

# **TRAINING REPORT**

**Sally Sullivan**

ICPA (Aust) continues to address the unique considerations associated with rural and remote training and endeavours to support states with the specific issues identified in their respective jurisdictions. At the 2019 Federal Conference, a motion requesting Federal Council support the states in their efforts to stop the impending closure of Agricultural Colleges, following the decision to close Agricultural colleges in Queensland in 2019, was actioned.

## **Closure of Agricultural Colleges**

The closure of Queensland's Emerald and Longreach Agricultural Colleges and the attempted closure of Moora Residential College in Western Australia has been of concern to rural people across the nation.

Federal Council has been in contact with Queensland ICPA Tertiary, Trade and Training Portfolio leader, Louise Winten to follow up on the situation in that state and offer our support. ICPA Qld was hopeful of a resolution such that facilities and accommodation will continue to be used for education and training and be available for use by the local community. ICPA Queensland are continuing talks with TAFE and universities.

In February 2020, an agreement was signed that would see the Longreach campus utilised for community events, training and commercial interests and retain the former College's memorabilia and other historical elements through to November 2020. This agreement, reached in consultation with a stakeholder committee and local community is the first stage of what will become a more permanent arrangement. Negotiations on the future of the Emerald facility are continuing.

The full media statement can be found at:

<http://statements.qld.gov.au/Statement/2020/2/19/agreement-on-future-of-longreach-agricultural-training-college> .

Work is continuing with the state government to transition the college into a local entity in the next five years and there is confidence that not only will agricultural training will be part of the future for the site but training and education will go wider than just agriculture.

Concern has been expressed regarding the short time frame (until November 2020) of the occupancy agreement the loss of teachers and resources from the district already since the closure and the lack of progress to continue agricultural education in western Queensland. Unfortunately, COVID-19 restrictions has halted all proposed activities and will most likely not occur at all in 2020, with the focus now on 2021 and beyond.

In Western Australia, Moora Residential College's largely federally-funded building upgrade is progressing and on 19 February 2020, the Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Michael McCormack MP, visited to view the progress with several colleagues.

Federal Council are committed to ensuring that agricultural colleges and agricultural training opportunities are maintained and expanded and will continue to follow the developments across states and assist wherever possible.

## **Assistance for rural and remote apprentices and trainees**

In October 2019, Federal Council met with advisors to the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education, Training and Apprenticeships (VET) Hon Steve Irons MP. Discussions centred around the challenges faced by rural and remote apprentices such as accessing study or assessment blocks where travel and accommodation costs are incurred, servicing of rural and remote trainees by training organisations and the costs and challenges of moving away from home in order to participate in apprenticeship or training

programs. The Assistant Minister's advisors agreed the rural and remote space also provides challenges from their perspective because of the costs and logistics of servicing training needs in rural and remote areas and the difficulties of disseminating information to rural and remote cohorts or prospects. One suggestion to come out of the meeting was to find rural and remote alumni within the Australian Apprenticeship Alumni Network to mentor rural and remote apprentices and trainees and promote those pathways. A request was made for suggestions of any rural/remote alumni who could be ambassadors for and promote/mentor rural and remote apprenticeships. Federal Council is currently following this up. The Assistant Minister's office also advised they could send information to distribute for rural and remote apprentices.

Assistant Minister Irons' office drew our attention to the National Careers Institute <https://nci.dese.gov.au/> established in 2019 to ensure Australians have access to high quality career information and support regardless of their age and stage. The Commonwealth Government hopes this site will assist the engagement of, among others, rural and remote people in training opportunities.

In recent conversations with the Assistant Minister's office, discussions were also had regarding Centrelink staff and improvements to the website to assist navigation by apprentices and trainees. Support for rural and remote apprentices who are ineligible for Youth Allowance was discussed, including the Commonwealth Living Away From Home Allowance (LAFHA).

