

## **TRAINING REPORT 2021**

**Kim Hughes**

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate on behalf of members to ensure rural and remote students and young people have the opportunity to pursue courses, training and careers that best suit their interest and ambitions regardless of their geographical location.

At the 2020 virtual Federal Conference, a motion was carried requesting that ICPA (Aust) lobbies the Federal Government to ensure assistance packages/schemes similar to the Coronavirus Supplement, which are established to support young people through times of specific economic impacts, include rural and remote apprentices and trainees receiving the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA).

At present only recipients receiving a social services payment, e.g., Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY are eligible to receive the Coronavirus Supplement. The ineligibility of LAFHA recipients to this support payment has proven difficult for many rural and remote apprentices who have experienced reduced hours due to the pandemic. Diminished earnings have exacerbated the already high financial pressure that living away from home incurs.

Federal Council wrote to the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships, Hon Steve Irons MP, the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator the Hon Anne Ruston and Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash.

Responses from both the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the Department of Social Services highlighted that LAFHA is appropriated under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives Program, and LAFHA eligibility is not linked to the income that an apprentice receives as part of their employment nor subject to parental income tests.

ICPA (Aust) also raised this issue with a number of Members of Parliament and Senators at recent delegations in Canberra, including the Minister for Regional Education, the Hon Andrew Gee MP. We will continue to advocate for this issue at every opportunity.

### **Assistance for rural and remote apprentices and trainees**

ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for an increase to the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) and indexing to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) to better reflect the cost of living for rural and remote young people who must move away from home to access their chosen pathway. We have made representation on this issue at every opportunity, conveying that although the LAFHA is greatly appreciated, it is simply not sustainable given the increased living expenses that come with living away from home, including rent, food, fuel and utilities.

Federal Council has also raised the issue with the Department of Education, Skills and Employment that the availability of the LAFHA payment needs to be more visible. As it is not a Services Australia payment and therefore not housed with other student payments (e.g., Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY), it can be easily overlooked. ICPA (Aust) continues to publicise links to available allowances for Australian Apprentices and trainees in its own publications in a bid to raise awareness of the financial support available to this cohort of young people.

Members are also encouraged to contact an Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (Apprenticeship Network) Provider <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/search-aasn> to discuss eligibility for apprenticeship support. They are able to:

- help find an employer and registered training organisation to complete training
- provide a training contract
- assess apprentices for a financial assistance
- provide advice and support to during the apprenticeship.

The need for apprentices and trainees to receive relocation assistance remains a focus within the Training Portfolio. Federal Council continues to raise the concern that Australian Apprentices and trainees are not eligible for any kind of relocation assistance either through the Relocation Scholarship or the new Tertiary Access Payment (TAP), which seriously impacts their ability to afford to move away from home to access an apprenticeship or traineeship. Federal Council will continue to advocate for this longstanding issue at every opportunity and explore all options available moving forward.

### **2021 Budget**

The 2021-2022 Budget included a further \$2.7b over four years to extend and expand the Boosting Apprenticeship Commencements wage subsidy. This includes \$1.2 billion to uncap the program and extend the subsidy to 12 months from the date of commencement and an additional \$1.5 billion to extend the commencement period for another six months to 31 March 2022.

Through the subsidy, any business or Group Training Organisation that engages an Australian Apprentice between 5 October 2020 and 31 March 2022 may be eligible for a subsidy of 50 per cent of wages paid to a new or recommencing apprentice or trainee for a 12-month period from the date of commencement, to a maximum of \$7,000 per quarter. There is no cap on the number of eligible trainees/apprentices.

ICPA (Aust) continues to reiterate to Government that whilst it welcomes investment in the Skills and Training sector to boost engagement of trainees and apprentices, this also must be balanced with financial support for the individual apprentices to ensure their cost-of-living expenses do not diminish their opportunities to access these apprenticeship opportunities.

### **Vocational Education and Training (VET) Skills Reform**

The Heads of Agreement for Skills Reform signed by the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments outlines the required changes to the VET system to ensure Australians can access high quality and relevant training with the skills to take on positions that emerge through the next decade and beyond.

