



2026 TRAINING PORTFOLIO REPORT

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It is my pleasure as Portfolio lead to present the Training Portfolio Report to our 2026 ICPA Federal Conference. The Training Portfolio with Federal Council support continues to advocate for equitable access to vocational education, skills training and Australian Apprenticeships for rural and remote participants. Throughout the 2025–26 Council year, advocacy has focused on ensuring that people living in geographically isolated areas have access to the same training opportunities as their metropolitan counterparts. We have communicated with Members, Ministers, Departments, policy makers, industry bodies and Government agencies to ensure the voices of rural and remote families are well represented in all decisions affecting post-school education and workforce development. Strong workforce opportunities and full engagement in rural Australia builds and strengthens our richly diverse communities allowing positive futures for us and our families.

The portfolio has continued to work on previous Conference motions and recommendations while strengthening relationships with government departments, stakeholders and national agencies responsible for Australia's skills and training system.

During the Council year, advocacy has continued on Motions from the 2025 Federal Conference, particularly in seeking the extension of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) to rural and remote students who must relocate to undertake an Australian Apprenticeship.

Although a formal Government response has not yet been received, significant progress has been made. The motion has been consistently raised through meetings with Ministers, government departments and stakeholders and was included in ICPA (Aust)'s submission to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations regarding revisions to the Australian Apprenticeship Priority List.

A significant outcome from a discussion at last year's Federal Conference was the opportunity to meet with the Jobs and Skills Commissioner, Professor Barney Glover, following introductions from the Rural Education Commissioner.

This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss the unique challenges facing rural and remote apprentices, particularly those required to relocate hundreds of kilometres from home to undertake both on-the-job and off-the-job training.

Discussions focused on:

- financial barriers to commencing apprenticeships;
 - the sustainability of apprenticeship pathways in rural Australia;
 - workforce shortages in regional industries;
 - improving data collection regarding relocating apprentices; and
 - opportunities to better support apprentices throughout their training journey.
- The consultation has established an ongoing working relationship with Jobs and Skills Australia, with further discussions planned as workforce planning continues.

During the council year, the Training Portfolio also contributed to consultations undertaken by Skills Insight regarding the upgrade of the Certificate II Rural Operations Qualification and the development of Trade Apprenticeships in Agriculture.



During consultations ICPA (Aust) emphasised the importance of ensuring that future agricultural training packages recognise the realities of rural employment and provide flexible delivery options that allow students to remain connected to their local communities wherever possible. The consultation also highlighted the need for training pathways that reflect modern agricultural industries while remaining accessible for students from geographically isolated locations.

Another significant advocacy initiative undertaken in 2026 was working with the Distance Education Portfolio in consultation sessions and then in the development of an ICPA(Aust) submission to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) supporting the proposed RICS. Our submission proposed recognition and the development of a dedicated OSCA code to cover the specialised classroom teacher support role – that is already undertaken by many across rural and remote Australia as a Governess, Home Tutor, or DE Supervisors.

- acknowledge the unique educational role undertaken by supervisors in a geographically isolated Distance Education classroom across Australia;
- improve national workforce data relating to geographically isolated education with a specific code for inclusion in future ATO and Census data ;
- provide formal recognition for this essential profession in supporting isolated children, and
- better inform future education policy and workforce planning.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to engage with the Australian Bureau of Statistics throughout the occupational classification review process, and keep our members informed of the outcome.

Within delegations and stakeholder meetings The Training Portfolio has continued advocating for:

- inclusion of Australian Apprentices within the Tertiary Access Payment, or development of an equivalent Australian Apprentice Access Payment;
- eligibility for the Relocation Scholarship for VET students and Australian Apprentices receiving dependent Youth Allowance;
- improved recognition and support for rural and remote apprentices through Apprentice Connect Australia Providers (ACAPs);
- improved identification of relocated apprentices within national apprenticeship data systems; and
- implementation of recommendations arising from the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System.

The Portfolio has also monitored changes to the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System announced during 2026 and will continue to advocate to ensure reforms adequately support rural and remote apprentices and their employers.

In 2026 the Australian Government announced changes to the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System, which will commence from 1 January 2027. While many existing supports remain in place, the reforms introduce several changes to employer incentives and the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List that may affect rural and remote apprentices and the businesses that employ them.

Of particular interest to ICPA (Aust) is the Government's commitment to revise the methodology used to develop the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List. (Announced within the 2026 Federal Budget with the following media release May 12 2026. [Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System Budget 2026 Factsheet.docx](#)) Following consultation with stakeholders during late 2025, the updated approach will place greater emphasis on both national and regional workforce shortages, utilise occupation shortage data from Jobs and Skills Australia, and provide greater stability by



considering skills shortages over a two-year period. This is a positive step towards recognising the differing workforce needs experienced across regional, rural and remote Australia.

ICPA (Aust) also welcomes the continuation of several important apprentice supports across the board, including:

- the (2026 increased) Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA), with indexed weekly payments continuing for eligible apprentices who must relocate as a result of the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System <https://www.dewr.gov.au/australian-apprenticeships/strategic-review-australian-apprenticeship-incentive-system> ;
- the Key Apprenticeship Program (KAP) apprentice incentive, providing up to \$10,000 for eligible apprentices in priority occupations;
- the Australian Apprentice Training Support Payment (AATSP) for apprentices undertaking Certificate III or higher qualifications in occupations on the Priority List; and
- continued access to Australian Apprenticeship Support Loans, providing interest-free financial assistance during training.

While these initiatives provide valuable assistance across the full range of Australian Apprenticeships, ICPA (Aust) remains concerned that many rural and remote apprentices continue to face significant upfront relocation costs that are not addressed by existing programs. ICPA(Aust) want the Priority List updates to enable a growing number of rural and remotes Australian Apprentices to access KAP and AATSP. Young people who must leave home to commence an apprenticeship experience many of the same relocation expenses as tertiary students yet remain ineligible for supports such as the Tertiary Access Payment and the Relocation Scholarship.

ICPA (Aust) will continue advocating for a more equitable approach to apprenticeship support, ensuring that future reforms recognise the additional financial and practical challenges experienced by Australian Apprentices from geographically isolated communities. We will continue to monitor the implementation of reforms and work constructively with government and industry stakeholders to ensure the needs of rural and remote apprentices remain central to future policy development.

The Training Portfolio remains committed to advocating for practical, evidence-based solutions that remove barriers to vocational education and apprenticeships to create equitable post-school opportunities for young Australians living in rural and remote communities.

Apprentice and trainee contracts that are currently in Training by selected characteristics (All Students, Regional and Remote) December quarter, 2021-2025

Year	All Students*	Regional and Remote	R R of total
2021	347,660	129,310	37.2%
2022	372,855	137,490	36.9%
2023	337,245	129,490	38.4%
2024	309,080	121,235	39.2%
2025	282,430	111,875	39.6%

**Australian Apprentices engaged in learning with a current state/territory contract.*

Data from the NCVER published documents.

Despite the many barriers, regional and remote regions are well represented in Australian Apprenticeship data, and a growing percentage of the total as the table shows. ICPA(Aust) are keen



to see this data accurately represent those who have had to relocate from a remote and very remote region to a metropolitan or inner regional area to engage in their chosen Australian Apprenticeship.

Finally, sincere thanks are extended to Federal Council, State Councils, Branches and member families who continue to provide the purpose, case studies, feedback and lived experience. These contributions remain invaluable in ensuring ICPA (Aust)'s advocacy is informed, relevant and representative of the challenges facing rural and remote Australia.