The opportunity was also taken to raise the issue of recipients of the federal LAFHA not being on the list of eligible existing payment recipients' Income Support Payments for the Economic Support payment or Coronavirus Supplement. Federal Council will continue discussions regarding whether LAFHA should or could be included with other Social Income support payments for the purposes of assistance measures such as those available during the COVID-19 pandemic. One suggestion from the Assistant Minister's office was for apprentices requiring support to take out a Trade Support loan, however this would need to be repaid in time like Higher Education Contribution Scheme - Higher Education Loan Program (HECS-HELP) loans. Trade Support Loans are available to apprentices at any time, regardless of hardship.

The *National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy: Final Report* contained promising recommendations and actions to assist the rural and remote training cohort access to high quality programs including:

- Further expand Regional Study Hubs and to include VET students.
- Improve service provision and access to high quality VET programs and ensure consistent regulations between jurisdictions.
- Ensure the VET sector focuses 'more on practical learning and technical and professional skills development'.
- Support states and territories to improve access to VET and improve choices for rural, regional and remote students by
  - reducing barriers for RTOs from providing training places across states and territories,
  - expand access to courses and qualifications relevant to rural and remote industry and
  - increase the availability of subsidised places for VET courses in rural and remote areas based on demand including employment opportunities.
- Ensure availability and consistency of support programs for rural and remote VET students including improving transport services for rural and remote students travelling to VET programs and study hubs.
- Build aspiration, improve career advice and assist rural and remote schools to prepare their students for post-school success by establishing aspiration-raising initiatives targeted at students and families - an ambassador program and local alumni networks similar to or build on the

Australian VET Alumni program which incorporates the Australian Apprenticeships Ambassadors program.

- Ensure consistency of delivery and improve access to high quality VET in schools programs based on successful VET models delivered in conjunction with RTOs and school-community partnerships that have shown to improve local employment outcomes.
- Improve career advice and work experience for rural and remote students delivered by professional career advisors conversant with schools, tertiary education providers including VET, industry and local community knowledge and improve online career information and advice and virtual work experience.
- Incorporate work integrated learning (WIL) placements including internships, mentorships, practicums, research, teaching and tutoring placements to enhance the skills and employability of students and attract and retain students in rural and remote areas.

ICPA (Aust) welcomed the announcement by Minister for Education the Hon Dan Tehan MP on 19 June 2020, that the Federal Government would be implementing measures from the *National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy* to assist students from rural, regional and remote Australia. At the time Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, Sen the Hon Michaela Cash said these measures would complement the Government's reforms in vocational education and training, through the \$585.3 million *Skills Package Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow*, developed off the back of the [Expert review of Australia's vocational education and training system](#), which incorporated specific detail on supporting VET in rural and remote Australia:

- There is a strong need to adapt or create policies to support rural and remote students engaged in VET. To address this, flexible and innovative delivery models need to be considered for these areas. One potential solution lies in the regional study hub model, which provides infrastructure and academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities
- The Commonwealth Government to expand the university-based regional study hub model to provide funding to VET providers to participate in regional study hubs.
- To ensure the model's viability, dedicated funding grants could be provided, in addition to the national rural and remote subsidy loading proposed earlier.

The Expert Review of Australia's Vocational Education and Training System: A Regional Education Expert Advisory Group has been established to advise Government on the ongoing education and training needs of regional, rural and remote communities which has explored how to improve access, opportunity and choice in tertiary education for regional, rural and remote learners, including exploring the expansion of the regional study hub model.

Further information can be found at

<https://www.employment.gov.au/delivering-skills-today-and-tomorrow>

<https://ministers.dese.gov.au/cash/inaugural-report-national-skills-commission-australian-labour-market-and-covid-19>

[https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets\\_1.pdf](https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/strengthening-skills-independent-review-australia-vets_1.pdf)

The circumstances of rural and remote trainees and apprentices are unique in nature and ICPA (Aust) will continue to advocate on their behalf to ensure they receive adequate support to reach their aspirations and full potential through various training settings and contexts.