



Briefing Papers

Distance Education Portfolio

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), is a voluntary, apolitical, national parent organisation working on behalf of our members for equity of access to appropriate education for children living outside of metropolitan areas.

Distance education is a necessity for many geographically isolated students. For approximately 1000 families living in isolated locations of Australia, face-to-face mainstream schooling opportunities are unavailable due to their geographical location. Students therefore have no other choice but to access distance education. Geographically isolated distance education entails unique challenges and significant commitment for the families who access it to educate their children.

SUMMARY

1. Distance Education Teaching Allowance

- Recognition of the value and necessity of the distance education tutor in geographically isolated schoolrooms through a financial allowance.
- Families are required to provide and fund all costs associated with providing a tutor, which necessitates the employment of additional staff or a family member (often the mother) which limits their ability to assist with the family business or on the property where the family reside or participate in paid employment in order to fulfil this role.
- The Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Allowance assists with the expense of setting up a home classroom and ongoing costs associated with this method of education. Distance education is not possible without a tutor present in the home schoolroom.
- ICPA (Aust) is seeking the introduction of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (*of at least \$6000 per family, per annum*), as remuneration for the essential work a distance education tutor performs.

2. Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

- It is critical that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education who offer education to geographically isolated students, are based in rural and regional areas to best meet their students' needs.
- ICPA (Aust) includes geographically isolated non-government distance education students as well as geographically isolated government distance education students when addressing equity in education issues for rural and remote students.

3. An increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) – Distance Education (DE) Allowance



4. Appropriate Learning Resources for Distance Education Students

- Learning materials for Distance Education students need to be readily accessible and available in a variety of formats, including print.

5. Support for volunteer educator programs for geographically isolated students such as BushEd, Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE), and Retired Educator Volunteers for Isolated Children's Education (REVISE)

ISSUE 1 - Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA)

Distance education for geographically isolated students who have no access to daily face-to-face schooling is founded on the assumption that a 'home or distance education tutor' is available to supervise the students in their home schoolroom. While most distance education services are well structured and distance education centres ably staffed, distance education provision and success require students to have ready access to a person able to teach the program in the geographically isolated classroom. This person is the distance education tutor who must be available and able to provide the practical, day-to-day supervision and support required for the effective delivery of a distance education program.

This is a significant barrier for geographically isolated families who must provide this tutor themselves. The distance education tutor must be present to commit between six and eight hours each day to the geographically isolated classroom to teach the distance education program, in addition to necessary preparation time. The role of distance education tutor requires dedication and is a commitment that frequently lasts many years. A distance education tutor must be capable and confident in delivering the distance education program, thus allowing rural and remote students to achieve educational parity with their urban peers who have face-to-face access to professionally trained teachers and support staff daily.

Tasks required of the distance education tutor include:

- setting up a classroom
- keeping students engaged in the curriculum
- providing duty of care supervision of the students
- dealing with disciplinary issues
- ensuring students link in via the internet or telephone for their formal instructions and a variety of extra-curricular activities
- receiving and returning completed lessons to distance education centres and marking schoolwork before it is returned.

Distance education tutors spend similar time to a teacher in a mainstream school preparing daily lessons and teaching their students, with no remuneration or recognition for the work they do. The delivery of distance education is not possible without the commitment of distance education tutors who are accountable for the face-to-face delivery of educational support, supervision, and educational evaluation of their students.

This role often falls on the mother, which means she is then unable to participate in other day to day work, either in the family business, on the property on which the family resides or elsewhere. In times of drought



and other rural hardship, this can be exacerbated as the need for the family member, acting as the home tutor, cannot be assisting with the day-to-day running of the business as well as supervising their children's schoolwork. Some families may employ a tutor or governess however this comes at substantial cost and finding a governess/tutor often proves difficult in isolated areas.

The roles women undertake in the operation of family agricultural businesses have changed and multiplied over the years. With the responsibility of the distance education tutor position often falling on the mother, fulfilling this position further compounds her workload. This can place increased pressure on other family members and may necessitate the employment of additional staff.

Due consideration must be given to the encumbrance on approximately 1000 families in geographically isolated areas for whom distance education is the only means to educate their children. The vital role of the distance education tutor should be remunerated through an allowance, which acknowledges the essential work they perform.

While the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Distance Education (DE) Allowance assists distance education families with some of the incidental expenses incurred to educate their children when living in geographic isolation, this does not include covering the cost of someone to teach the children in the home schoolroom. According to the [AIC Guidelines](#), the intent of the AIC Distance Education Allowance since it was established has not been to cover costs for providing a tutor in the distance education home classroom.

"5.4.1 Purpose

The Distance Education Allowance contributes towards incidental costs incurred by geographically isolated families whose student children are undertaking their education by distance education methods. This payment is not intended to meet the ongoing cost of provision of education (e.g. costs associated with teaching, tuition and supervision)."

Specific support and remuneration for these families which recognises and acknowledges the vital role the distance education tutor plays in geographically isolated distance education is needed assist these families who are required to provide a tutor for their students. Provision must be given to the encumbrance on approximately 1000 families in geographically isolated areas for whom distance education is the only means to educate children in the form of a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) for all families eligible for and in addition to the geographically isolated category of the AIC – Distance Education Allowance.

ICPA (Aust) envisages:

- eligibility for a DETA would be linked to receipt of the federally funded AIC -Distance Education Allowance and therefore determined by the same geographical isolation criteria
- a DETA would be paid annually per family (approx. 1000 nationally) at a rate of \$6000.00 and indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).



