



Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia (Inc)

**FEDERAL COUNCIL
“Access to Education”**

SUBMISSION

to the

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training**

for the

Inquiry into Teacher Education

from

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

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**Compiled by
Glennis Crawford
Federal Councillor, ICPA (AUST)**

**Contact:
(Mrs) Glennis Crawford
Federal Secretary
ICPA (Aust)
PO Box 540
WAIKERIE SA 5330
Fed@Secretaryicpa.com.au**

www.icpa.com.au

The Federal Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to respond to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, Inquiry into Teacher Education.

BACKGROUND

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have equality of access to a continuing and appropriate education. It encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. The member families of the Association reside in rural and remote Australia and all share a common goal of access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this. The children are educated in small rural schools, at boarding schools, school term hostels and by distance education.

STATEMENT

ICPA (Aust) believes that teaching in rural and remote Australia is demanding and challenging and requires students to be trained so that they are better prepared for posting in a rural and remote location. ICPA (Aust) also recognises that teachers, particularly those who are in their early years of teaching need support whilst in their rural and remote location, in terms of mentoring and professional development.

COMMENTS ON THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

ICPA (Aust) focuses its submission on the Terms of Reference 3 and 5.

Term of Reference 3

Examine attrition rates from teaching courses and reasons for that attrition.

ICPA (Aust) believes that trainee teachers who come from rural and remote areas of Australia are more likely to return to a rural and remote location on graduating. However, there is a need of financial assistance for rural and remote trainee teachers so their university teaching course can be completed. Many young trainee teachers from rural and remote Australia are unable to sustain the financial rigors of living away from home for the years of their course, and hence do not complete their studies.

The options open for rural and remote students are eligibility to Youth Allowance or the acquisition of a scholarship. Unfortunately many rural and remote students are ineligible for Youth Allowance and therefore must finance their own living away from home expenses. This is an enormous imposition on rural and remote families who have already spent considerable finances in educating their student to the level required for university entry to a teacher training course, as many have had to live away from home in their secondary years to access an appropriate education.

Students who have to live away from home to access teacher training are burdened with the costs associated with rent, daily food requirements and general living expenses like electricity, as well as adjusting to life in a capital city or a regional city location. They frequently lack the financial and social support of their family as compared to a trainee teacher who is able to live at home.

Some students are fortunate enough to gain a scholarship through their chosen university or through other public and private means, but these scholarships are limited in number, and frequently academically based.

The Review outcomes need to:

- Make available some form of tertiary access allowance for students who come from rural and remote areas of Australia to access a university teaching course.
- Make available specific scholarships for rural and remote students over the period of their course, so that their studies can be completed without the financial implications that they now encounter.

Term of Reference 5

Examine the educational philosophy underpinning the teacher training courses.

1. A significant number of trainee teachers on graduation will be appointed to a rural and remote location. It is therefore appropriate that **all** trainee teachers complete a compulsory unit in rural and remote teaching.

This compulsory unit needs to consider the following points as part of such a module.

- Providing trainee teachers an overall view and exposure to living and working in rural and remote locations. Living in these locations exposes the person to the local community and it is important that a newly appointed teacher is aware of community expectations in regards to behaviour and interaction with the community. Essentially a teacher in a rural and remote location is in the “public eye” during their working time, social and cultural activities. This is a far cry from teaching in a city location, where there can be little or no interaction between the teacher and community. The module should give students information that often essential services, like dental and medical service, banking, etc, are not always easily accessible in rural and remote locations.
- Management of multi-year level classes. Although ICPA (Aust) recognises that many schools operate with multi-year classes, it is more likely that this situation occurs in rural and remote locations. The clustering of year levels can depend greatly on the size and resources, including teacher allocation, of the school, but it is not unrealistic to expect that some schools with only two teachers are teaching all subjects across three or four year levels.
- Recognising and management of children with learning difficulties, learning disabilities and those who are gifted and talented. It is well known that children who have special learning needs are first identified by the teacher. It is therefore imperative that trainee teachers have the knowledge about the education of children with special needs and where to seek assistance for the management of a child’s program of study.
- Exposing a trainee teacher to the methodologies behind the teaching of students in distance education. Distance education students can be learning in a small rural school or in an isolated location including station homestead, fishing boat, mining camp etc. Learning through distance education mode is becoming highly technical with the introduction of information technologies as part of the delivery of courses.

- Exposing trainee teachers to cross- cultural teaching with emphasis on teaching Indigenous students.
 - Ensuring that trainee teachers have experience in a rural practicum. ICPA (Aust) believes it is important that trainee teachers undertake a rural practicum, to have a better understanding of what it is like to be living and working in a rural or remote location.
2. A significant number of trainee teachers undertake a rural practicum. These students are often those who see their teaching career in a rural and remote location and are already undertaking some elective modules in their course in this area. However, it is often the case that these students undertaking a rural practicum, for professional experience, which prepares them for their chosen career opportunity, are faced with added costs. Many students work part time to off set their living costs, and undertaking a rural practicum requires them to leave their job. They can be faced with double rental costs they being at their accommodation in the location of their course and also in the rural and remote community where they undertake their rural practicum. The costs associated with travelling to some rural and remote locations are expensive, considering the price of fuel and the limited public transport options. These reasons alone make the option of undertaking a rural practicum impossible for many trainee teachers.

There is indication that government and non-government universities have some programs to support a limited number of placements in rural teaching practicums. However all systems do not have the financial resources to provide for the necessary level of support across a range of semesters for the number of students who wish to participate in a rural practicum. ICPA (Aust) supports universities in their efforts to obtain funding for students undertaking a rural practicum.

The Review outcomes need to:

- Make it compulsory for all trainee teachers to undertake a course in rural and remote teaching, including the methodologies in distance education.
- Give trainee teachers the means, in monetary terms, to undertake a rural or remote teaching practicum, so they are not severely financially disadvantaged because of their desire to broaden their experience which would assist in their future career development.

SUMMARY

In 1999 and 2000 The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) held a National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education. The Commission’s recommendations included five recommendations in relation to teacher training. ICPA (Aust) draws this review committee’s attention to those recommendations, which have not been enacted upon. These recommendations by HREOC can be found in their publication “Recommendations – National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education”, page 44 and 45. These recommendations can also be viewed on the website http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/rural_education/

There are many programs associated with rural and remote teacher training, including very successful but limited by resources models in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. These programs must be supported by governments so that trainee teachers are given the means by which they can achieve their career ambitions. Ultimately, the beneficiaries of programs as mentioned above are the children in rural and remote Australia.

Rural Australia and its allied industries contribute 17% to Australia's GDP. This figure is very significant in relation to the overall population. It would be expected that this financial contribution by rural and remote Australia should go some way to supporting the aspirations of our rural and remote residents, such as those seeking teacher training and willing to pursue their career in rural and remote Australia.