

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.**

**"Access to Education"**



**Submission**  
**to the**  
**Higher Education Standards Panel**  
**on the**  
**Developments in Higher Education**  
**Admission Practices**

**from the**  
**Federal Council**  
**of the**  
**Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.**  
**ICPA (Aust)**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA Aust) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the discussion paper *Developments in Higher Education Admission Practices* and highlight the key issues and challenges concerning access to tertiary education for rural and remote students. ICPA (Aust)'s recommendations will ensure equity of education for rural and remote tertiary students.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, grassroots, not-for-profit, apolitical, national parent organisation, which advocates on behalf of members for equity of access to an appropriate, consistent and high-quality education for all geographically isolated children and students, from early childhood through to tertiary and the provision of services required to achieve this. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia. They often live great distances from their nearest education institution and from services required to support the education of their children.

ICPA (Aust) believes engaging in tertiary education at an institution of their choice should be an option for all young Australians who have the ability, ambition, motivation and desire to attain their goals regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location. Rural and remote students continue to be under-represented at tertiary level. The progression from secondary school to tertiary education can be difficult for all parents, carers and students alike, but those who are geographically isolated face increased variables and complexity during this pivotal transition period. ICPA (Aust) seeks to ensure that these students have access to tertiary education options which will enable them to pursue the career path of their choice.

ICPA (Aust) advocates that students isolated from tertiary education due to location must be recognised as a separate disadvantage group in any consideration of the higher education admission processes so that transparent, easily accessible and appropriate information and support can be provided when considering or pursuing tertiary education.

ICPA members educate their children through different modes due to their geographic isolation; for primary schooling this can be through distance education or rural schools and for secondary education, often boarding school is the only option. Therefore the needs of geographically isolated students vary greatly.

Many rural and remote students live vast distances from higher education institutions, have poor internet services in isolated areas and for boarding students, are away from family support as their parents cannot physically interact with them on a daily basis. Rural and remote students must be given the opportunity to obtain information in various mediums, including phone, internet and face to face through school teachers and/or career advisers to ensure they have all the information available to them as they are often unable to visit university open days to view facilities or on-campus accommodation.

Access to comprehensive, up-to-date information and support for senior secondary career pathways planning is essential for all young Australians regardless of geographic location. Further, higher education institutions must be transparent in their admission processes and offers to students, particularly rural and remote students who often face relocation to take up study. It is imperative that rural and remote students and their families are equipped to make informed decisions about their education pathway including course availability and

delivery options, entry requirements, alternative entrance options, application processes, course costs, accommodation options, campus facilities and support available. For many students living in rural and remote areas, support is often not readily available and difficult to access due to the remoteness of where they live. Additionally rural and remote students who must complete their education at boarding school are not able to discuss face to face with their family the options and choices available to them. This can be detrimental to students' ability to reach their future aspirations.

ICPA (Aust) is appreciative of the websites including *QILT*, *Myfuture*, *Study Assist* and *Course Seeker* which are valuable sites for our members, students and their families. This information needs to be up to date, comprehensive and readily accessible not only to students, but also to parents to ensure they can adequately support their children with both understanding the information and the decision-making process. It is also imperative that staff at schools are well-versed and knowledgeable in various university admission information and processes and have access to resources and training to be able to provide adequate advice to students.

For students whose course and institution preference is dependent on an ATAR ranking as the entry pre-requisite, more support is required for students in years 11 and 12 via teachers, careers advisers and schools, online assistance and a dedicated call centre to assist rural and remote students to understand the influencing factors regarding the process of acceptance into particular tertiary institutions.

It is important that the bonus points allocation and how they are used to adjust ATAR is transparent and that information about bonus point allocation and eligibility are clear and readily available across all institutions. ICPA (Aust) believes the addition of bonus points afforded to rural and remote students will assist in increasing the representation of this cohort at university level.

Furthermore, the range of non-ATAR related admission options including At-school offers, school recommendations and scholarship entry need to be transparent and readily available through all mediums of communication including online, face to face and through schooling institutions to ensure all students, including rural and remote, have equal opportunity to attend university. Greater understanding of how alternative entry options are offered is very important for rural and remote students who often live great distances from their chosen tertiary institution. Information on these offers needs to be distributed to all schools to ensure rural and remote students are aware of this alternative option of receiving a university offer.

ICPA (Aust) also believes that it is essential that rural and remote students and their families are well-informed of options available to them, such as specific allowances and remoteness considerations. Rural and remote students, who study via distance education, in small rural schools or at boarding schools, face unique challenges and barriers both during their schooling and to access a tertiary education and it is imperative that they and their parents are aware of the various assistance and concessions they may be eligible for, to ensure they are given every opportunity to achieve their goals.

A national approach to managing applications across borders would simplify student's applications to their chosen tertiary institution, especially if applying interstate. Many rural

and remote students, by nature of where they live, do not necessarily study at an institution in their home State. Further, for States and Territories such as Tasmania and Northern Territory, that do not offer certain courses, for example Veterinary Science, students would benefit from a national approach.

ICPA (Aust) recommends the above factors are taken into consideration to address the unique needs of students from rural and remote Australia intending to access a tertiary education and appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper.

ICPA (Aust) is more than happy to provide additional information on any of the topics that have been raised should it be required.