



2026 Tertiary Portfolio Conference Report

Jennifer Ruska - QLD

The Tertiary Portfolio team has continued to advocate strongly on behalf of rural, remote, and geographically isolated tertiary students throughout the year. Following the 2025 Federal Conference in Adelaide, correspondence was sent to relevant Ministers, Government Departments, Universities, and other stakeholders regarding the motions carried at Conference.

Several responses have been received, while many others remain under consideration and continue to form part of ICPA (Aust)'s ongoing advocacy agenda. As anyone involved in advocacy knows, sometimes waiting for a response can feel a little like waiting for rain in the outback—we know it's coming... eventually! In the meantime, we continue to follow up, engage with stakeholders, and ensure the voices of rural and remote tertiary students remain front and centre.

Youth Allowance and Student Financial Assistance:

Several motions from the 2025 Federal Conference focused on improving access to Youth Allowance and reducing financial barriers faced by rural and remote students undertaking tertiary study. Correspondence relating to improvements to the Youth Allowance application process, simplification of eligibility criteria, reform of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period, and review of the Dependent Youth Allowance parental income threshold has been sent to the relevant Ministers and Departments. Although some responses have acknowledged the significant financial pressures faced by geographically isolated families, no commitments to policy changes have been provided so far. ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for a system that better reflects the realities faced by rural and remote students who are often required to relocate long distances from home to access further education.

Accommodation and Rent Assistance

The cost of accommodation remains one of the most significant barriers to tertiary participation for rural and remote students. Motions advocating for increased Rent Assistance, the introduction of a rural and remote accommodation support program independent of parental income, and prioritisation of rural and remote students for residential college accommodation have been raised with Ministers, universities, and accommodation providers. Responses received have acknowledged the financial pressures associated with living away from home and outlined existing supports such as the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme. However, no commitments have been made to establish additional accommodation assistance programs or priority accommodation pathways. ICPA (Aust) will continue advocating for fair accommodation support that recognises the unique circumstances of geographically isolated students.

Tertiary Access Payment (TAP)

The Tertiary Access Payment continues to be an important support mechanism for rural and remote students transitioning to tertiary study. Correspondence regarding streamlining the TAP application process received a response from the Department of Education advising that Services Australia is responsible for administration and application processing. While no specific changes were announced, the Department acknowledged the importance of feedback regarding application processes and customer experiences. ICPA (Aust) welcomed recent changes extending eligibility to some students



who undertake a gap year and will continue advocating for further improvements to ensure the payment remains accessible and effective for rural and remote students.

Commonwealth Prac Payment and Placement Support

A significant number of motions focused on the financial challenges faced by students undertaking mandatory placements. These included calls to extend Commonwealth Prac Payment eligibility to students studying medicine, veterinary science, and allied health degrees, Graduate Diploma of Education students, and students from rural and remote backgrounds undertaking placements away from home. ICPA (Aust) has written to the Minister for Education outlining the additional travel, accommodation, and living expenses often incurred by geographically isolated students when completing mandatory placements. A response was received regarding the Commonwealth Prac Payment outlining the current arrangements and eligibility criteria. While the Government highlighted the introduction of the payment for teaching, nursing, midwifery, and social work students, no commitment was made to extend eligibility beyond the currently approved disciplines. ICPA (Aust) remains committed to advocating for equitable placement support for all rural and remote students regardless of their chosen field of study.

Agricultural Education and Workforce Development

Several motions focused on strengthening agricultural education pathways and addressing workforce shortages. ICPA (Aust) has advocated for universities to offer agricultural subjects as pathways within secondary teaching degrees, promote agricultural teaching specialisations, increase participation of agricultural graduates in the High Achieving Teachers Program, and provide ongoing support for the National Farmers' Federation AgCAREERSTART Program. A response was received from the Minister for Agriculture regarding AgCAREERSTART, advising that Government funding has been extended to support program delivery through 2026. While this was welcomed, no commitment has been made regarding long-term funding beyond the current pilot program. ICPA (Aust) continues to advocate for initiatives that support the future agricultural workforce and improve access to agricultural education opportunities.

Looking Ahead Many of the issues raised through the 2025 Federal Conference motions remain active advocacy priorities for ICPA (Aust). Federal Council will continue engaging with Ministers, Government Departments, Services Australia, universities, and industry stakeholders to ensure the voices of rural and remote students and families are heard.

The Tertiary Portfolio team thanks branches for their continued support, case studies, and advocacy. Real-life experiences remain one of the most effective tools in demonstrating the challenges faced by geographically isolated students and play an important role in influencing future policy development.