

## **TERTIARY REPORT 2021**

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A tertiary education must be accessible, affordable and attainable for all Australians but the reality is that rural and remote students continue to be under-represented at the tertiary level due to a disparity in participation, retention and achievement. This adversely impacts rural and remote students and their communities.

Along with stakeholders and other organisations, the Tertiary portfolio continues to collaborate closely with relevant ministers and departments including the Minister for Families and Social Services, the Minister for Regional Education, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, the Department of Social Services and Services Australia.

Excitingly, significant developments in the tertiary sphere over the last 12 months have addressed some long standing policy objectives, albeit only in part.

### **NATIONAL REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE TERTIARY EDUCATION STRATEGY (NAPHTHINE REVIEW)**

Rural and remote tertiary education has been placed at the forefront of the Federal Government's mind following the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy Final Report (Naphthine Review) in 2019. The full report can be read here:

[www.deese.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report](http://www.deese.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report).

Following the release of the report, the Government indicated they would accept the aims of the recommendations and specific actions would be considered. There were 33 actions which included expanding Regional Study Hubs, improving internet access, introducing a new tertiary education access payment, reducing earnings requirements of Concessional Workforce criteria, improving information on financial support and improving career advice in schools.

We will continue to follow up on these recommendations:

- **Independent Youth Allowance** - allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. This recommendation enables rural and remote students who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally, including at a Regional Study Hub, to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY if they then relocate their place of study for a minimum of one further year and are 90 minutes by public transport from home.
- **Independent Youth Allowance Concessional Workforce test** - recommends reducing the earnings requirements and a review of the recent changes to the parental means test cut-offs.
- **Practicums** – recommends an Away from Base payment for students who have to travel to complete parts of their course and are studying externally either at home or a Regional Study Hub.

The Report from the *Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments* included two recommendations that by May 2021 the Minister for Education publish a comprehensive implementation plan for the recommendations and actions outlined in the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Halsey review) and the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Naphthine review). The measures recommended in these two reports would ensure access, participation, retention, completion and success for rural and remote tertiary students for which ICPA (Aust) has been advocating for many years.

Also identified in the Naphthine Review was the necessity to improve the availability, quality, delivery and range of appropriate support services for rural, regional and remote students. Research, commissioned by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) aimed to gain a better understanding of the range of support services provided by tertiary providers, identify the improvements required with a view to developing a range of information for tertiary providers on best

practice for delivering support services to rural and remote students. In July 2021 Federal Council took part in the consultation process.

### **JOB-READY GRADUATES PACKAGE**

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the announcement by the Government on 19 June 2020, outlining the implementation of measures from the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy*. In October 2020, the Job-ready Graduates Package passed Parliament.

This Package contained important changes to Australia's Higher Education System providing some additional support and opportunities for regional and remote students by:

- bridging the gap in participation and attainment between regional and remote students and metropolitan students,
- improving opportunities for regional and remote students to attend university,
- driving productivity for the regions,
- increasing facilities in regional areas,
- improving opportunities in regional communities,
- investment in regional campuses, and
- increased financial support for regional and remote students.

Details can be found at:

<https://www.studyassist.gov.au/news/job-ready-graduates-package-higher-education-reforms-0>

Job-ready Graduates Package measures applicable to rural and remote students include:

#### **1. Tertiary Access Payment**

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a \$5000 one-off payment that aims to improve tertiary education attainment and retention rates of students from regional and remote communities by assisting students with the additional costs of relocating to undertake tertiary study including start-up expenses, costs of living, direct costs of education or training and the cost of traveling home in semester breaks.

Eligibility criteria for school leavers:

- must be from outer regional, remote and very remote areas (as per the ASGS remoteness classifications),
- must be relocating more than 90 minutes by public transport from their family home,
- must be enrolled in an eligible full-time higher-level tertiary education, Certificate IV or above qualification of at least one-year duration, and
- parental income must be below the threshold of \$250 000.

