



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia

**FEDERAL COUNCIL
"Access to Education"**

**SUBMISSION
to the**

**Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace
Relations**

on the

**Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill
2010**

from

**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 Aust), is pleased to provide comments to address the inequity facing Inner Regional students, who are being discriminated against because of the location of their family home. ICPA represents families who live in rural and remote Australia. Our goal is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for these children and thus ensure they have access to a continuing and appropriate education.

ICPA is focused on ensuring demography is not a marker of destiny for students from rural and remote Australia. We therefore advocate that this review examine methods of providing an equal opportunity for all tertiary students from regional Australia who need to relocate to attend a university of their choice.

Families who reside in rural and regional Australia continue to be frustrated by the increasing cost for their children to access a tertiary education and the lack of Government support to help get these children through their university years. Many country students needing to relocate from the family home to attend a university receive no Government support and their families struggle to meet the financial costs of assisting their children while at these institutions.

ICPA believes that inner regional students should be included in the guidelines which currently apply to outer regional, remote and very remote students for qualifying for independent Youth Allowance. Inner regional students face similar problems and expenses of relocation to attend a university as outer regional and remote students but they are being denied the ability to qualify for independent Youth Allowance in an 18 month period. Many country students return to a rural area once they have received a qualification and bring with them the learned skills highly valued in our regional areas. Numerous country students defer their tertiary courses to try to qualify for independent Youth Allowance as the prohibitive cost of relocating to attend a university and the associated living expenses once relocated are not affordable for a majority of students.

Employment in regional areas is often seasonal and hard to find on a permanent basis. People work very long hours during busy times of sowing, picking, mustering and harvest but this work is not year round. It is virtually impossible for rural students to qualify for independent Youth Allowance under the current 30 hours per week self-supporting rule.

Young people living in an inner regional area, hoping to qualify as independent for Youth Allowance, have no choice but to work on average 30 hours per week. The hours worked are averaged over periods of time that suggest the work has been full-time in nature. For example, working:

- at least 120 hours in each of 19 periods of four weeks or
- at least 390 hours in each of 6 periods of 13 weeks

Under these criteria even a two week holiday or sickness could prevent a student from qualifying if they are paid on an hourly basis. All this may result in at least a two-year deferral of a course in order to meet the only qualifying criteria for independence for a student from an inner regional area. Most universities do not

allow two year deferral and many of the students who defer their studies never take up their positions at university. The retention of this single qualifying criterion will do little to increase the rate of rural students taking up tertiary studies.

Why should it be more expensive for rural students to achieve a tertiary qualification than the metropolitan student population? The current measures for income support do not adequately recognise the extra costs incurred by all rural and remote students attempting to access a tertiary education. They do not address the inequities rural students are subjected to because they do not have access to a tertiary institution they can attend whilst living at home. Even in rural areas that do have a tertiary institution it is frequently the case that the courses offered are significantly limited in range compared to those on offer in urban institutions, thus denying the 'local' rural student the ability to study their desired course. Why should the decision of which tertiary institution to attend, come down to the proximity of it to where you live instead of being based on availability of the course of study you wish to undertake?

Engaging in tertiary education should be an option for all Australian students. The ability to access education is one of the key considerations in determining whether a student can undertake tertiary studies. There is no doubt rural students are facing special challenges as the equity of educational access for rural and remote students is being significantly restricted. In Australia in 2010, many students living in rural and remote areas are still being denied the right of access to tertiary education due to lack of affordability. Distance has an associated cost factor as the logistics for rural and remote students to journey to an institution offering tertiary studies is often beyond their financial means. The high up-front costs of accessing and paying for accommodation, fuel for travel to access their place of study, along with living costs, all impact on rural and remote student access. Inner regional students, outer regional, remote and very remote students alike, bear this same cost arising from the need to move away from home to access tertiary studies.

ICPA believes the use in isolation of the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC) for residential location in order to determine which workforce participation criteria is to be used for assessing independent Youth Allowance, is flawed. Without due consideration to the important factor of ability to access tertiary institutions within a defined geographical area, merely considering where one resides is an unsuitable measure.

The Remoteness Area classification of the ASGC, like other statistical geographies, provides a framework for the collection, dissemination and analysis of data. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, in releasing ASGC Remoteness Areas, advised caution in using remoteness classifications in isolation from other variables when addressing policy issues such as funding. It was not intended to be a stand-alone indicator.

The ASGC was used by the Government simply because it was available; the measure was not specifically designed to accurately determine tertiary educational access. There are many regional towns included in the guidelines where the distance to

attend a university is great and there are limited or no tertiary institutions available to students residing in these inner regional towns. The placement of ASGC boundaries split some towns, so classification of zones and the ability to qualify in one zone versus another may depend on which side of the street you reside.

The greatest barrier to access to an appropriate higher education is the lack of adequate financial means to fund the access. Regional Australia needs an educated population. We need to get better at what we do in order to feed the world's growing population. We need an educated population to support the infrastructure of rural Australia. It is vital that every student from rural Australia be given the same opportunities to access an appropriate tertiary education as their metropolitan counterparts. Most city dwellers simply do not wish to move to the country to take up employment so we as a nation are reliant on rural students returning to rural areas to keep Australia a productive and progressive food and fibre-producing nation.

ICPA thanks the Senate Standing Committee for the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010 and urges all Committee members to consider the necessity of enabling rural students, wherever their family home, the ability to access an appropriate tertiary course. ICPA would be pleased to appear as a witness before the Committee at the forthcoming public hearing, to be held at Parliament House on December 17th and to thus give the Committee an opportunity to hear first hand and in greater detail, the overwhelming reasons for passing the amendment to this important legislation.