



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **the Premier and Cabinet**
Office of the Director General



Our Ref: 24-479197
Your Ref: Petition No 17

Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Legislative Council Committee Office
18-32 Parliament Place
WEST PERTH WA 6000

Dear Hon O'Brien

I refer to your letter received 16 May to the Premier, requesting further information on the introduction of school fees for s457 visa holders.

I understand the Committee has made a number of requests for information on this measure since it was announced in 2013 and has previously received written responses on the issues raised from the Minister for Education and the (former) Treasurer.

You indicate a further interest in the application of the hardship provisions. As you would be aware, as part of the 2014-15 State Budget now handed down, the Government announced a change to the tuition fee. While the original fee was set at around one quarter of the average annual cost of educating a student in Western Australia, the potential impact of this fee on families with two or more children was acknowledged. In the recent Budget the Government has moved to mitigate this impact by capping the fee at \$4000 per annum for the first child only, irrespective of the number of children enrolled in the public school system. While there continues to be an expectation that visa holders will make a contribution to the cost of education provided to their children, the revised single fee is intended to alleviate hardship for large families.

Beyond this any families still experiencing financial hardship due to exceptional circumstances will have the further opportunity to apply for special consideration, especially for fee deferment. The arrangements for this, expected to be applied on a case by case basis, are still being developed between the Department of Education and the Department of Training and Workforce Development (who administers visa fee arrangements). This information will be made publicly available in the near future.

Finally you express the Committee's disappointment and frustration at the DPC's failure to respond to your recent inquiries. Parliamentary staff were advised that that the DPC Officer best available to provide information was not available at that time, no concern was expressed. If it had been known that the Committee was disappointed with the response at the time I would have considered alternative options. I apologise for having disappointed the Committee and assure you there was no intent to frustrate the Committees' inquiries. However, you should understand that, pending the Budget deliberations and announcement by the Government, there was little that officials would have been able to advise the Committee, even if the requested officer had been available in the short notice provided by the Committee noting these were matters of Policy and Cabinet coordination.

I trust this information is of assistance to the Committee and welcome your further detailing of specific areas of interest if further information is required.

Yours sincerely



Peter Conran
DIRECTOR GENERAL

6 JUN 2014