

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2022 TRAINING PORTFOLIO CONFERENCE REPORT

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The children ICPA represents are often born into or grow to contribute as if they have a job at a young age. Rural family life can be so much a part of the family business that many fit in work tasks around school days or terms right through their early childhood, primary and secondary education, developing valuable skills and knowledge to contribute positively to the community around them. The ability of rural and remote students to learn on-the-job, which is the very core of Vocational Educational and Training (VET) does not need to be questioned; but the ability of our students to access the opportunity to learn and gain skills, knowledge and VET credentials (to secure future employment) at any stage of their education journey can certainly be questioned.

The VET system provides nationally recognised qualifications developed through skill and knowledge-based competency attainment. There are around 1,800 qualifications on offer, covering accredited courses, industry-recognised skill sets, units of competency and specific skills training. VET training takes place in classrooms, workplaces, online, and can be full-time or part-time. It appears on paper that VET is an incredibly good fit for regional, rural and remote students due to its diverse delivery options. As we know the reality can be more troublesome.

Employment in our contemporary world is rapidly changing and more of our workforce are highly skilled and micro or fully qualified. Completing Year 12 (or equivalent) is the minimum requirement for most employers and many more are seeking people with post-school qualifications. Apprenticeships, traineeships, diplomas, or certificate III or IV level qualifications can set young people up for a stable and rewarding career. In 2020, 69% of Australians aged 20-64 years had a post-school qualification, increasing from 57% in 2005. There were nearly 300,000 apprentices and trainees in 2021, working across more than 500 different occupations, including many non-trade occupations. The success of rural communities relies on this figure having a fair representation of rural and remote students.

ICPA (Aust) advocates for those who live and work in rural and remote areas who are under-represented in long term reports on both Training and Tertiary certification. With the national completion rates for VET qualifications frequently reported at an alarming 50%, it is clear that Governments are falling short of supporting those on a trade career pathway across all areas of Australia, whilst facing a chronic National Skills Shortage. Established funding and support programs are still centred on the employer or Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) rather than the student/trainee/apprentice. Our advocacy will continue until we see this addressed.

Training Motions

At the 2021 Federal Conference members presented three Training motions seeking continued advocacy on increases to the Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA), the need to address issues with the LAFHA application process and a request for relocation assistance for Australian Apprentices and trainees needing to relocate to access their chosen pathway process.

Following Conference, correspondence was sent to then Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business the Hon Stuart Robert MP, in relation to the need to increase the LAFHA, copying in the relevant Ministers and Shadow Ministers. Federal Council also raised the need for provision of relocation assistance and the inclusion of Australian Apprentices and Trainees in the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to assist with costs associated with moving away from home to access their chosen trade/training pathway. While to date we have not received replies to our correspondence, with the change of Government, we will continue to raise these topics where possible and will inform members of any developments.

ICPA (Aust) has sought advice from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) in regard to the processes for applying and receiving the LAFHA and raised concerns that this process needs improvement to ensure eligible Australian Apprentices are able to access the assistance. DESE confirmed that there should only be a three month wait on payments and that they are handled by the Australian Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers.

<https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/>.

Furthermore, DESE has advised that there is a provision for LAFHA to be claimed and paid for up to three months in certain circumstances without an approved training contract from the date of commencement or recommencement, however each jurisdiction determines the requirements from the RTO to approve the training contract. The Guidelines for the Australian Apprenticeship Incentives Program can be found here:

<https://www.dese.gov.au/skills-support-individuals/resources/australian-apprenticeships-incentives-program-guidelines>.

Federal Council is continuing the advocacy of previous Training motions and member enquiries highlighting concerns that VET Certified Training remains unobtainable for rural and remote students. Issues include:

- The frequent lack of availability of courses/qualifications, which is further influenced by chronic teacher/trainer shortages
- The lack of access to the face-to-face component of training, assessment and mandatory workplace experiences
- The high costs of travel and accommodation to fulfill training and assessment requirements.

National Review of VET Delivered to Secondary Students

In March 2022 Federal Council contributed to the National Review of VET Delivered to Secondary Students in Regional, Rural and Remote areas and raised the following issues affecting rural and remote students:

- The limited opportunity to participate in VET courses due to the availability of courses and local workplace experience and training
- The lack of access to qualified VET staff (both trainers and assessors) including the recruitment and retention of trained staff, teaching out of specialty, the funding capacity of schools to run and resource VET and to employ specialised staff often related to remoteness; VET staff maintenance of credentials
- The distance to providers or workplace training and assessments, the cost of travel and accommodation to placements, including if VET program is accessed from another school or facility, and the impact on the family when parents need to accompany the student i.e. time away from home and cost

- Online courses are either not the course of choice for the students or they are hindered by limited and unreliable internet capacity
- The need for VET qualifications to be recognised beyond school.

