

TERTIARY REPORT

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Following on from the 2016 Federal Conference and some major wins in 2015, the tertiary portfolio has had further positive outcomes that will address some of the access issues and the current under-representation of rural and remote students at university.

Election Promise: In mid-2016, the Coalition made an election announcement with three of the components to have a significant impact on our tertiary cohort:

- A reduction in the time regional and remote students need to be employed under the self-supporting criteria from 18 months to 14 months to qualify for Youth Allowance (YA) and ABSTUDY living allowance. This criteria will allow students to finish Year 12 and start university after the equivalent of a gap year and at the same time be eligible for independent YA if they have fulfilled all the criteria. Legislation was passed in March 2017 allowing for this change to take effect from 2018 for the school leavers of 2016. Members have been asking for this measure for many years.
- Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships (RRES) - 1200 scholarships for students undertaking studies in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). These scholarships will be available for undergraduate, post graduate and vocational education students. The implementation process is in the final stages and it is anticipated the initial scholarships will be awarded in 2018.
- An independent comprehensive review into equity of education access for rural, remote and regional students including higher education students will allow ICPA (Aust) to include and address many issues facing our tertiary cohort when accessing higher education. Federal Council plans to include the following aspects in this Review: Introduction of a Tertiary Access Allowance, changes in Relocation Scholarship and Youth Allowance qualifying criteria, removal of the Independent YA parental income limit criteria, reviewing dependent YA parental income limits and age criteria for automatic independent YA and financial assistance for relocation costs to complete compulsory work experience.

Youth Allowance: An overview of Youth Allowance, was compiled by ICPA (Aust) with advice from Dept. of Human Services. This guide, updated during 2017, aims to be complimentary to the Youth Allowance website and can be viewed on the ICPA (Aust) website - [Youth Allowance Overview](#).

Start-up Scholarship/Loan: As of 1 July, 2017, the Student Start-up Scholarship is replaced by the Student Start-up Loan, a voluntary income contingent loan for all students including grandfathered students who had already been in receipt of the Start-up Scholarship prior to Jan 1, 2017. The new Start-up loan is voluntary and is to be repaid through the tax system only after the HELP loan is repaid.

HECS-HELP Upfront Discount and HELP Voluntary Repayments: The upfront HECS-HELP discount and the voluntary HELP repayment bonus ceased as of Jan 1, 2017.

HECS-HELP Benefit: The *Review of the Demand Driven System* identified the HECS-HELP Benefit Scheme proved to be ineffective at influencing study and careers choices, had limited take-up and failed to increase demand for particular occupations. As a result, legislation was passed in September 2016, which

included the removal of the HECS-HELP Benefit from July 1, 2017, meaning 2016/2017 income year is the last year the HECS-HELP benefit can be claimed. HECS-HELP benefit is still eligible to be claimed for work undertaken prior and graduates have 2 years to lodge their application with the Australian Tax Office to reduce either compulsory HELP repayments or HELP debt.

Other motion outcomes: ICPA Federal Council has continued to address further aspects of Youth Allowance (YA) including: all rural and remote students being classified as independent, reduction of the age threshold for automatic eligibility for YA, relocation scholarships, removal of the independent YA parental income limit, raising the parental income limit for dependent YA and financial assistance for all tertiary students who need to relocate for compulsory course practicums. ICPA (Aust) has had no further commitment for change but will continue lobbying and pursuing these issues.

Tertiary Access Allowance (TAA): The Tertiary Access Allowance remains an important lobby despite the 2015 changes to the dependent Youth Allowance that meant that more rural and remote students are eligible for the Relocation Scholarship. The Tertiary Access Allowance payment amounts are aligned with the Relocation Scholarship, to assist in the high cost of relocating to tertiary education for any rural and remote student who has to relocate to tertiary education. We will continue to lobby for the Tertiary Access Allowance as opportunities present including the Regional, Rural and Remote Education Review.

