



## **Australian Universities Accord Final Report: A Breakthrough for Rural and Remote Students**

### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association is hailing the Australian Universities Accord Panel's Final Report as a watershed moment for rural and remote students across the country, with a number of key recommendations set to address persistent challenges faced by families living in rural and remote Australia.

In November 2022, the Australian Universities Accord Panel was commissioned by the Federal Government to conduct a review into Australia's higher education system, with its final report detailing 47 recommendations to help deliver a higher education system to meet the current and future needs of the nation.

Kate Thompson, Tertiary Education Portfolio lead with ICPA, says the report is a pivotal moment in Australian education reform, with the potential to create equitable higher education opportunities for all rural and remote students.

"After being closely involved in the consultation process for this report, we are pleased to see a number of key recommendations particularly around access to tertiary education for rural and remote students, financial support, and changes to the HELP loan system," she said.

"We believe many of these recommendations can be implemented quickly and effectively by the Federal Government and will make an immediate difference to students and their families."

The report highlighted the under-representation of regional, rural, and remote tertiary education, with recommendations to expand the Regional University Study Hubs program, as well as calls for a needs-based funding model that took into account the cost of higher education delivery in rural and remote Australia.

Changes to the Tertiary Access Payment (TAP) were also recommended, including the removal of the 12-month commencement requirement, directly addresses the cost challenges faced by students relocating for tertiary study.

"The introduction of the TAP has been welcomed by ICPA," said Ms Thompson.

"The students who take a gap year still have the huge relocation costs and this expansion will deliver the original intent of the TAP which was to assist rural and remote students with the cost of accessing higher education."



The report recommends the introduction of financial support for mandatory unpaid work placements. This would see the Federal Government work directly with tertiary education providers, state and territory governments, industry, business and unions to provide funding to cover additional costs and alleviate financial hardship and placement poverty.

In addition to this, the report also calls for an increase to the Parental Income Free Area for Youth Allowance from \$58,108 to \$68,857 per family, as well as an expansion to the income support eligibility for part-time students.

“The financial strain and pressure placed on rural and remote students has long been a concern of the ICPA,” said Ms Thompson.

“These recommendations recognise the financial hardships faced, particularly by those who have relocated for their studies and addresses cost of living pressures, where government is encouraged to focus on students with the most needs, which the ICPA has long been advocating for.”

The ICPA also welcome a recommendation for a fairer and simpler indexation and repayment system to ease the financial pressure of Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) loans. It proposes reduced student contributions on high-cost courses, aligning contributions with projected lifetime earnings to alleviate financial burdens, particularly on low-income earners.

“The Accord's Final Report signifies a strategic approach towards creating a level playing field for all students,” said Ms Thompson.

“Particularly those from rural and remote areas grappling with the increased cost of living associated with higher education pursuits.”

For media inquiries, please contact:

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*About the Australian Universities Accord Panel:* In November 2022, the Federal Government commissioned the Australian Universities Accord Panel to conduct a review to drive lasting reform in Australia's higher education system. Led by the Minister of Education with advice from a panel of eight eminent Australians chaired by Professor Mary O'Kane AC.

*About the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA):* Established in 1971, ICPA is a voluntary, not-for-profit, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring equity of access to education for all students who live in rural and remote Australia. To find out more, visit representatives at their stand at the Motherland Australia Conference being held in Launceston, Tasmania, on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> and Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> March