

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2022 TERTIARY CONFERENCE PORTFOLIO REPORT

Kate Thompson

For rural and remote students who aspire to attend university, the pathway must be accessible and affordable. The disparity in participation, retention, attainment and opportunities must be addressed to ensure equity for this rural and remote student cohort. Students from this cohort are faced with barriers which has led to under-representation. These barriers include lower access, choice and opportunities in rural and remote areas, connectivity (reliability, high speed and affordability) and the high cost of relocation and ongoing living expenses. Relocation is out of necessity rather than choice and challenges increase the more remote a student resides from their chosen university.

The tertiary motions presented at the 2021 Federal Conference continue to highlight the breadth of issues facing rural and remote tertiary students when accessing higher education. The Tertiary Portfolio has addressed the motions through correspondence to and collaboration with Ministers and Government departments including the Minister for Families and Social Services, the Minister for Regional Education, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the Department of Social Services and Services Australia.

Pleasingly, Federal Council can report that there have been some welcome outcomes from our advocacy which will positively impact rural and remote tertiary students.

Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

Cost is the greatest restraint on rural and remote students' ability to attend university and the TAP is designed to ease the burden of these costs, which include:

- the high cost of relocation
- up-front set-up expenses including accommodation (rental housing bond or residential college fees, electricity connection) and
- ongoing costs of living expenses, travel and communications (telephone, internet).

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is a one-off, means-tested payment of up to \$5000 for school leavers from inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas. Eligible students are those who relocate more than 90 minutes by public transport from their family home to undertake a full-time, eligible higher level tertiary education course (Certificate IV or above) in the year following Year 12 or equivalent and whose parental income is below \$250 000.

The second year of the TAP commenced in 2022. Late in 2021, Federal Council participated in the evaluation consultations of the TAP, recommending changes to the program so all rural and remote students who have to relocate for study/training are afforded equity of access to a tertiary/VET education. ICPA (Aust)'s recommendations included:

- Aligning the TAP with the Relocation Scholarship in terms of payment rates, transitioning to an annual and ongoing payment to recognise that the costs are not just being borne in the first year of the student's course.
- The availability of the TAP for all rural and remote students on commencement of university including after a gap year.
- Removal of the \$250,000 parental limit as many parents are already facing huge costs as they support other tertiary students already at university and younger siblings at boarding school.
- The inclusion of rural and remote Australian Apprentices who fulfil the TAP criteria.
- Eligibility extended to eligible inner regional students.
- The administration of the TAP solely through Services Australia.
- The uncapping of TAP availability by removing the 'first-in, first-served and best-dressed' criteria.

Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie, former Minister for Regionalisation, Regional Communications and Regional Education and Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, former Minister for Government Services, in a joint Media Release, announced changes to the delivery, eligibility and payment structure of the TAP on the 17 December 2021 in response to the evaluation of the program.

Changes included:

- The extension of eligibility criteria to include eligible inner regional students.
- The application and payment process for all TAP applicants whether attending a university, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) provider or other higher education provider to be administered solely through Services Australia.
- Eligible students from outer regional, remote and very remote areas will continue to receive up to \$5,000 and students from inner regional areas will receive \$3,000.

Information on the TAP can be found at:

www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment
www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment.

Whilst the introduction of a TAP has been a positive development, ICPA (Aust) is working with the Government to ensure this payment meets the needs of all rural and remote tertiary students and the guidelines used reflect our longstanding advocacy for a Tertiary Access Allowance.

Delegations and Meetings

Federal Council met with Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, former Minister for Families and Social Services' advisors via teleconference in December 2021. Tertiary issues raised included:

- A thank you from ICPA (Aust) for the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 measures for gap year students, liquid assets test and proof of identity, Fares Allowance changes and the Tertiary Access Payment.
- The Tertiary Access Payment and the issues mentioned above.
- Youth Allowance
 - The need for significant increase in the parental income limit for dependent students.
 - The need for the removal of the parental income limit for independent rural and remote students.
 - The need for the implementation of the Napthine Report recommendations, namely
 - the provision of greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for Youth Allowance,
 - reduced earning requirements for Independent Youth Allowance and
 - a review of the parental income cut off limits for Independent Youth Allowance.

- The need for the Relocation Scholarship criteria to be extended to include all rural and remote students who must relocate and live away from home to access tertiary education not just if in receipt of Dependent Youth Allowance.
- The need for flexibility in the Proof of Identity process for Youth Allowance.

