has been compiled detailing the capacity and associated costs of each facility. Data collected has found that when comparing this information against figures for the 2020 academic year, boarding fees have increased on average by 2% compared to the National average of 3%.

Federally, a key point of discussion throughout the past 12 months has been the tough financial conditions being experienced by families due to the ongoing drought and the impact this is having when sending students away to school. Members of ICPA Federal Council have heard stories of families who cannot meet the costs of boarding and are removing students from schools or trying to decide which child will be educated and which child will not.

Whilst some have proposed a HECS style scheme for farmers for expenses such as private school fees, others want the network of government boarding schools extended.

Boarding schools have been supportive of rural students during the current drought; however, they must run a business, and many are finding it difficult to continue to assist multiple students whose families cannot pay the required fees over a long period. The concern that resonates across rural and remote Australia is, how does a geographically isolated student access schooling if their family cannot afford to pay the excess costs associated with their compulsory education?

Although boarding schools in eastern states of Australia are still receiving enrolments, overall the number of students from rural and remote areas is decreasing.