
TERTIARY REPORT

Distinguished Guests, Fellow Members of ICPA, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is with much pleasure that I present the 2023 Tertiary Report.

During our 2023 Annual State Conference held in Bourke there were 5 tertiary motions presented. These involved issues around consideration of ways to condense tertiary training so that those students wishing to complete their studies quickly were able to achieve their qualifications and get into the workforce, universities ensuring a high level of support to be delivered by tertiary educators, transfer of credits and advance standings being transferred between universities, tertiary institutions working with businesses to help students find placements and continued support and funding of the Country University Centres.

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 Women and Regional Health, Minister for Agriculture, as well as the University Admissions Centre. Federal Council have also been advocating through the Minister for Families and Social Services, the Department of Education, Skills and Employment and the Department of Social Services and Services Australia.

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), which is in its third year, 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) following year 12 or equivalent and whose parental income is below \$250 000. In 2022, changes to the delivery, eligibility and payment structure has widened the criteria and further assisted eligible students with the costs of relocating to undertake tertiary study including start-up expenses, costs of living, direct costs of education or training and the cost of travelling home in semester breaks. The Australian Government Department of Education has confirmed that the TAP is a permanent scheme and the program numbers are not capped.

In response to the queries related to the Tertiary Access Payment identified in motions, the following update has been received from the Department of Education.

TAP Eligibility

- The latest [TAP Guidelines](#) for 2022-2024 clarify that a student may commence studies at any point in the year following completion of Year 12 or equivalent. The Department of Education website “Who can get it” section now reads: ***You need to be an eligible student moving away from home to study at a tertiary education provider. This payment is for those who start studying in the year after finishing year 12 or equivalent.*** For example, in the scenario raised in the motion, a student who completes a bridging/enabling course in Semester 1 of the year following Year 12, and who then undertakes eligible tertiary study in Semester 2 would qualify for the TAP (subject to meeting all other criteria).
- In relation to the reference to the “academic year” the website refers to: ***Study at least 75% of a fulltime study and Study a course with a minimum duration of one academic year.*** It has

been confirmed that 'academic year' effectively means 12 months and is irrespective of when in the year a student starts.

The above is now clearly visible on the website as well as in the Guidelines. ICPA (Aust) has been advised that the Department will ensure that all universities are using the updated languages as per the current Guidelines in their promotion of the TAP.

Information on the TAP can be found at:

<http://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/tertiary-access-payment>

<http://www.dese.gov.au/tertiary-access-payment>

In correspondence to the Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP, ICPA (Aust) applauded the policy to deliver up to 20,000 new university places and the prioritisation of places to universities that offer opportunities to under-represented groups including students in regional and remote areas, those who are the first in their family to study at university and First Nation Australians. Additionally, ICPA (Aust) requested that regional universities were prioritised to enable rural and remote students' greater choice to study within the regions, remain connected to their communities, help to improve the academic outcomes for this cohort and improve accessibility and affordability. In response Minister Clare reassured ICPA (Aust) of the availability of the 26 Regional University Centres and a further six new Centres expected to be operational in Semester 1, 2023 which provide access to a university education for those students wishing to remain within their communities. There was also an increase in funding to Regional Universities (Regional University Campus Funding) which aimed to increase regional student places.

Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES)

The RRES program closed for new applicants after the 2022 round. The concerns of late RRES payments affecting students was passed on to the Australian Government Department of Education who in turn raised it with Queensland Tertiary Admission Centre (QTAC) who administered the RRES. There are a number of factors that affect student payment times and QTAC aimed to have payments paid within 2-4 weeks of the census dates, assuming all documents required are supplied on time.

The Department of Education also shared this issue with others, including the team responsible for administering the TAP, to ensure awareness of the importance of timely payments for students is considered in future programs, particularly those that are administered by external agencies.

Youth Allowance online application issues

While not a motion in 2022, ICPA (Aust) has continued to liaise with Services Australia with issues raised by members about the Youth Allowance online application. Pleasingly, areas in the application have been amended to remove some ambiguities in the wording of the questions.

The following issues were presented as motions and actioned by ICPA Federal Council but to date have had no response:

Relocation Scholarship

Federal Council continues to advocate for the Relocation Scholarship criteria to be changed to include those rural and remote students who must relocate away from home to access a tertiary education and do not qualify for dependent Youth Allowance. The Relocation

Scholarship is an adjunct payment of dependent Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY Living Allowance and is not available as a stand-alone payment or for independent Youth Allowance recipients. It does not recognise the significant costs incurred by all rural and remote students over the duration of their tertiary education who must relocate to access higher education.

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the introduction of the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) however this payment only assists rural and remote students with relocation costs in their first year of tertiary study. Extending the Relocation Scholarship and aligning the TAP with the Relocation Scholarship amounts would benefit the Youth Allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students ineligible for Youth Allowance and ICPA (Aust) is recommending this at every opportunity.

Independent Youth Allowance (YA) Parental Income Limit

Members once again requested the removal of the Parental Income Test from the eligibility criteria for rural and remote students qualifying for Youth Allowance as an independent under the workforce participation criteria. ICPA (Aust) on behalf of our members, continues to raise that this Youth Allowance category recognises these rural and remote students have earned the required amount in a 14-month period and proved their independence from their parents, therefore their parental income should not be a criteria.

