

TERTIARY REPORT

Kate Thompson

The challenge to address the under-representation of rural and remote students in higher education remains a high-priority. Multiple factors are responsible for this under-representation: financial challenges, social-economic status, school experiences, low aspiration, distance, ad hoc preparedness and loss of family and community support networks. All students who have the desire to pursue a university education at an institution of their choice, must be supported to achieve their goals and to succeed regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location

Rural and remote tertiary students' issues continue to be heard through ICPA (Aust)'s persistence and continued lobbying. Federal Council have addressed the tertiary motions through correspondence to government and departments, delegation, submissions and meetings highlighting key issues and challenges faced by our rural and remote students. There have been some positive announcements, commencement of programs and outcomes over the last twelve months.

The Australian Government continues to invest in the rural and remote tertiary cohort. Post the Federal election in 2019, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education said "Every Australian child, no matter where they live, should have access to the best educational opportunities. It is why continuing the work we have begun with higher education providers to lift Australia's attainment rate outside of our capital cities will remain a paramount priority."

REGIONAL EDUCATION PACKAGE

On 12 November 2018, the Government announced a funding package over four years to provide students from rural and regional Australia with greater choice in and access to higher education. The measures included funding for expansion of the Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarship Program, the Regional Study Hubs and the development of a National Regional, Rural and Remote Higher Education Strategy.

RURAL AND REGIONAL ENTERPRISE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (RRESP)

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program (RRESP) supports students in rural, regional and remote areas with the costs of studying at university or at a vocational education and training institution. Successful students can receive up to \$18,000 depending on course length (minimum of six months full-time or up to eight years part-time) and type of study or training (on campus, or through online and distance education) and for qualifications from Certificate IV to PhD courses. A further \$500 is available to support an internship.

Visit <https://www.gtac.edu.au/scholarships/benefits> for more information. The Federal Government expanded the Program in November 2018 with the announcement of an additional 1,955 Scholarships. In April 2019, the third round of Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships opened and now includes all fields of study. While the uptake of scholarships has been encouraging and greatly appreciated by recipients, members have reported issues with the ad hoc timing of payment of the scholarship affecting their financial planning for the semester and causing angst.

REGIONAL STUDY HUBS

On 12 November 2018, the Minister for Education announced the successful grant recipients of 16 community-owned Regional Study Hubs (in 22 locations). The regional study hubs will be supported and funded over four years to "provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access, as well as academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities".

<https://www.education.gov.au/news/minister-education-announces-16-regional-study-hubs>

Regional Study Hubs support regional students to study courses locally, delivered by distance from any Australian university, by providing greater access to study, support and infrastructure; part of the Government's strategy to support regional, rural and remote education.

NATIONAL REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE EDUCATION STRATEGY

ICPA (Aust) responded to the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy* highlighting the key issues and challenges raised by ICPA members concerning access to tertiary and training education for rural and remote students and regional communities.

<https://www.icpa.com.au/documents/download/1186/federal-submissions/national-regional-rural-and-remote-education-strategy-submission-january-2019.pdf>. The development of a ***National Regional, Rural and Remote Higher Education Strategy*** aims to increase participation in post-secondary education and address the ongoing education and training needs of regional communities and is in response to the recommendations from the Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education. The final report is due for release in July after being provided to the Minister for Education at the end of June 2019. ICPA (Aust) looks forward to the outcomes and recommendations of this review.

VIRTUAL WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ADVISORY GROUP

ICPA (Aust) has been represented on the Virtual Work Experience Program (VWEP) Advisory Group, an initiative being delivered by Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) for the Department of Education. The twelve-month pilot program seeks to develop and test a work experience model providing an opportunity for students to undertake Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) projects in the virtual environment. The pilots have commenced, and the preliminary outcomes will be available for release at Federal Conference.

TERTIARY ACCESS ALLOWANCE (TAA)

The TAA remains one of our highest priorities and ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby as opportunities present for this allowance to be introduced. The TAA amount is aligned with the Relocation Scholarship amount: 1st year - \$4,553; 2nd or 3rd year - \$2,278; 4th or subsequent years - \$1,138. In a response from the Minister for Education, the TAA has been passed onto the Minister for Families and Social Services for future policy consideration.

