

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia Inc.

"Access to Education"



Submission

to the

Review

of

Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training

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 of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to ***the Review of senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training*** by (i) addressing issues relevant to rural and remote students and (ii) making recommendations for consideration to improve equity of access to post-school pathways education and support for rural and remote senior secondary students; helping students make well-informed choices and to reach their aspirations and potential.

ICPA (Aust) is a voluntary, apolitical 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. Students whose family home is in rural and remote Australia, live great distances from their nearest training institution and frequently must live away from home to access further education.

ICPA (Aust) acknowledges the panel's recognition of those who live in regional, rural and remote areas as a specific disadvantage group in their terms of reference. Access to information on and support for senior secondary career pathways is critical for all young Australians' future planning regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location. For many students living in rural and remote areas, difficulty in accessing information and support is proving restrictive to them achieving their future aspirations. Support is often not readily available and difficult to access due to the remoteness of where these students live. Availability and flexibility of modes of delivery of information/courses and difficulty accessing work placement opportunities can present real barriers to engagement in pathways into jobs and careers. Rural and remote students deserve access to options for post-school that are commensurate with their ability, skills, ambition, aspirations, passion, interests and motivation, and the opportunity to succeed.

Issues for Rural and Remote Students

To ensure equity of access to senior secondary pathways and to improve the successful transition to their post-school career pathway for rural and remote students, ICPA (Aust) believes the following challenges need to be considered for these students:

- **Affordability**
 - A major deterrent to rural and remote students participating in the tertiary and VET system and their ability to access their chosen course on a daily basis is the cost of accessing chosen courses.
 - The unpredictability, complexity and fragmented nature of the current income support system means far too many young rural people are simply not even contemplating the tertiary or VET system. In effect, their aspirations are being driven and dictated by their ability to access financial assistance while they study and train. It is necessary for many rural and remote students to take up part-time work to manage financially while studying tertiary and VET courses. Maintaining this part-time work can have a detrimental effect on their studies, and can be difficult to maintain when on compulsory course placements away from their institution or when going home for semester breaks.
 - Recognition needs to be made that rural and remote students may need to relocate to attend work placement, university or training institutions away from home, incurring high accommodation and travel expenses.
- **Accessibility and availability**
 - Training providers, courses and practicum places in rural and remote locations to facilitate the completion of the course including practical course components may not be readily available.

- Students in rural and remote locations are constrained in their ability to complete courses due to a lack of easy, regular access to appropriate businesses to conduct the practical component of their chosen course.
 - The cost of delivery of courses to rural and remote areas can be prohibitive for service providers in both the private and government RTO sectors, reducing access to courses for students outside metropolitan areas.
- **Communication issues**
 In rural areas, students often live great distances from training centres and the quality and capability of internet and communication services may make accessing and completing online components of a program challenging. Data restrictions for Sky Muster satellite internet customers is particularly problematic, as while an Educational Service is available to students enrolled in Schools of Distance Education for primary and secondary education, tertiary and vocational education students do not qualify for the additional data offered by the Sky Muster Education Service. A large percentage of rural students live in areas where only Sky Muster satellite internet is available or possibly mobile broadband where data can be cost-prohibitive. Expanding the Sky Muster Education service to include tertiary students and adding unmetered educational content to the new Sky Muster Plus satellite internet plans would also prove very helpful to these students. Rural and remote students need a variety of means of delivery.
 - **Access to Quality Staff**
 It is essential that suitably qualified staff in regional and remote locations are engaged, with a high level of knowledge and skills relevant to the curriculum being taught and must extend to the career pathway curriculum. These teachers must have access to regular, affordable upskilling opportunities and professional development to ensure their skills and knowledge remain of high standard and relevant to emerging trends and demands of business/industry.

 Onerous teacher registration requirements in various jurisdictions further limits the availability of skilled teachers in these rural and remote areas. ICPA (Aust) believes that an alternative, flexible pathway could be made for these teachers to retain their teacher registration to ensure utilisation of these skilled teachers within rural and remote contexts to enhance and increase careers pathway programs offered in these areas.
 - **Transparency**
 Adequate information needs to be available to provide career pathways advice via appropriate and effective communication means on a national platform to support consumers' choices with regard to course availability, entry requirements, pre-requisites, costs and financial support in order for an informed decision to be made. There is a plethora of information available which is difficult to navigate and locate.

 ICPA (Aust) supports an agent or an intermediary to improve transparency and flow of information and ensure informed decisions about learning pathways to rural and remote students and their parents/carers. The newly formed www.courseseeker.edu.au website devised for tertiary information could be a basis for a single online careers pathway information platform and provides a comparison website with information including providers, job availability, prerequisites, costs, government support, and has tools to assist with career pathway decision-making and identification of individual career options tailored to interests and abilities. It is important that all career pathways are encouraged as acceptable and valued career paths. ICPA hopes the National Careers Institute fulfils its purpose in helping to ensure school's career advisors are providing consistent information.

- **Skills**

Rural and remote students must have access to the same career pathway opportunities as offered to metropolitan students. Students need to be supported in the development of skills including teamwork, communication and interpersonal skills, problem solving, creativity and entrepreneurship and job skills including curriculum vitae writing and interview skills, to be an effective contributor to the workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

ICPA (Aust) recommends the following to address the challenges for the rural and remote students we represent so they can better understand the decisions that they need to make to build the working lives to which they aspire.

- Rural and remote students need to be given equitable access to support and resources when in secondary school to assist them to develop the essential skills and knowledge associated with making decisions on their future pathways. The mode of delivery of this support and resources may need to be adapted to suit the location of the students
- Assistance needs to be expanded and improved for rural and remote students to ensure courses, training providers and workplaces are accessible. Rural and remote students often have to relocate to access their courses and this comes at an immense cost. ICPA (Aust) recommends expanding and simplifying allowances for the expenses incurred to access courses and costs associated relocation, travel and accommodation expenses. Support needs to also be available for these students who may experience social and emotional challenges due to the need to leave their local, known communities.
- Expansion of online or virtual learning and training opportunities and resources would improve accessibility for students in rural and remote areas, however continued improvement in availability, accessibility and affordability in internet and communication services is required for regional, rural and remote schools, teachers, students, parents and communities is necessary for this to occur. It is imperative for the Sky Muster Education Service to be extended to VET and tertiary students.
- The attraction and retention of teachers and VET educators in these locations requires attention to ensure the sustainability of high-quality learning environments for rural and remote students.

ICPA (Aust) is appreciative of the Australian Government's commitment to students in rural and remote areas reaching their potential in their chosen career pathway. Quality access to career information and pathways is pivotal for rural and remote students, their families and rural communities as potentially trainees/students will return to the rural setting bringing back skills to their local area. This in turn will benefit rural and remote communities by enhancing their economic and social sustainability and improve viability and progress.

Rural and remote students face unique, multiple challenges in making decisions about their future whether that pathway is into the workforce, higher education or training. Young people need to follow their skills, career aspirations, interests and needs and be given the access to options so they can make well-informed choices.