Dependent Youth Allowance (YA) Parental Income Limit

Despite welcomed changes to the dependent YA eligibility criteria (removal of the Family Assets Test, the Family Actual Means Test and the changes to the Family Pool), the current parental income remains extremely low and a significant increase is required to be more reflective of the actual cost of supporting a dependent tertiary student. The cost of relocation and the ongoing costs of supporting a tertiary student for the duration of their tertiary course is beyond the means of many rural and remote families, particularly if they are also supporting other full-time student family members either at school or at tertiary level.

Changes to the criteria for Youth Allowance

The longstanding motion requesting that the Federal Government change the criteria for gaining independent Youth Allowance, so that rural and remote students who are not eligible for dependent Youth Allowance and have to leave home to study at tertiary level are eligible for independent Youth Allowance on commencement of their chosen tertiary course remains unresolved despite the following recommendations from the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy - Final Report*:

Recommendation Two: Improve access to financial support, to support greater fairness and more equal opportunity by allowing greater flexibility in pathways to qualify for independent Youth Allowance.

Implementation of this recommendation would

- assist in greater access to Youth Allowance for rural and remote tertiary students and their families who are unable to support their children through this education pathway.
- enable rural and remote students who successfully undertake their first year of tertiary study externally to access independent Youth Allowance or independent ABSTUDY, to then relocate to their place of study for a minimum of one further year and would also incorporate reviewing the recent changes to the parental means test cut-off.

ICPA (Aust) on behalf of members continues to urge the Federal Government to implement all of the recommendations made in the Report, which is available here:

www.education.gov.au/access-and-participation/resources/national-regional-rural-and-remote-tertiary-education-strategy-final-report

A review of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period

Members asked for the removal of the Liquid Assets Waiting Period for rural and remote students who have fulfilled the self-supporting criteria for Youth Allowance as an independent and have to relocate to access tertiary education, to recognise the high cost these students face when relocating and the need for these savings to fund the cost of relocation, ongoing costs of living and attending university.

ICPA (Aust) and ICPA-NSW welcomed the Federal Government's commitment to increase investment in skills and Vocational Education Training (VET) and the focus on improvements to TAFE facilities as outlined in the 'Your Education Policy - TAFE Technology Fund'. At the conference, members voted for advocacy to ensure regional TAFEs are included in this measure.

Following conference, correspondence was sent to the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, Minister for Skills and Training, the Hon Fiona Nash, Regional Education Commissioner, and other relevant Minister, Senators and MP's seeking assurance that this commitment to provide high quality 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 VET students are often under-represented in post-compulsory education and experience significant disadvantage in their efforts to pursue their chosen courses and that any measures aimed at improving quality of and access to TAFE facilities address these barriers would be welcomed.

ICPA (Aust) and ICPA-NSW also welcomed the Government's commitment to increase opportunities for apprentices and trainees in areas of skill shortages, including the proposed plan for Fee Free TAFE places. This initiative has been introduced from January 2023 to provide more opportunities for apprentices and trainees, fill skills shortage gaps like those in trades and construction, resources, digital and cyber security, new energy and advanced manufacturing and provide opportunities for school leavers and other priority groups to access TAFE courses. ICPA (Aust) highlighted that it is imperative that there is acknowledgement of the barriers that rural and remote students face in accessing VET courses locally and recommended that these students are prioritised in the allocation of these Fee Free enrolments.

Other longstanding issues within the Tertiary Portfolio continue to be addressed in correspondence and other communications with Ministers, MPs and Senators. ICPA (Aust) continues to raise the need for a significant increase to the commonwealth Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) for Australian Apprentices and trainees and alignment of the allowance to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). In correspondence to the Minister for Skills and Training as well as within Federal Council's 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission ICPA (Aust) emphasised that an increase to the LAFHA is imperative to ensure adequate financial assistance is available for apprentices and trainees who are ineligible for dependent Youth Allowance but must live away from home to access their chosen pathway. They cited that apprentices from rural and remote locations face extreme financial pressure given the significant expenses associated with relocating and living away from the family home including rental bond, rent, utilities, food and fuel without adequate financial assistance to offset the cost of living.

A response received from the Minister described the Government's current initiatives to assisting students to access training opportunities, including those initiatives mentioned above, however no commitment was made to an increase to the LAFHA or its alignment to the CPI.

ICPA (Aust) also continues to raise the request for a broadening of the Relocation Scholarship eligibility criteria to include apprentices and trainees to assist with the cost of relocation expenses incurred when embarking on vocational education, training courses and apprenticeship pathways away from home.

All issues within the Training Portfolio continue to be raised through every avenue available to ensure all rural and remote young Australians have the opportunity to pursue a VET pathway, apprenticeship or traineeship of their choice, regardless of their geographical location.

Rent Assistance

Members asked for Rent Assistance to be substantially increased for rural and remote students receiving Youth Allowance to more closely reflect the real cost of living for this cohort and the actual rental market. Rent Assistance has not kept pace with the increases in rental costs.

ICPA-NSW is very appreciative of the 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.

During deputation in Sydney in October we visited the University Admissions Centre who are always very welcoming and supportive of our organisation. It was interesting to hear about the long-term effects Covid is having on the mental health of students and we were able to share stories of students and their experiences.

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 in order to support local industry and community.

Tanya Mitchell
Tertiary Portfolio