The Tertiary Portfolio has been involved in the Department of Social Services and Services Australia quarterly meetings, advocating on behalf of our tertiary students.

Proof of Identity for Youth Allowance

The initial confirmation of identity for many rural and remote students who live vast distances from a Centrelink service centre or rural and remote access centre has long been an issue. These students have not been able to start or proceed with their application for Youth Allowance until these original documents have been sighted at an access or service centre leading to delays in the application, approval and commencement of Youth Allowance payments.

Following correspondence from Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds, former Minister for Government Services and discussion with the Department of Social Services, ICPA (Aust) is pleased to report that a new process of identity confirmation has been established. Processes are now in place for students to confirm their identity and commence their application for Youth Allowance online, removing the need for the applicant to present in person to an access or service centre.

Proof of identity can be verified:

- Online - for students applying for Youth Allowance online, applicants have the option during the online claim process of booking a video for sighting and verification of original identity documents which allows the applicant to proceed with the application process.
- over the phone, or
- in person.

More information can be found here: www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/how-to-prove-your-identity-with-centrelink?context=43916.

Regional Education Commissioner

The appointment of the Hon Fiona Nash as Regional Education Commissioner has been welcomed and ICPA (Aust) looks forward to working closely with the Commissioner on the implementation of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy (Naphthine Review) recommendations to achieve positive outcomes for rural and remote tertiary students.

Recommendations from the *Education In Remote And Complex Environments Report*

ICPA (Aust) has welcomed the measures from the *Education in remote and complex environments Report*, the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* (Halsey Review) and the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy* (Naphthine Review) which have been implemented for rural and remote tertiary students including the introduction of the Tertiary Access Payment, the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships, the Regional University Centres, the Course Seeker website, the appointment of the Regional Education Commissioner and improvements to the Fares Allowance scheme. These have considerably improved access, outcomes and opportunities for regional, rural and remote students' access to higher education.

ICPA (Aust) continues to seek the implementation of **all** the recommendations which would ensure rural and remote tertiary students' access, participation, retention, completion and success in the course of their choice. These measures include:

- Improved availability, information and support of accommodation, income support and high quality career information and advice.
- Improved access to high quality VET programs in regional, rural and remote areas.
- Reduction in the earnings requirements of the Independent Youth Allowance Concessional Workforce test and a review of the recent changes to the parental means test cut-offs.
- The provision of greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for 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 to their place of study for a minimum of one further year and are 90 minutes by public transport from home.
- Improved access to affordable, reliable, high speed internet services.
- The implementation of an Away from Base payment for students who have to travel to complete mandatory units and practicums of their course and are studying externally either at home or a Regional Study Hub.
- Improved quality and range of student support services including pastoral care, mentoring programs and academic support.

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 (Napthine 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.

Rural And Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES) Program

This 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, 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 including an additional \$500 to support an internship.

Round 6 of the RRES program is available for students commencing study at any time during the 2022 academic calendar year. For more information and the application process for the RRES and the Creative Arts Scholarships for regional and remote students visit the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre (QTAC) www.qtac.edu.au/rres-program/.

School Leavers - National Careers Institute 'Your Career' Website

NCI has developed information and resources for school leavers and their parents/guardians transitioning to university, vocational education and training (VET), apprenticeships or employment. These include:

- 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.

- 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.
- The ***Parents and Guardian's Guide for School Leavers*** to facilitate careers conversations at home.
- **Webinar series.**

These resources and information can be found on the Your Careers website here:

www.yourcareer.gov.au/school-leavers-support/.

Youth Allowance Overview 2022 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 Youth Allowance eligibility and application. This document summarises the lengthy Youth Allowance 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 2022 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.

ICPA (Aust) is very appreciative of the Federal Government's continued commitment and prioritisation of tertiary education for rural and remote students. The recent positive and significant measures have addressed many current and past motions, albeit in part. ICPA (Aust) will continue to progress and raise the profile of current, previous and ongoing issues rural and remote students face when accessing a tertiary education through all avenues available to us at every opportunity, to ensure they have the opportunity to access, participate and complete a tertiary education of their choice commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.

My sincere thanks must go to my fellow Tertiary Portfolio members Jane O'Brien, Sally Sullivan, Anna McCorkle and Lisa Slade, the State Tertiary Portfolios and all of Federal Council for their ongoing support, guidance, knowledge and dedication.