



2025 Tertiary Federal Conference Report

Tim Fletcher- NSW

Summary

The number of tertiary motions last year (24) tells of the need to provide equity of access to a tertiary education for rural and remote students and narrow the gap in terms of access, participation and achievement with our city cousins.

News that some long-term issues have been successfully addressed.

- 1) The **Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)** of \$5000 has been changed to allow for students from regional and remote areas to commence first year university study up to the age of 22.
The original requirement was that students had to go directly from school to university. This disqualified students who wanted to work of a year or more before starting tertiary studies.
- 2) The **Student Ombudsman** which was a university accord recommendation, commenced on 2nd February. This is an independent office that will help address complaints and issues relating to the fair treatment of students within educational institutions.
- 3) The **Tertiary Education Commission** will commence in mid-2025, with an interim commissioner appointed (another recommendation from the universities accord). This is in addition to the *Regional Education Commissioner, currently The Hon Fiona Nash* who has focused on the needs of regional, rural and remote communities across Australia to access higher education opportunities.
- 4) The initial **Paid Practicums** for selected tertiary courses of *nursing, midwifery, social work and teaching* will commence on the 1st of July 2025 and are budgeted to continue for four years. The payment for eligible students is \$319.50 per week, benchmarked to the single Austudy rate.
- 5) The expansion of **Regional University Study Hubs** continues with the announcement on the 3rd February of 10 new centres opening in: Clermont and Moranbah QLD, Hughenden QLD, Hay NSW, Tumut NSW, Northam WA, Kununurra WA, Kangaroo Island SA, Hamilton VIC, St Helens TAS, and Burnt Pine Norfolk Is. The new hubs are expected to be operational by mid-2025. This brings the total number to 56 centres across the country. CUC's and RUSH locations being accessed by high school students to study DE or after hours.
- 6) The new federal government has not yet passed the legislation to reduce student **HECS debt** by 20% from the 1st of June 2025.

For additional reading there have been three significant reviews into tertiary education:

The Halsey Review,

The Naphthine Review, and

The Australian Universities Accord.

1. **Tertiary Access Payment**

- Eligibility is expanded to include students who take a gap year before commencing tertiary study



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- Payments of TAP are timely to provide assistance with the cost of relocation prior to moving.
- Members wanting assistance with TAP applications for university.

2. Youth Allowance changes

- Removal of the Liquids Assets Waiting Period
- Increase the parental income limit for dependent youth allowance
- Extend Relocation scholarships to all YA recipients from inner and outer regional, remote and very remote areas
- Classify rural and remote students who have to relocate for tertiary study as independent for YA purposes
- Remove the parental income limit for students applying for independent YA under workforce participation criteria
- A real Increase to the Commonwealth Rent Assistance

3. Implementation of all recommendations from Australian Universities Accord Final Report.

- Expansion of Regional University Study hubs
- Tertiary Access Payment: as above
- Improved student income support:
- Increase the Parental Income Free Area for dependent Youth Allowance
- Expand income support eligibility to include pro rata student payments for part-time study
- Review eligibility criteria and payments including for rural and remote students.
- Introduction of financial support for mandatory unpaid work placements.
- Government Funding for placements in nursing, social work and teaching professions (announced in Budget 24/25)
- Employer Contributions for placements in other fields by both public and private employers.
- Introduce a fairer and simpler indexation and repayment arrangements for HELP loans:
- Reduce Student Contributions for high-cost courses
- Change Indexation timing so amounts withheld are accounted for before indexation is applied
- Marginal Rate Repayments and indexation rate set to the lower of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Wage Price Index (WPI).
- Further review by the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Education to address the complex social security system:
- Eligibility criteria for youth payments should take into account regional students have specific needs including high relocation costs and are effectively independent once they have left home and should be considered for eligibility for Youth Allowance as an independent.
- Allow students to undertake reasonable amount of work while studying – review arrangements such as the income bank.



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- Increase aspiration, participation, and success in tertiary education among under-represented groups by:
- Establish a consistent national framework for career guidance.
- Ensure post-school pathways are visible and integrated into the high school curriculum.

Thank you to my fellow Tertiary portfolio members - Louise, Julia, Kelly, Anna, Melissa and Sally, Federal Council and State Councils for the support, expertise and assistance in the tertiary portfolio. Bit by bit we can bring about the changes required to assist our tertiary students.