The TAP commenced in 2021 and applications remain open with students encouraged to apply as soon as possible. Students relocating to study at a university should apply through their participating university and students relocating to study at a non-university higher education provider must apply through Services Australia. The TAP can be claimed in addition to YA and Relocation Scholarship. Information on the TAP can be found at:

[www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment](http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment)

[www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment](http://www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment)

[www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-university-students](http://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-university-students)

[www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-vet-and-nuhep-students](http://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education/resources/tap-program-guidelines-vet-and-nuhep-students)

In August 2021, Federal Council provided feedback to the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) during the first-year evaluation consultations of the TAP which aimed to examine the program's appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency in meeting its intended objectives. Federal Council included data from a survey the tertiary and training portfolios conducted to determine knowledge, application and experience of the TAP.

Federal Council continues to advocate for the introduction of a **Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA)** for rural and remote students irrespective of eligibility for Youth Allowance. ICPA (Aust) proposes TAA amounts align with the Relocation Scholarship payments which would benefit Youth Allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students who are ineligible for Youth Allowance. This would address the 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) will closely monitor the TAP and will respond to ensure it is akin to our proposed TAA.

Members can find more information regarding the TAP and Federal Council's advocacy surrounding the program in the ICPA (Aust) Training Report 2021.

## **2. Rural And Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES) Program**

The RRES program supports undergraduate, postgraduate and higher-level vocational education and training students in rural, regional and remote areas with the costs of studying at university or a vocational education and training institution. These scholarships continue to be:

- valued at up to \$18,000, and
- available to regional and remote students studying in any discipline from Certificate IV to PhD level at an eligible higher education provider or vocational education and training institution, with a duration of 6 months full-time and up to 8 years part-time, delivered on campus, or through online and distance education.
- There is an additional \$500 to support an internship.

More information can be found at [www.dese.gov.au/rres](http://www.dese.gov.au/rres). Round 5 of the RRES program opened 1 March 2021 for students commencing study at any time during the 2021 academic calendar year. Information and applications for the RRESP and the Creative Arts Scholarships for regional and remote students are through the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) [www.qtac.edu.au/rres-program/](http://www.qtac.edu.au/rres-program/).

## **3. Regional University Centres (RUC)**

Regional University Centres provide tertiary students in regional and remote locations campus-like facilities and support including study spaces, video conferencing, computer facilities and internet access. They also provide academic support and pastoral care for students studying via distance at partner universities. This allows students to remain in their local community and study online. More information about the program can be found at [www.education.gov.au/regional-university-centres](http://www.education.gov.au/regional-university-centres).

The Federal Government has committed funding through to 2023-24 including the establishment of 8 new RUCs bringing the total to 32 across Australia.

## **4. Fares Allowance**

From 1 January 2021, the Fares Allowance waiting period for Youth Allowance and Austudy will be reduced from 6 months to 3 months before the first claim can be made. This will allow students to access a return trip home from their place of study under Fares Allowance in their mid-year break. All other aspects and the eligibility criteria of the Fares Allowance remain the same. [www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/Centrelink/fares-allowance](http://www.servicessaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/Centrelink/fares-allowance).

## **5. Reintroduction of the HECS-HELP Upfront Payment Discount**

On 1 January 2021 the HECS-HELP upfront payment discount was re-introduced and can now be claimed. This discount provides an incentive for students to pay their student contribution either partially or fully before census date and receive a 10% discount providing the payment is \$500 or more, which will decrease their student debt.

## **6. Regional Education Commissioner**

The Regional Education Commissioner, once appointed, will:

- oversee and coordinate the implementation of recommendations from the Napthine Review,
- work to address the complex factors driving the disparity in regional education outcomes,
- champion regional education across all education sectors from early childhood through to higher education, including both university and vocational education and training,
- oversee and coordinate projects that respond to the Strategy, and
- work with all tiers of government and other stakeholders.

### **QUALITY INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION REVIEW**

ICPA (Aust) had the opportunity to progress past motions in a submission to the *Quality Initial Teaching Education Review* which sought to identify issues relating specifically to teachers and teaching in rural and remote Australia. ICPA (Aust) sought the need for inclusion of modules specifically related to teaching in a rural and remote context and specific learning needs in undergraduate and postgraduate education courses. This would serve to prepare teachers for future rural and remote pathways, building capacity and support in these locations. Furthermore, it would assist the recruitment and retention of competent, committed, confident and highly effective teachers in rural and remote Australian schools who can deliver a consistently high standard of education for rural and remote students.