The calculations below highlight the average financial loss and implications of a mother undertaking the distance education tutor role.

Family member as geographically isolated distance education tutor	
Average hours per day	6-8 hours per day, approx. 40 weeks per year
Average years spent as DE tutor for one child	8 years (Kindy/preschool plus primary school)
Average total hours spent tutoring one child	9600 –12,800 hours
Minimum Wage	\$23.23 per hour
Unpaid Work/Wages forgone (number of hours x Minimum wage)	\$223,008 - \$297,344
Superannuation @ 11% foregone	\$24,530 - \$32,707

RECOMMENDATION

That the Federal Government introduce a Distance Education Teaching Allowance (DETA) as remuneration the essential work distance education tutors perform in geographically isolated distance education schoolrooms.

ISSUE 2 - Schools of the Air/Schools of Distance Education

ICPA (Aust) strongly believes that Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education who offer education to geographically isolated students should remain based in rural and regional areas so they can best meet their students’ needs. ICPA (Aust) understands that decisions of this nature are principally State- based, however Federal Council wishes to raise awareness of this topic with all levels of government and the community to ensure Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education remain in rural and remote communities and that the resources and support provided for geographically isolated students who have no choice but to be educated via these schools is maintained.

The value and importance of these schools to rural and remote students, families and their communities needs to be understood and appreciated. The tyranny of distance means that geographically isolated distance education students have limited opportunities for face-to-face interaction with their teachers and peers, learning, participation in a regular classroom, assessments, identification of any specific learning needs and other activities. Moving Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education to a centralised urban environment would further limit these opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

Schools of the Air and Schools of Distance Education which cater for geographically isolated students should remain in regional and rural locations to best serve the needs of these students.

ISSUE 3 - Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) – Distance Education (DE) Allowance

Families who educate their children via distance education are required to establish and maintain a schoolroom setting, provide extra learning materials and resources, print necessary learning materials, all of which are supplied to students at mainstream schools. In addition, distance education families often



travel significant distances to participate in school activities that offer interaction and socialisation for their children, incurring considerable travel and accommodation expenses. The AIC Distance Education Allowance assists distance education families with some of these necessary expenses to educate their children when living in geographic isolation. Increasing the existing allowance would assist families with the rising costs of educating children in isolated areas.

With the changing nature of distance education schools, ICPA (Aust) also requests a separate category for geographically isolated students to be established within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme using existing geographic isolation (GI) eligibility to recognise the unique needs of geographically isolated students and ensure that adequate and appropriate assistance continues to be provided to these students who do not have daily access to face-to-face appropriate schooling due to distance as per the original intent of the scheme. The needs of GI students, regarding remoteness, lack of services and related expenses, differ considerably to other categories, which are now included in the scheme. It is also essential that the allowance adequately assists with the out-of-pocket costs incurred by rural families when their children need to study via distance education. Geographically isolated distance education students are a unique disadvantage group due to where they live and financial assistance needs to be maintained and increased to assist with and better reflect the costs associated with educating these students, as per the original intent of the AIC Scheme in order to allow them to access and achieve equitable educational opportunities and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An increase to the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) – Distance Education (DE) Allowance
- A separate category for geographically isolated distance education students be established within the Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) Scheme to ensure that adequate support and assistance is maintained and increased for these students.

ISSUE 4 - Learning Resources For Distance Education Students

ICPA (Aust) is aware that provision of learning materials and resources for distance education is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments, however, request the support of the Federal Government to ensure appropriate resources continue to be supplied to distance education students across Australia.

Families who educate their children via distance education are required to establish and maintain a schoolroom setting, provide extra learning materials and resources, print necessary learning materials all of which are readily supplied to students at mainstream schools. In addition, distance education families often travel significant distances to participate in school activities that offer interaction and socialisation for their children.

A variety of methods of learning should be provided in Schools of Distance Education and delivery methods for geographically isolated families need to remain flexible. For example, students who may have difficulties in accessing an online program for a variety of reasons, would find their study compromised if they had to access their learning materials solely online. Distance education students access their daily learning in a variety of ways, and most depend on a blend of learning materials determined by the school



and communications infrastructure. Working, well-maintained landline phone services and internet access are vital for geographically isolated distance education students as these services provide necessary access to distance education programs.

RECOMMENDATION

Appropriate Learning Resources are available and accessible for Distance Education Students in order to ensure equitable educational access, opportunities, and outcomes for these students.

ISSUE 5 - Support for Volunteer Educator Programs

From ICPA (Aust)'s research, 85% of the geographically isolated distance education tutors across Australia are the mothers of the children who must study via distance education. This person receives no assistance, support, respite nor remuneration for this role as they are required to supervise and assist their students on an ongoing, daily basis in the schoolroom.

The volunteer remote educational support for rural and remote students programs, such as Bush Ed, Aussie Helpers Volunteers for Isolated Student's Education (AHVISE) and Retired Educator Volunteers for Isolated Children's Education (REVISE) aims to support the education of rural students and in particular isolated families involved in distance education. REVISE connects retired teachers with distance education families and coordinates visit by the tutors to these families for periods of approximately 6 weeks during the school year.

These tutors assist distance education families by taking over the role of home tutor the during their stay and provide students with learning guided by a retired teacher and in turn provide respite from the classroom for home tutor mothers/family members. These services are invaluable for the isolated families and ICPA (Aust) is dedicated to ensuring this service, which provides much needed help remains available for families.

RECOMMENDATION

Ensure continued support and funding for volunteer remote educational support services across Australia.