



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

**FEDERAL COUNCIL**

**"Access to Education"**

**SUBMISSION**

**to the**

**Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees**

**on the**

**Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia Inquiry**

**From the**

**Federal Council**

**of the**

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

**ICPA (Aust)**

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The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, (ICPA), is pleased to provide comments to address some of the Terms of Reference for the review of higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia. ICPA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important area of government decision making.

ICPA is a national, apolitical, volunteer organisation, formed in Bourke in 1971, representing families who live in rural and remote Australia. Our goal is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for all geographically isolated children and thus ensure they have access to a continuing and appropriate education from the earlier years of schooling through to post secondary. Consideration must be given to factors which affect the education of these students that are not necessarily considered within the context of metropolitan education. Above all, ICPA is focused on ensuring demography is not a marker for destiny for students from rural and remote Australia.

For a number of decades ICPA has highlighted to government the issues that impact on the agricultural industry. The very reason for the formation of ICPA in 1971 was due to the effects of rising production costs, reduced commodity returns and limited job opportunities throughout rural and remote Australia. Today, these factors continue to see many families move to larger towns seeking employment and better educational opportunities for their children. It is interesting to note that in a CSIRO survey in 1973, lack of schooling and opportunities for education were given as the greatest contributing factor towards the decision of families to leave rural and remote parts of Australia and this is still applicable today.

In recent years the effects of the widespread, long running drought has impacted on the viability of the agricultural industry and offered little hope for young people looking for a future in agriculture. Adding to this a number of agricultural colleges that offered related courses have closed, narrowing the pathways to the industry. Unfortunately, now that prospects have improved as the drought has broken across much of Australia many institutions and courses are no longer available.

If the agricultural industry is to survive it is vital that governments address the inequities families residing in rural areas face when accessing education. Serious consideration must be given to financial support for students who live great distances from their universities and training centres, and must relocate to attend them. Funding must also be for industry that either support or service the agricultural industry, often in small and or remote areas.

ICPA advocates that this review examine methods of providing adequate funding at the federal level, and comparable rates of assistance at state and territory levels, that will allow students to access their universities and training centres, including travel, accommodation and the cost of living away from home.

Among the greatest challenges facing rural areas is attracting and retaining qualified staff in order to improve community development and cohesion. A programme that would encourage metropolitan students to take up placements in rural areas would be of great benefit to the agricultural industry, and indeed all industries and services that support the agricultural industry. Consideration should be given to increasing pathways to agribusiness courses, for example an agricultural apprenticeship and a reduction in HECS fees to encourage students to take up studies in agricultural and related fields.

These students are the future work force of rural Australia and need to be supported in order to fulfil their career aspirations.

**ICPA requests that adequate funding be available from both Federal and State and Territory governments to assist students undertaking practicums and training courses necessary to complete their courses.**

- Assistance must be available to help meet the costs of travel and accommodation for students relocating and travelling either to or from rural or isolated areas for their training.
- Funding must be comparable between States and Territories.
- Reduction in HECS fees for students undertaking Agricultural Science and related courses.

In order to complete their courses, many students need to relocate permanently or travel regularly to participate in compulsory practical course requirements. The financial costs are significant in securing temporary or permanent accommodation, as well as travelling to and from their homes to metropolitan or large regional centres.

Currently the financial assistance offered by states and territories is sporadic for students who are required to move away from home to secure an apprenticeship, complete training blocks or enrol in training courses offered by institutions other than universities.

Students undertaking teaching, nursing, those involved in the building, mechanical and agricultural industries, amongst others, make up the workforce needed to support the broader agricultural and agribusiness industries. It is vital that students are assisted financially while undertaking their placements and training.

**ICPA supports the introduction of a National Agriculture Apprenticeship.**

- A national agricultural apprenticeship would allow young people to gain formal qualifications through a mixture of study and work.
- This course would help address the widening gap between skilled agricultural labour supply and demand.

ICPA supports the introduction of a National Agricultural Apprenticeship, as proposed at the *Heywire Youth Issues Forum* by ABC's 2010 Heywire competition entrants. This initiative would benefit young people already working in the industry and would help to build a positive perception of the agricultural industry.

Learning areas might include animal husbandry, cropping programmes and business management. It could also encompass introductory units such as engineering, butchering and carpentry. Most of the course units already exist at various institutions around the country and would simply need to be brought together under one recognised apprenticeship.

**ICPA requests the Federal Government introduces a Tertiary Access Allowance, (TAA), as financial assistance to rural and remote students who must live away from home to access tertiary education.**

- One of the greatest barriers facing regional and remote students wanting to participate in tertiary education is the cost of relocating away from the family home.
- TAA must be available to access tertiary studies that are both transparent and sufficient to meet the costs of relocating.

Students who need to relocate face the prospect of having to move great distances from home. This places an enormous strain on the student and their family's financial resources.

Students from regional and remote areas face relocation expenses regardless of their or their family's means. Whilst dependent Youth Allowance recipients needing to relocate receive a Relocation Scholarship, independent Youth Allowance recipients are not eligible for a relocation scholarship, despite facing the same relocation costs as dependent recipients. Those students not eligible for Youth Allowance because of arbitrary income threshold limits and unrealistic assets tests, and who still need to live away from the family home to access their tertiary study, receive no assistance whatsoever.

ICPA believes this measure alone would make a huge difference to the number of students from rural and isolated areas who engage in tertiary study, including the all important areas of agriculture and agribusiness.