

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

"Access to Education"



**Submission**

to the

**Higher Education Standards Panel Secretariat**

on the

**Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes**

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 *Consultation on the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes* with recommendations for consideration to ensure equity of education for rural and remote tertiary students.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, non-partisan parent body dedicated to ensuring all geographically isolated students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education. This encompasses the education of children from early childhood through to tertiary. The majority of member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of achieving equitable access to education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this. Tertiary students whose family home is in rural and remote Australia, live great distances from their nearest tertiary institution and frequently must live away from home to access further education.

ICPA (Aust) believes, engaging in tertiary education at an institution of choice should be an option for all young Australians who have the ability and desire to fulfil their goal regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location. We advocate that students isolated from tertiary education due to location, must be recognised as a separate disadvantaged group so that assistance is provided and enhances the access to tertiary education. These students who continue to be under-represented at university, face many barriers to accessing tertiary education including costs of relocation, tuition and living expenses, socio-economic status, distance from tertiary education institutions and preparedness.

To ensure equity of access to a tertiary education and to improve the educational outcomes and participation rates of rural and remote students, ICPA (Aust) recommends the following:

### **Questions**

*1. Based on your experience, what is the most important information needed to help potential higher education students determine which course to study and which institution to apply for? Please feel free to rank the different types of information in order of importance.*

- *Examples could include information about course prerequisites, ATAR cut-offs, other non-ATAR-related entry options or requirements, possible career pathways and qualification requirements, institution reputation, campus facilities, course cost, student peer cohort characteristics, family history or other connections to a particular institution, accreditation of a course by a professional body or association, graduate employment and earnings outcomes, student reviews or surveys of teaching quality, recommendations from friends or family.*

For rural and remote students to make informed decisions about which course to study and what institution to apply to, they require information on entrance ATAR scores, alternative entrance options, application processes, course costs, accommodation options campus facilities and support available.

Due to the distance rural and remote students live from higher education institutions and often poor internet services in isolated areas, these students should be given the opportunity to obtain information on the university, courses available, application process, facilities and services in various mediums, including phone, internet and face to face, to

ensure they have all of the information available to them. Many of these rural and remote students cannot attend open days or have poor internet capacity limiting their options for virtual tours and web conferencing, to gain course information or assistance with applications. Having “student mentors” that prospective students can access to inquire about how courses operate and the university itself can be very helpful.

*2. Is knowledge about how the ATAR rankings are calculated and published ‘cut-off’ thresholds a significant influencing factor on course and institution preferences? How could this information be made more accessible and useful?*

The calculation of ATAR rankings do play a part in course and institution preferences. There needs to be more support 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 for acceptance into particular tertiary institutions.

*3. Is there sufficient information about how ‘bonus points’ are awarded and used to adjust ‘raw’ ATARs sufficiently understood? Should the application of bonus points be more consistent across different institutions? Is the current variety of different bonus point rules appropriate to meet the needs of individual students and institutions?*

It is important that the awarding of bonus points is transparent, consistent nationally and across all institutions to ensure equity for all students including those disadvantaged by living in regional and remote areas. Information about bonus point allocation, eligibility and availability, needs to be clear and readily available. The addition of bonus points afforded to rural and remote students will assist in increasing the representation of this cohort at university level.

See ***Widening gaps: what NAPLAN tells us about student progress*** by Pete Goss and Julie Sonnemann, <http://www.grattan.edu.au/report/widening-gaps/>

*4. Is there sufficient knowledge of the range of alternative admissions procedures employed by higher education institutions?*

- *Examples could include ‘early’ offers on the basis of previous year’s cut-off or school recommendations.*

The range of alternative admission procedures should be transparent and readily available through all mediums, including online, face to face and through schooling institutions. This is particularly relevant for rural and remote students who due to their geographical isolation often find it hard to access this information. Early entry, school recommendations and scholarship entry would all be appropriate alternative entry for rural and remote students.

*5. Should there be an annual report of the proportion of students accepted into courses by each higher education institution on the basis of their ATARs and/or what the median ATARs was for each course?*

Rural and remote students remain under-represented in tertiary education. Reports including demographic information applied against both regional/metropolitan institutions and ATAR scores would be beneficial.

*6. Do the current state-based Tertiary Admissions Centre arrangements adequately cope with students' desire for mobility to institutions across state borders? Would a more national approach to managing applications across borders be beneficial?*

A national approach to managing applications across borders would simplify our student's applications to their chosen tertiary institution, especially if applying interstate. Many rural and remote students planning on a tertiary education, by nature of where they live, do not necessarily go to an institution in their home state. For states and territories such as Tasmania and Northern Territory, that do not offer certain courses, for example veterinary science, our students would benefit by a national approach.

*7. Is there an understanding of how such mechanisms as early offers, second round offers and forced offers affect the transparency of higher education entry? How, if at all, should these factors be dealt with for the purposes of transparency?*

Improved transparency of non-ATAR related entry options would ensure all students including rural and remote, have equal opportunity to attend university. Greater understanding of how early offers and second round offers eventuate, is very important for rural and remote students, who often live great distances from their chosen tertiary institution.

*8. What information or enhancements do you think should be added to the Australian Government's Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) website?*

Websites including QILT, Myfuture and StudyAssist are valuable tools for our members, students and their families. Rural and remote students need to have more options to be able to access this information, as many are not able to access a reliable internet service. Schools, teachers and careers advisers must be able to access and provide this information in alternative forms, to assist students make appropriate tertiary choices. These websites need to recognize rural and remote students in their information comparisons. A combined website including university performance measures and a comprehensive service that serves to inform and educate about all career options across the education and training, and employment spectrum would be very beneficial.

9. *How best should comparable information on student admissions procedures be made available to the public? What is the most appropriate and effective way to communicate information to students? What information or enhancements do you think should be added to Tertiary Admission Centre websites, university and non-university institution websites, and/or Australian Government websites such as QILT and Study Assist?*

The majority of our members have students being schooled through distance education or attending boarding school for their secondary education due to geographical isolation. These students should be provided with an opportunity to access this information through careers advisers, schools, teachers, websites, face to face or telephone. Isolation brings communication issues so it is important to have an appropriate and effective range of communication options. For boarding students, this information needs to be accessible to both parents and students to facilitate parents to assist their children with both understanding the information and decision making. This would also ensure consistency of information.

10. *What special measures are needed to ensure equity of access for disadvantaged students?*

Recognition needs to be made that rural and remote students are a disadvantaged group and entitled to equity of access to tertiary education through appropriate career advice, access to tertiary institution and course information, early entry into their chosen course, bonus points allocation commensurate with location, early accommodation allocation and recognition of the financial costs associated with relocation to study their chosen course.

11. *Can you suggest any other changes that would improve public awareness and understanding of tertiary admissions processes?*

- Recognition that geographically isolated students are a disadvantaged group due to location
- A variety of means to deliver information needs to be employed as those living in rural and remote areas often have poor internet service.
- Clear and transparent pathways for rural and remote students.
- Improved access to information.

ICPA (Aust) recommends that the Higher Education Standards Committee take the above factors into consideration to address the needs of students from rural and remote Australia intending to access a tertiary education.