There is continued disparity in the level of financial assistance provided to help with relocation costs for rural students who have qualified for independent Youth Allowance compared to dependent Youth Allowance assistance. ICPA (Aust) see the Relocation Scholarships as a way to alleviate the burden for rural students who relocate to pursue tertiary education regardless of which type of Youth Allowance they qualify for. Aligning the TAA with the Relocation Scholarship amounts will benefit the youth allowance students qualifying as an independent as well as students' ineligible for Youth Allowance.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE (YA)

Since the 2018 Federal Conference, another legislative change to Youth Allowance (YA) benefited those rural and remote tertiary students applying for YA as an independent. As of 1 January 2019, the parental income cut-off for regional, rural and remote students applying for YA under the *Independent through work: Part-time work or earnings for rural and remote students'* criteria, increased from \$150,000 to \$160,000, plus \$10,000 for each eligible additional child in the family. There is also greater flexibility in the choice of financial year used for parental income. This change has further resulted in YA being more accessible to rural and remote students.

INDEPENDENCE CRITERIA

ICPA (Aust) is adamant students who have to relocate from rural and remote areas to access their tertiary education **must** be recognised as a separate disadvantaged group and be considered

financially independent of their parents for the purpose of qualifying for Independent Youth Allowance. ICPA (Aust) continues to lobby the Federal Government on this issue.

ICPA Federal Council has continued to address further aspects of Youth Allowance (YA) including: rural and remote students being classified as independent, relocation scholarships, raising the parental income limit for dependent YA, removing parental income from rural and remote Independent YA criteria, adjusting the qualifying amount for rural and remote students applying for YA under part time work/earnings criteria, rural and remote students who do not receive dependent YA but live away from home for tertiary education be eligible automatically for YA as an independent at commencement of their course, and reinstatement of the HECS-HELP upfront and HELP voluntary repayments. ICPA (Aust) has had no further commitment for change but will continue to pursue these issues.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE OVERVIEW 2019

An overview of Youth Allowance has been collated by ICPA (Aust) with advice from Department of Human Services. This guide, updated at the end of 2018, aims to complement the Youth Allowance website and can be viewed on the ICPA (Aust) website - *Youth Allowance Overview* <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/129/youth-allowance-overview-2019-for-website>. The document aims to interpret and summarise the lengthy Youth Allowance website information for rural and remote students planning to study full time and who intend to apply for Youth Allowance. It is also available in the January edition of Pedals each year. **It is a guide only.** For more information, advice, clarification and further assistance please phone **132490** (dedicated Youth Allowance phone number) or visit: www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/youth-allowance. Again ICPA (Aust) would like to thank the Department of Human Services and the Department of Social Services for their invaluable assistance with clarification of information for this document.

CENTRELINK

Unfortunately, members are still reporting issues when applying for YA: inconsistent information being given from different staff, staff being ill-informed about current criteria and long-wait-times on the 132490 support line. We continue to liaise with the Department of Human Services reporting issues from members as they arise. The Minister for Human Services, the Hon Michael Keenan, reported back to Federal Council that the 2017-2018 Budget had allocated resources to increase the number of Department's call centre operators and the 2018-2019 Budget allocated funds for the Department to target call wait times and improve service delivery. By December 2018, an additional 350 new operators had been allocated specifically to the Youth and Student enquiry line.

Applicants are encouraged to use the online *Claim Tracker*, a tool that provides graphic representation of the progress of a claim, notifications at points throughout the claim including electronic messaging to alert the applicant where tasks or actions remain outstanding and displays the estimated completed date of their claim.

UNIVERSITY COURSE WEBSITE

Launched in late 2018, *Course Seeker* is the new national Higher Education information website. This website is a one stop shop allowing current and prospective students to easily research and compare higher education courses by course, study area, institution, admission criteria, state, delivery pathways, providers and application processes www.courseseeker.edu.au.

By the end of 2019, the reform of the higher education admissions process will be complete and a transparent, consistent process will be available; standardised presentation of admissions information including study options, entry requirements and application processes, adoption of common admissions terminology, adoption by Tertiary Admission Centres of more consistent approaches, reporting and streamlining interstate application processes and the national website. Students, parents, teachers and career advisors will be able to more easily navigate higher education admissions policies and processes.

TERTIARY AND TRAINING WEBSITE DOCUMENT

The “*Useful Tertiary and Training Websites*” document collated by the Tertiary and Training portfolio provides useful websites and resources for students to assist in planning their future whether that be at university, VET course, apprenticeship or heading straight into the workforce. It is available on the ICPA website <https://www.icpa.com.au/page/attachment/123/useful-tertiary-and-training-websites-december-2018>. The document was the basis of a “Speed Session” presented by ICPA (Aust) at the Australian Boarding Schools Association International Conference in October 2018.

ICPA (Aust) will continue to raise our members’ issues, to achieve the changes and measures needed to ensure our rural and remote students have the opportunity to achieve a tertiary education commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.

I would like to thank the State Tertiary Portfolios and my fellow Tertiary and Training Portfolio members, Nikki Macqueen, Jane O’Brien, Kristen Coggan, Sally Sullivan and Suzanne Wilson for their continuing support.