Skills and Training Ministers are rolling out initiatives identified in this Agreement and, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, are delivering the JobTrainer Fund to provide up to an additional 340,700 free or low-cost training places in areas of identified skills needs. Participating states and territories are rolling out training places which will benefit and support job seekers and young people, particularly school leavers.

The Australian Government has also commenced work on immediate reforms identified by National Cabinet, which include a review of the current standards for Registered Training Organisations, building Registered Training Organisation capacity and capability for continuous improvement and developing a VET workforce quality strategy. This work has been informed by priorities identified through the VET Reform Roadmap, and builds on VET sector reviews, including the Braithwaite

Review, Joyce Review and rapid review of Australian Skills Quality Authority's (ASQA) regulatory practices, governance and culture.

Consultation over recent months has sought feedback from stakeholders on how best to strengthen the role of industry engagement in the VET system and on the design of qualifications, with a particular focus on new approaches that will better meet the needs of employers and learners now and into the future. ICPA (Aust) has had the opportunity to participate in relevant aspects of this consultation and provided feedback from a rural and remote context on how best to support geographically isolated students in their endeavours to pursue VET pathways.

All Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are working towards a new National Skills Agreement by August 2021.

### **Agricultural Colleges**

Federal Council has been in regular contact with the Queensland ICPA Tertiary, Trade and Training Portfolio leader to offer support in relation to the closures of Agricultural Colleges such as the Queensland Agricultural Training College (QATC) campuses in Longreach and Emerald.

Currently, the Regional Area Planning and Development Board (RAPAD) hold the lease of the former Longreach Pastoral College campus and are investigating ways to utilise this asset in the future.

AgForce Qld has advised they have recently convened a meeting of the Northern Pastoral Companies with the Queensland Department of Education, Small Business and Training (DESBT), RAPAD, the Queensland Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance (RJSA), the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) and other interested agencies. Following on from this, AgForce Qld are now working with RJSA on a proposal to DESBT (including TAFE Qld) for livestock industry training at Longreach, with support from the northern pastoral group members to identify required entry-level skills and industry pathways. Agforce Qld will also be working with peak industry bodies (Cattle Council of Australia, Sheep Producers Australia and Wool Producers Australia) as well as broader industry. The focus initially is to consider the entry-level training required for the livestock industry employers and potentially expand from there.

Federal Council will continue to follow these developments and to offer assistance and support wherever possible.

### **National Careers Institute**

Federal Council has been working closely with the National Careers Institute (NCI) to assist with the roll-out of a range of resources to support school leavers to work through their next steps after school.

The NCI has rolled out a School Leavers Information Kit (SLIK)

[www.yourcareer.gov.au/media/xlcbghjw/school\\_leaver\\_information\\_kit.pdf](http://www.yourcareer.gov.au/media/xlcbghjw/school_leaver_information_kit.pdf) which has been especially developed to assist school leavers with education, training and work options. It provides:

- information and support to help with decisions about post-school career pathways
- information on work and education options such as university, vocational education and training (including apprenticeships and traineeships), volunteering and community service
- tips and resources to help apply for jobs, and
- resources outlining government financial support and subsidies available.

The SLIK is supported by the Parents and Guardian's Guide for School Leavers to help start careers conversations at home.

[www.yourcareer.gov.au/media/111fn3at/parentsandguardiansguideforschoolleavers.pdf](http://www.yourcareer.gov.au/media/111fn3at/parentsandguardiansguideforschoolleavers.pdf)

School leavers aged 15 to 24 can also access a 45-minute personalised careers guidance session with a qualified career practitioner to ask education, training or work-related questions they may have through **1800CAREER**.

More information can be found on the ICPA (Aust) website in the Training Portfolio.

I would like to sincerely thank Federal Training Portfolio members Alana Moller, Kate Thompson, Sally Sullivan and Jane O'Brien for their knowledge and support over the past year, along with the State Training Portfolio leaders. Affordable access to training and career opportunities is the only way to ensure rural Australia achieves a skilled and qualified workforce into the future. ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate for equity in opportunity for rural and remote young people who wish to pursue a VET pathway to ensure geographical location is not an obstacle or hindrance to achieving their career goals.