Teacher Education: Federal Council has raised the inclusion of rural and remote education majors and modules such as Autistic Spectrum Disorders in teaching courses with the Minister for Education and Training, the Shadow Minister for Education, Universities Australia, NRHA, SPERA and the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE). Ultimately university course content is determined by the individual university and ACDE can only make recommendations. This rural education major has been positively received during delegation and will be addressed in the Review. Educating students in the rural and remote context is unique and challenging and requires specialised knowledge and skills. It has been identified that specific rural training aids in the retention of teachers and assists in the sustainability and resilience of these rural communities where people want to live, work and raise families. The importance is obvious with more than 4,000 schools located in rural, regional and remote locations who educate almost 30% of all students in Australia. A postgraduate Master of Education (Leadership and Management) with rural foundations has commenced in South Australia and the principles, benefits and importance should be afforded to an undergraduate course to equip the graduates with the challenges facing rural educators including students with specific learning needs.

Centrelink: ICPA (Aust) has continued communicating with the Department of Human Services in relation to the issues that members are reporting when applying for Youth Allowance. The Department has repeatedly reinforced that application problems should be addressed via the **13 24 90** helpline or by visiting a service centre by the applicant or their authorised representative.

The Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) Performance Audits of the Administration of the Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY Payment Schemes was commissioned in late 2016, to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Department of Social Services and Department of Human Services' administration of the Youth Allowance (Student) and ABSTUDY programs. In a submission, ICPA (Aust) highlighted our members' issues and experiences of the **13 24 90** support line, documentation requirements, service centres, online applications and communication difficulties and processing and approval times. The ANAO audit report was released in May 2017 with recommendations including the implementation of a strategy to ensure the rollout of new processing systems is well planned, managed and evaluated and learnt from previous processes.

Submissions/consultation: Submissions and consultations remain an important avenue to address many of our motions along with correspondence, meetings and delegation.

Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes: We responded to the Higher Education Standards Panel on the “*Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes*” in 2016. The final report recommendations will deliver easier access to clear, comprehensive, consistent and readily comparable information about the full range of study options, entry requirements and application processes at all registered Australian higher education providers. It will ensure the adoption of common admissions terminology, widen the accessibility, improve the presentation of admissions information and include a new national admissions information platform to give students, parents, teachers and career advisors the knowledge and capacity to more easily navigate the higher education admissions process. The final implementation plan has been released (available on the Department of Education and Training website at <https://www.education.gov.au/node/13841>) which sets out a phased approach to the implementation of the recommendations. Many of these recommendations will be in place for the benefit of 2018 higher education students, including the delivery of consistent information on admission policies and processes, comparable data on recent student admissions and the Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) profile of places offered for every course available. Full implementation will be in place for the 2019 students. These changes are very positive for our rural and remote students.

ICPA (Aust) has been involved with consultation process of the Rural and Regional Enterprise STEM Scholarships and the Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY audit and had the opportunity to comment on the final reports.

Higher Education Reform Package: The proposed Higher Education Reform Package that is currently being debated will have benefits for regional students. The reform is aiming to enhance the sustainability, transparency and accountability of the higher education sector while providing students with greater choice and support, fairer access for under-represented groups and opportunities to succeed. Regional, rural and remote students will benefit in the following ways:

- Enhancements to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) will help remove the barriers that many regional and remote students face in high quality education and support.
- The establishment and maintenance of up to eight community-owned, regional study hubs across mainland Australia to improve access to higher education for regional, rural and remote students.
- Increased support for sub-bachelor places. The Australian Government will extend demand driven funding to eligible sub-bachelor courses which will give students a better opportunity to obtain a relevant and recognised qualification more quickly.
- Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships will support 1200 regional and remote students to undertake science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies.
- Continued regional loading to support the cost of educating students in regional and remote Australia.
- Implementation of all the recommendations of the *Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes*

The tertiary sphere has experienced some very positive changes and significant progress over the last year including progressing some long standing issues. We will continue to lobby for our members’ issues to ensure rural and remote students who aspire to gain a tertiary education, can do so with support for the access, financial and other barriers they face.