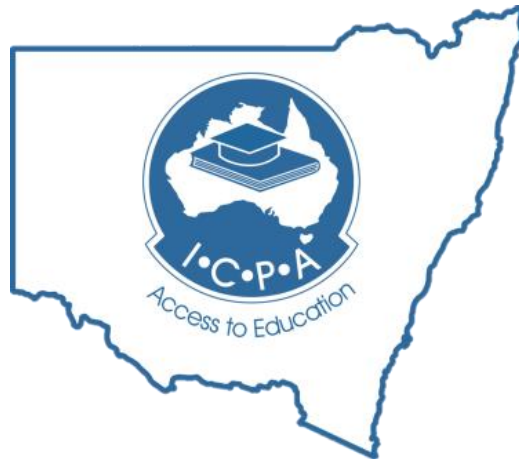


Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales Inc.



Submission to the
**Inquiry into Future Development of the NSW Tertiary Education
Sector**
NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No 3 – Education
July 2020

portfoliocommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Submission Prepared By
Mr Tim Fletcher & Mrs Tanya Mitchell
ICPA-NSW State Council

President: Mrs Claire Butler
"The Vale"
BALRANALD NSW 2715
Ph: 03 5020 6871 M: 0409 206 871
Email: NSWPresident@icpa.com.au

Secretary: Mrs Deborah Castle
"Knockalong" 414 Warburtons Lane
RANKINS SPRINGS NSW 2669
Ph: M: 0428 727 022
Email: NSWSecretary@icpa.com.au

Summary

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales (ICPA NSW) believes that all students irrespective of where they live are entitled to equitable access to education that enables them to participate to their full potential in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the community.

Engaging in a tertiary education at an institution of choice should be an option for all rural and remote students who have the ability, ambition, motivation and aspiration to pursue their goals regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location.

Rural and remote students are under-represented at tertiary level compared to metropolitan students (1). The high cost of relocation to a distant campus, including transport, upfront tuition expenses and living away from the family home are all factors that result in the under-representation of rural and remote tertiary students.

90% of students from rural and remote areas of NSW who gain admission to university and then defer for 12 months will not take up the offer. (1)

Background

This submission has been prepared by ICPA NSW - a voluntary, non-profit advocacy group that has its roots firmly embedded in rural, remote and regional areas across the state.

The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of NSW advocates for members with children who:-

- Attend a rural preschool or access early childhood education through a mobile preschool service
- Attend a small rural or remote school
- Study by Distance Education and School-of-the-Air lessons
- Travel to school by bus or private vehicle (daily, weekly or at the start and end of each term)
- Board away from home to access primary or secondary school at a boarding school, agricultural high school, hostel, private boarding or maintain a second home
- Attend a tertiary institution - University/TAFE/College

(1) University Admission Centre (UAC) data

Inquiry into the Future Development of the NSW Tertiary Education Sector – Terms of Reference

1.

(a) Tertiary education's economic development role, especially university campuses and Country University Centres (CUCs) in regional NSW;

ICPA NSW fully supports regional university campuses and Country University Centres (CUCs) and the role they play in the economic development of the communities in which they are established.

ICPA NSW firmly believes that raising the educational outcomes in rural and remote areas will build stronger communities and lead to informed decision making regarding the future of those communities.

The challenge to address the under-representation of rural and remote students in higher education remains a high-priority of ICPA NSW. Multiple factors are responsible for this under-representation: financial challenges, social-economic status, school experiences, low aspiration, distance, ad hoc preparedness and loss of family and community support networks when attending study out of the district. All students who have the desire to pursue a university education at an institution of their choice must be supported to achieve their goals and to succeed regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location. Rural and remote tertiary students' issues continue to be heard through ICPA NSW persistence and continued lobbying.

ICPA NSW are very pleased with the recent Australian Government announcement of funding for establishing a further six CUC's, one of which is in Parkes, NSW.

The early success of the CUC model in Cooma NSW has shown that moving to the country is not a dead end! Professional people looking for work can continue postgraduate study. If they have a partner, it can mean that they also have continued access to university course work online, available at the Centres with high speed internet, designated study areas and support staff rather than feeling that moving away from a city is a giant leap backwards and a career-crushing choice. It has been a stepping stone for some students - "testing the waters" in tertiary education before moving to full time study or attending a city campus.

