

ISOLATED CHILDREN'S PARENTS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA



2023 FEDERAL CONFERENCE TRAINING PORTFOLIO REPORT Anna McCorkle

“When we talk about preparing people for the workforce, it is often framed as being a choice between vocational education, going to university, or on-the-job training. The problem with that paradigm is that the speed of technological advances means future workers will probably need to do all three, and not just once. They will need to constantly move in and out of education throughout their careers to update their knowledge and skills. A new approach to vocational and higher education is essential to prepare the workforce of the future.” Peter Shergold AC, *Financial Review April 2, 2023*

The 2022-23 Federal Council Training Portfolio year has been focused on the current and previous motions, which continue to highlight the difficulties rural and remote students face when choosing to continue with their post school education as apprentices and trainees. The gaining of skills for employment and to be productive positive members of our communities requires people to have access to education and training, not just employment.

Certification was once a new concept, yet now the attainment of these certifications and subsequent qualifications is the background behind a shift in the forthcoming “post compulsory education” pathway for many Australians and is a requirement for many occupations, jobs and even tasks that we all undertake every day in our business, working and personal lives. Rural and remote students accessing a training course face challenges common to their urban counterparts and many also need to relocate or travel vast distances with the associated high costs.

2022 Federal Conference Motion

Delegates at the 2022 Federal Conference in Perth carried a training motion requesting the inclusion of Regional TAFEs in the proposed improvements as mentioned in the ‘Your Education Policy - TAFE Technology Fund’.

Following conference, correspondence was sent to the Minister for Skills and Training the Hon Brendan O’Connor MP, and Regional Education Commissioner the Hon Fiona Nash along with other relevant Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament seeking assurance that this commitment to provide high quality information technology (IT) facilities, workshops, laboratories and telehealth simulators extends to regional, rural and remote communities and the TAFE institutions which provide services in these locations, allowing access for rural and remote students closer to home. Our correspondence reiterated that rural and remote apprentices and Vocational Education and Training (VET) students are often under-represented in post-compulsory education and experience significant disadvantage in their efforts to pursue their chosen courses. Further, we recommended that any measures aimed at improving quality of and access to TAFE facilities address these barriers.

In a response received from the Minister, it was confirmed that the \$50 million TAFE Technology Fund would include investments across regional Australia and in addition funding for projects under the



balance of the fund will be able to be applied for, including in rural and remote locations. View the TAFE Technology Fund website [here](#).

Delegations and Meetings

The October 2022 and May 2023 delegations to Canberra enabled Federal Council to meet with Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament to raise members' issues such as the Commonwealth Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA) and the inclusion of apprentice and trainees in the established Tertiary Access Payment (TAP). Federal Council has been involved in regular meetings with the Department of Social Services and Services Australia. Consultations were held with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations to support ICPA (Aust)'s submission to the Australian Apprenticeship Services and Supports Discussion Paper.

Submission - Australian Apprenticeship Support Services and Supports Discussion Paper

Apprenticeships and available supports remain a key focus area for the government on the back of the Jobs and Skills summit held in September 2022. ICPA (Aust) contributed a submission to the non-financial Apprenticeship Supports review, addressing the services of the federally funded Australia Apprenticeship Support Network (AASN) providers. Apprenticeships cannot commence without the involvement of an AASN. Across Australia there are seven Apprenticeship Network Provider organisations, contracted by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations with 130 fulltime sites and approximately 500 mobile field officers.

In the submission and consultations, ICPA (Aust) reiterated members' concerns, including the need for more support from the AASNs in relation to rural and remote apprentices and trainees. Below is an outline of the feedback provided.

Accessing Australia Apprenticeships in rural and remote locations

- The need for increased Careers Education regarding apprenticeships in schools.
- The allocation of an AASN provider staff member for rural and remote Australian Apprentices to develop a rapport and be their first point of contact to provide timely and regular monitoring of wellbeing, progress, identification of anomalies in work environment and answer any questions from the apprentice.

Flexibility in Training and Assessing - Encouraging and Supporting Rural and Remote Apprentices

- The high upfront and ongoing costs for rural and remote students who must relocate to access their apprenticeship contributes to low completion rates for this cohort. ICPA (Aust) appreciates that the financial aspects are being reviewed in late 2023 and looks forward to expanding on these issues, which include the need for increases to the Commonwealth Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA), inclusion of apprentices and trainees in the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) along with Youth Allowance adjunct payments including the Relocation Scholarship.
- Increased supports for Australian Apprentices through training and upskilling of AASN provider staff on the unique needs of rural and remote apprentices who have relocated from home to access their apprenticeship including the knowledge and experience of the non-financial support these apprentices need to succeed.

Australian Apprenticeship Support Network and its Providers

- There is a need to have appropriate systems in place to periodically and adequately review support services to ensure performance indicators are met along with the AASN Code of Conduct and Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System Guidelines.



In April the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations released the 'Future Directions Australian Apprenticeships Support Services Consultation Paper'. ICPA (Aust) identified issues addressed by several stakeholders including employers, unions, state and territory government representatives, AASN providers, Government Training Organisations (GTOs) and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who contributed to the review process. Following are some of the key points raised.