During August and September 2021 Federal Council participated in a webinar and a consultation with the Review Expert Panel and reinforced the challenges for teaching in the rural and remote context.

The submission to the *Quality Initial Teaching Education Review* can be read here:

[https://icpa.com.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Quality%20Initial%20Teacher%20Education%20Review%20Submission%20Final%20July%202020\\_1.pdf](https://icpa.com.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Quality%20Initial%20Teacher%20Education%20Review%20Submission%20Final%20July%202020_1.pdf)

### **CENTRELINK - PROOF OF IDENTITY**

During the height of COVID-19, provisions were made to streamline applying for Youth Allowance (YA). An applicant could use their myGov account to confirm their identity, receive a Centrelink Reference Number (CRN), create a Centrelink online account, link their Centrelink online account to myGov and make their claim online. The Department of Social Services have indicated that the COVID-19 proof of identity provisions will cease and the return of having to present to a Service centre or Centrelink office is imminent.

ICPA (Aust) would like to see the COVID-19 provisions continue for rural and remote applicants who are unable to reasonably attend a service centre due to the tyranny of distance. This would enable an application to commence with an online proof of identity. The applicant could then present at a service centre for confirmation of identity documents once relocated to their place of study prior to their commencement of Youth Allowance payments. This provision would address the difficulty many rural and remote students and families have with initial proof of identity that results in delays in applications, approval and commencement of YA payments.

### **YOUTH ALLOWANCE**

#### **COVID-19 and Gap Year Students**

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the 2020-21 Budget announcements that support young people currently on a working gap year affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19 in relation to their ability to fulfil their working criteria to demonstrate independence for Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY. These measures address the tertiary motion brought to Federal Conference in 2020.

Two provisions were introduced:

1. Young people from regional and remote areas who were qualifying for Youth Allowance as an independent under the Concessional Workforce Independence Criteria (CWIC) will be

automatically considered, for the six-month period between 25 March and 24 September 2020 to have:

- earned 75 per cent of the National Training Wage Schedule weekly rate (unless in receipt of a higher income), or
  - worked 15 hours per week.
2. A temporary pathway for young people planning on taking a working gap year in 2021, who earn at least \$15,000 through agricultural work during the period 30 November 2020 and 31 December 2021 will be considered independent for Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY.

### **NATIONAL CAREERS INSTITUTE 'YOUR CAREER' WEBSITE**

Federal Council collaborated with the National Career Institute (NCI) and Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) in the development and roll out of information and resources for school leavers on work and education options including university, vocational education and training (VET), apprenticeships or employment.

NCI has developed three additional resources for school leavers and their parents or guardians:

1. The **School Leavers Information Kit** (SLIK) provides information and support to assist with post-school career pathways decisions, work and education options such as university, vocational education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships), volunteering and community service, tips and resources to assist with job applications and resources outlining available government financial support and subsidies.
2. The **School Leavers Information Service** is a free phone, text or email support to navigate the School Leavers Information Kit and the website. The service also offers a free 45-minute personalised career guidance session with a qualified career practitioner
3. The SLIK is supported by the **Parents and Guardian's Guide for School Leavers** to facilitate careers conversations at home. [www.yourcareer.gov.au/school-leavers-support/](http://www.yourcareer.gov.au/school-leavers-support/)

These resources and information can be found on the Your Careers website [www.yourcareer.gov.au](http://www.yourcareer.gov.au).

### **YOUTH ALLOWANCE OVERVIEW 2021 DOCUMENT**

The Tertiary Portfolio has updated the Youth Allowance Overview in consultation with the Department of Social Services and Services Australia as a guide to YA eligibility and application. This document summarises the lengthy YA website information for rural and remote students planning to study full-time and intending to apply for Youth Allowance and is available in the January 2020 Pedals and on the ICPA (Aust) website. 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).

Thank you to State Tertiary Portfolios, my fellow Tertiary Portfolio members Nikki Macqueen, Jane O'Brien, Sally Sullivan and Kim Hughes and all of Federal Council for their ongoing support, guidance, knowledge and dedication.

We will continue to raise members' new and ongoing issues at every opportunity through all avenues available to us, to achieve measures needed to ensure our rural and remote students have the opportunity to access, participate and complete a tertiary education commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.