(b) The mission of NSW universities with a particular focus on the role of universities to serve specific geographic communities;

Significant public funding flows to the tertiary sector each and every year. It would be nice to think that the provision of tertiary education could be improved by flexible delivery of course content and learning outside the sandstone walls of city universities. Country University Centres (and Regional Study Hubs) do provide infrastructure such as study spaces, video conferencing, computing facilities and internet access, as well as academic support for students studying via distance at partner universities.

The partnership between universities and these centres are a positive step towards reducing disparity between students from rural and remote communities and their metropolitan counterparts.

ICPA NSW has addressed the tertiary issues through correspondence to government and departments. ICPA NSW travel to Canberra and Sydney with meeting delegations, written submissions and face to face meetings to personally highlight the key issues and challenges faced by our rural and remote parents and students.

There have been some positive announcements from the Australian Government as it continues to invest in the rural and remote tertiary sector. After the federal election in 2019, the Hon Dan Tehan MP, Minister for Education said, "Every Australian child, no matter where they live, should have access to the best educational opportunities. It is why continuing the work we have begun with higher education providers to lift Australia's attainment rate outside of our capital cities will remain a paramount priority."

(c) The post-pandemic return of foreign student numbers and the financial sustainability and risk management of strategies of NSW tertiary education institutions;

(d) The quality of university teaching and research, including the extent and impact of insecure employment in the sector;

(e) Levels of integration of the tertiary education sector with industry;

ICPA NSW encourages dialogue between tertiary education providers and industry to develop graduates with relevant skills, problem solving abilities and the capacity to adapt to the evolving workplace in Australia and abroad.

For an example look at the high level of automation and booming growth in agricultural technology. Where once big burly blokes tossed bags of wheat about on farms the demand now is for tech savvy workers to operate variable rate combines and analyse harvest yields on-the-fly.

(f) The quality of campus life and student freedom of expression;

University campus life may often be the first time young adults have been away from the family home. It can offer so many opportunities - social; sporting; cultural immersion; especially to students from a “one horse town” who have never played in a team because there were never enough kids.

Thinking about and then debating issues openly and honestly are fundamental skills in an advanced society. Just because someone disagrees with your idea does not mean they hate you. It may mean they have different experiences, level of understanding or even a cultural or emotional bias.

Good manners and common courtesy are not mandatory but you reap what you sow.

(g) Foreign political interference within the NSW tertiary education sector;
follow the money...**(h) The current levels of coordination and/or support provided to NSW universities by the NSW Government;**

Tertiary students from rural and remote areas can incur huge expenses with regards to living away from home to study. The drought has highlighted these costs. Statistically, students from rural and remote areas who move away for tertiary education are more likely to gain employment in a rural and remote area when they complete their studies – such as nurses, doctors and teachers - it is therefore vital that these students remain supported during their tertiary education. Even so, the current trend is that about three quarters of students who leave the bush to attend tertiary study will not return home.

ICPA NSW has addressed the tertiary issues through correspondence to government and departments. We travel to Canberra and Sydney with meeting delegations, written submissions and face to face meetings to personally highlight the key issues and challenges faced by our rural and remote parents and students.

RECOMMENDATION: That consideration be given to affordable travel subsidies for university students.

(i) The recent experience with online learning and lessons for the further development of alternative models of tertiary education service delivery

- ZOOM platform is not effective in large numbers, asking questions was impossible
 - Easily interrupted (ie bad connections or limited access to internet, mic being left on or not on mute, bad quality camera)
 - Hard to engage with students
- Practical lessons not performed
- Proctor U (online delivery method from United States) very insecure
 - Allowed complete access to Wi-Fi history of all users in the home
 - Had to sign waiver to say university was not liable if anyone hacks their network or any damage that may befall students
 - 5000 signatures for a petition by Western Sydney University students asking for them not to have to use Proctor U but it was either use it or be without access to online studies

RECOMMENDATION: That there be significant changes to security in the way online content is available to those students having to undertake online study.

(j) The appropriateness of current NSW legislation regulating, overseeing and enabling tertiary education; and

(k) Any other related matters.

ICPA NSW will continue to raise our members' issues, to achieve the changes and measures needed to ensure our rural and remote students have the opportunity to achieve a tertiary education commensurate with their aspirations and career plans.

The number of tertiary motions again proposed by our members at our annual state conference highlights the ongoing issues that our tertiary cohort face when accessing higher education.