

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Department of Education and Training Higher Education Group

on the

Implementation of Regional Study Hubs 2018

from the

Federal Council

of the

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

ICPA (Aust)

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Contact:
(Mrs) Suzanne Wilson
Federal Secretary
ICPA (Aust)
122/8 Gardiner St
DARWIN NT 0800
FedSecretary@icpa.com.au
Phone: 0418 830 214

Contact:
(Mrs) Wendy Hick
Federal President
ICPA (Aust)
Thorntonia Station
CAMOOWEAL QLD 4828
FedPresident@icpa.com.au
Phone: 07 4995 3266

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Discussion Paper on Implementation of Regional Study Hub Initiative.

Since 1971, ICPA (Aust), a voluntary, apolitical parent body has represented member families, the majority who reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia. The goal for our 2700-member families is to achieve equity of educational opportunity for all children living in rural and remote areas, thus ensuring they have access to a continuing and appropriate education determined by their aspirations and abilities rather than the location of their home.

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the announcement of the implementation of up to eight Regional Study Hubs that will provide greater access to study support and infrastructure to higher education for regional, rural and remote Australia and address the lower participation rates of rural and remote students in higher education.

The potential benefits for regional and remote students who wish or need to remain in their local regional area for the entire or part of their chosen higher education study utilising regional study hubs include affordability, choice, ease of access, peer and supervisor support, reliable and affordable internet services, the ability to better balance work and family demands and remain in their local community.

Regional Study Hubs (RSH) criteria:

Level of higher education provision in the region – would a study hub enhance provision? Is there a gap in existing offerings in the region?

Some urban-based university courses require practicums in rural areas as part of their syllabus; utilising nearby resources for practicums/lab experience would enhance these regional study hubs’ provision. Regional Study Hubs in areas that can offer practicums as well as hands on lab experience when needed would alleviate regional students needing to relocate for these practicums and lab sessions. The Regional Study Hubs may also be able to build relationships for students attending at urban universities to also access rural/regional practicums through the Regional Study Hubs.

The availability of a regional study hub would also provide local businesses offering apprenticeships, assistance with the theory component of a course. Local businesses can also offer a wealth of skills and expertise that could be utilised. when needed in specific areas.

Regional study hubs would undoubtedly improve the provision of higher education in the regions. The hubs should be seen as a supplement to higher education provided in larger centres or as one of a number of choices for regional students to access higher education.

Distance to university campuses or education providers – while it is not proposed that there be a specified proximity from established providers, study hubs aim to meet a need where a traditional university campus is not viable.

Travel to distant/interstate university campuses for specific course choices and socialisation would still be required will still be the preferred choice of some by some rural and remote tertiary students. The availability of a Regional Study Hub closer to their home (though still possibly hundreds of kms away) may encourage other geographically-isolated students to access a tertiary education who would not otherwise do so.

Human resources – the availability and involvement of people with relevant skills to support the work of the regional study hub.

Local skilled personnel could be accessed to teach, lecture, assist with technology, provide secretarial support, engagement and counselling; if not available locally, then the attraction of residents to support the hub would be very beneficial to rural communities. Fly-in fly-out scenarios would have little benefit to the community. Extra skilled *residents* arriving in town to support the study hubs would help boost the local population.

Educational resources – the availability, and level of access to, electronic and physical resources which support student learning.

In order for a Regional Study Hub to be successful, there would need to be many separate study areas equipped with the latest equipment including computers, printers and Wi-Fi and a lecture theatre. The provision of fast, reliable and affordable internet and telephony is essential to provide the better communication services required for online study, webinars as well as video-conferencing for lectures and tutorials.

Services to be provided – applicants will be assessed on the number and type of services that they provide. For example, providers who deliver pastoral, technical and social services in addition to educational support will be viewed more favourably than those that offer fewer services.

The availability of regional study hub supervisors on-site is required to provide face-to-face contact, technology assistance, pastoral support, motivation and explain university procedures. Face-to-face contact with peers, socialisation, cultural and academic support albeit on a much smaller scale would enable discussion of ideas and are a critical element of both relationship building and personal development.

ICPA (Aust) looks forward to the establishment of the Regional Study Hubs and the benefits they will provide for those rural and remote students who choose to utilise the study hubs for their higher education pathway. They will enable rural students, wherever their family home, the ability to access an appropriate tertiary course via the delivery mode of their choice.