
TERTIARY REPORT

Distinguished Guests, Fellow Members of ICPA, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is with much pleasure that I present the 2025 Tertiary Report.

The disparity in tertiary participation, retention, attainment and opportunities for rural and remote students continues to be evident in the under-representation of this cohort in tertiary education compared to their metropolitan counterparts. The priority for the tertiary portfolio is to address the barriers to ensure equity for these rural and remote students. Tertiary students and their families from geographically isolated locations face unique disadvantages and challenges to accessing a tertiary education. Factors such as a lack of social support, distance from tertiary education institutions, the high costs of relocation, tuition and ongoing living expenses all contribute to lower choice and opportunity for these students. These barriers increase the more remote a student resides from their chosen university.

Members continue to voice the greatest impediment to accessing a tertiary education is the high cost for students to relocate, often hundreds of kilometres away, to access their chosen pathway, along with living away from home. Adequate financial assistance is imperative to increase the engagement of rural and remote students at this level. ICPA-NSW seeks to ensure that students from rural and remote areas who have the ability, ambition, motivation and desire have access to tertiary education options which will enable them to pursue the career path of their choice.

During our 2024 Annual State Conference held in Dubbo there were 4 tertiary motions presented. These involved issues around the way advanced standings and credits could be transferred from one academic transcript to another when a student has cause to change universities, collaboration between Country Universities Centre and TAFE Connected Learning Centres to create Regional University Study Hubs within the Connected Learning Centres, increase to the allowance rates for Vocational Training Assistance Scheme (VTAS) to reflect the actual costs for apprentices and trainees and support for tertiary students and apprentices who have to undertake placements to complete their qualification.

The Tertiary Portfolio has addressed the motions through correspondence to and in collaboration with Federal Council to Ministers and Government departments, including the Minister for Education, Minister for Regional NSW, Minister for Agriculture, as well as Shadow Ministers, the University Admissions Centre and Council of Deans of Education.

We have also recently been made aware that the NSW Government AgSkilled program is telling our members that they are ‘managing their budget’ and are therefore not offering access to training currently. This program was to enhance vocational education and training

for the agriculture and livestock sectors ensuring workers are prepared for industry changes driven by innovation, research and technology. The program was aimed at primary producers, farm employees, industry professionals, or those seeking employment in agriculture, including job seekers and school leavers, working in the agricultural plant-growing and livestock sectors. We continue to seek clarification and advocate for continued support for this program that upskills those working in our agricultural industry.

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

Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

The Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) is available for eligible school leavers from inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote areas 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). We can now confirm that the payment may be available to first year tertiary students who finished Year 12 or equivalent before 2024.

Paid Placements

Those studying to be a teacher, a nurse, a midwife or social worker will be eligible for the Commonwealth Prac Payment to support them undertaking mandatory workplace placement required for university and vocational education and training qualifications. This new payment will provide around 68,000 eligible higher education students and over 5,000 VET students each year with \$319.50 per week during their clinical and professional placement periods.

Benchmarked to the single Austudy per week rate, this payment will provide cost-of-living relief for many students. It will be means-tested and available from 1 July 2025 and will be in addition to any income support a student may also receive. We are now advocating for other professions being studied to be included in the eligibility.

The Country Universities Centre (CUC) is a network of learning hubs dedicated to making higher education more accessible to regional students. With community-owned centres across NSW, QLD, and Victoria, CUC provides local students with modern study spaces, technology, and access to academic resources and support services. CUCs continue to expand across NSW, Queensland and Victoria which makes accessing a tertiary education for thousands of rural and remote students a viable option.

ICPA-NSW is very appreciative of the State and 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. We 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.

In closing, I would like to thank all of those who seek to support our rural and remote students to access, participate and complete their tertiary education, to forge relationships and partnerships in order to provide an educational pathway to support local industry and communities.

**Tanya Mitchell on behalf of Robin Beckwith
Tertiary Portfolio**