ICPA (Aust)'s Recommendations:

- Funding and support to rural and remote schools to deliver VET programs
- Incentives and provision of extra funding and allowances to assist with additional costs such as travel, accommodation and other costs unique to rural and remote contexts
- Virtual VET programs partnering with bigger centres that deliver VET programs
- Ensuring adequate and affordable communications technology is available for online courses
- Pathways for VET Trainers (teachers) which consider their unique situations in rural and areas
- Ensuring the VET pathway is valued equally as a higher education pathway or a direct employment pathway.

Current Government Initiatives

Current national initiatives for apprentices and trainees are based around the Skills Priority List and the Australian Priority List which identifies occupations assessed as experiencing national skills shortages.

<https://www.dese.gov.au/australian-apprenticeships/resources/about-australian-apprenticeship-priority-list>

These programs include fee-free employer incentive payments or reduced student course fees to address the National Skills Shortage and targeting specific industries and occupations.

It was positive to see attention given to the Skills Shortage area in the 2022-23 Federal Budget. The proposals below from the Budget are presently being reassessed by the current Government with final announcements yet to be released.

Australian Apprentice Incentive Scheme and Financial Assistance Employer Incentives

Employers who engage an Australian Apprentice in an occupation on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List may be eligible for a wage subsidy of up to \$1,500 per quarter for the first two years of the apprenticeship and up to \$750 per quarter for the third year.

Hiring incentives are available for employers of Australian Apprentices in occupations not identified on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List of up to \$3,500 in the first year of the apprenticeship. Federal Council are currently seeking further confirmation of these initiatives.

Apprentice Incentives

Australian Apprentice Training Support Payment

Commencing 1 July 2022, the Australian Apprentice Training Support Payment is available to eligible apprentices undertaking a qualification at either Certificate III, IV, Diploma or Advanced Diploma level leading to an occupation on the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List. It is a payment of up to \$5,000 for the first two years of their Australian Apprenticeship to support apprentices with the cost of undertaking an apprenticeship.

Commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance is available for eligible Australian Apprentices in the first three years of the apprenticeship.

Trade Support Loans are available to eligible Australian Apprentices to assist with everyday costs while completing your apprenticeship.

Information on eligibility and application for financial assistance for Australian Apprentices is available at <https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/aus-apprenticeships-incentives>

National Skills Agreement - Skills Reform Priorities

While the Australian, State and Territory Governments had committed to work collaboratively on long-term improvements through the National Skills Agreement ensuring that Australians have access to a high quality Vocational Education and Training (VET) system, we understand that with the new Government now in place, the commencement of this Agreement has been delayed . Federal Council will keep abreast of any developments in this regard and ensure these are communicated to members

JobTrainer Fund

The JobTrainer Fund commenced in July 2020 to provide school leavers and job seekers access to free or low-cost retaining and upskilling opportunities to assist in job attainment in high-priority areas. Funding was also allocated for the Supporting Apprentices and Trainees wage subsidy.

Funding for the JobTrainer Program was further extended in the 2022-23 Budget with additional places pledged and investment for a further two years contingent on matched funding from States and Territories.

The extension and expansion of JobTrainer will help to address the increase in demand for skilled care workers, particularly aged care, supporting existing care workers to get the skills they need and providing affordable access to training for new care workers. It will also provide more training places to support the growing demand in Australia's digital workforce.

Job seekers and young people, including school leavers, may be eligible and can take advantage of subsidised training to learn skills for jobs in demand. Under the extension, any Australian who wants to enrol in an aged care, digital skills, disability care or childcare qualification can also access a JobTrainer place, regardless of their age, employment status or prior qualifications.

JobTrainer funding is available for full qualifications and short courses, based on a list agreed between the National Skills Commission and State and Territory Governments.

Training places under JobTrainer are now available. Further information on the JobTrainer Fund is available on the following websites:

- Your Career: www.yourcareer.gov.au/jobtrainer
- My Skills: www.myskills.gov.au/jobtrainer
- Department of Education Skills and Employment:
<https://www.dese.gov.au/skills-reform/jobtrainer-fund>

Federal Council will maintain contact with the relevant Government Ministers and Departments to raise any concerns that members have so please make contact with us.

Websites that offer additional information include:

- National Skills Commission: www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au
- National Careers Institute: www.dese.gov.au/nci
- Your Career: www.yourcareer.gov.au

To conclude I would like to thank everyone on Federal Council for welcoming me in November 2021. I seem to have jumped in boots and all on a steep but well supported learning curve. I am grateful for the encouragement and guidance that is always available. I did not expect to be heading up a portfolio team right off the bat! The Training Portfolio continues to work closely with the Tertiary Portfolio on

many issues that overlap. Thank you, particularly to those within the Training Portfolio Alana Moller, Kim Hughes, Kate Thompson, Jane O'Brien and Sally Sullivan and the Federal Council Team who are always on hand.