- **Apprentices who experience additional barriers** need more support, and often more specialised support, to succeed.
- **Apprentices from regional, rural and remote areas**
 - Apprentices from regional, rural and remote areas can face additional geographic barriers when it comes to sourcing an apprenticeship pathway. When they do commence an apprenticeship, it is often difficult to access and stay motivated to complete the off-the-job training component due to the financial and social costs of travelling or living away from home.
 - It was further noted that struggles with living expenses, including high fuel and associated travel costs to travel extensive distances between home, workplaces, and/or off-the-job training, can present increased logistical complexity for apprentices from regional, rural and remote areas.
 - Concerns were also raised about the timeliness of service provision for rural and remote apprentices. Apprentices from rural and remote areas, and their employers, could benefit from being able to access virtual or self-service options, including virtual sign ups.
- **Proactive engagement by apprenticeship support services** can support better awareness of the supports available to employers and apprentices.
 - Consultation identified a consistently low level of awareness and understanding amongst apprentices and stakeholders of the role of the AASN providers.
 - It was highlighted that available support services need to be more visible for regional and remote apprentices who face additional challenges either living away from home or travelling to attend the off-the-job component of their training.
- **Better connected services and information sharing can identify issues as they emerge**
 - Acknowledgement was made of the need for greater capacity and capability for information sharing to ensure better targeting of supports for apprentices at risk of disengaging to ensure timely assistance when issues emerge with an apprentice's training, such as difficulty completing the off-the-job training component. A 'one-stop-shop' approach could be beneficial to allow access to the full range of available supports.
- **Proposed future directions**
 - All apprentices are set up to succeed and know where to get help when they need it.
 - Apprentices who face additional barriers to completion have access to quality targeted mentoring and personalised assistance.
 - The proposed model for apprenticeship support services and non-financial supports will put the apprentice at the centre and ensure the system continues to deliver skilled workers that industry needs. The future model is intended to be delivered on a regional basis and provide choice for employers and apprentices to select between at least two providers in each state except in the Northern Territory, where an expanded range of services will be procured separately on behalf of the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government.



ICPA (Aust) provided feedback and recommendations on the proposed model outlined in the Future Directions paper to further strengthen the proposed model to grow apprenticeship engagement and completion in rural and remote locations. During a meeting with other parent body stakeholders in May, issues raised included:

- Training of AASN staff in financial and non-financial supports is essential for all staff supporting rural and remote students at all stages in their apprenticeship, as is the knowledge of the barriers that are often experienced by rural and remote apprentices who have to relocate for both on and off the job components of an apprenticeship.
- The need for a 'one stop shop' service available online and face to face, allowing the employer, apprentice and/or RTO to access services specifically trained to support geographically isolated apprenticeship opportunities.
- The need for AASN staff to be contactable to ensure timely assistance for the apprentice and employer.
- Regularity of reviews and 'checks and balances' of all parties involved the process.
- The need for increased knowledge by the AASN, RTO and employer of the geographic isolation circumstances of a rural and remote apprentice/trainee who has relocated to take up both the on and off-the-job training.

Once the final report is received, Federal Council will notify members of the new AASN structure and supports. ICPA (Aust) is awaiting the release of the terms of reference for the review of the current financial supports available for Apprentices and Trainees, some of which are outlined below.

Support for Australian Apprentices

Australian Apprentices may be eligible for financial and non-financial support from the Australian Government. To claim and receive payments under the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System they must meet all primary eligibility requirements.

For more information on the financial incentives and payments and eligibility criteria for Australian Apprenticeships please refer to :

- Australian Apprenticeships Financial Support page
<https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/financial-programs>
<https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/aus-apprenticeships-incentives> .
- Apprenticeships Incentives System Guidelines <https://www.dewr.gov.au/skills-support-individuals/resources/australian-apprenticeships-incentive-system-guidelines>
- Australian Apprenticeship Support Network provider
<https://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/search-aasn>

Payments available for eligible apprentices include:

- Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA)
- Youth Allowance
- Australian Apprentice Training Support Payment
- New Energy Apprenticeships Program
- Assistance for Australian Apprentices with disability
- Support for Women in Trades
- Trade Support Loans

2022 National Skills Agreement:

In August 2022 the National Skills Agreement was agreed to by Australia's Skills Ministers and endorsed by the National Cabinet. Its vision "Australia needs a VET sector that provides high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity and support Australians to obtain the skills they need to participate and prosper in the modern economy. Recognising the key role the VET sector plays in providing strong economic and social outcomes for Australians, all



governments commit to working in partnership to negotiate a National Skills Agreement” Within the six principals rural and remote students are assured that they “have access to the education, training and support needed to obtain well-paid, secure jobs.” For more information view [here](#).

2023-24 Budget Allocations

Skills and workforce development: In 2023–24, the Australian Government will provide funding of \$1.9 billion to support state skills and workforce development services, including \$1.7 billion through the National Skills and Workforce Development Specific Purpose Payment (SPP), and \$230.2 million through National Partnership payments. These include 12-Month Skills Agreement (including TAFE Technology Fund), Fee-free TAFE from 2024, JobTrainer Fund, Resources Centre of Excellence and further allocation of funds to the states for vocational education and training will be subject to the successful conclusion of negotiations for a new 5-year National Skills Agreement, which would commence on 1 January 2024.

To conclude I would like to thank everyone on Federal Council for the encouragement and guidance that is always available. The Training Portfolio continues to work closely with the Tertiary Portfolio, as many of the post school pathways issues overlap. Thank you, particularly to those within the Training and Tertiary Portfolios Kate Thompson, Alana Moller, Kim Hughes, Miffy Waugh, Julia Broad and Naomi Obst, and to the extended Federal Council Team who are always on hand.