



# National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy

## Submission form

**Welcome to the submission process for the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Strategy).**

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group invites all interested parties to put forward ideas on the [framing paper](#) released on 20 December 2018.

The Advisory Group is seeking action-orientated responses to the challenges and key questions identified in this paper. The paper outlines the background of the strategy formation, the problem facing regional, rural and remote education and the challenges faced by those communities.

Your responses to the Framing Paper should focus on practical steps the Government could take to improve tertiary education access and attainment for people from regional, rural and remote backgrounds.

The form can be submitted any time before public submissions close at **5:00pm (AEDT) on 1 February 2019**.

Please note that the fields in the form are text only and pictures cannot be included. To return your completed form or if you experience difficulties in completing the form, please contact the Strategy Secretariat at [RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au](mailto:RegionalStrategy@education.gov.au).

### Note:

- information provided through the submission process may be published with your permission, including in the documentation relating to the Strategy and on the department's website
- questions marked with a \* require an answer to be provided.

## Privacy agreement

I agree to the Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions of Submissions included at [Attachment A](#) to this document\*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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*Note: If you do not accept the Privacy Notice and Conditions of Submissions please do not complete or submit this form.*

I agree to have my submission published.\*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

## Your details

Title\*

Mrs

First name\*

Suzanne

Last name\*

Wilson

E-mail address\*

[REDACTED]

State/Territory\*

NT

Would you like to receive updates about the Strategy's process? \*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

## Submission details

I am making this submission as a: \*

Educator

parent/carer/guardian

Student / potential student

School

University

Training Provider

Employer

community organisation

government agency

peak body / Think Tank

academic person

Other

Are you submitting on behalf of an organisation (including a business, other body or agency)? \*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

Please specify the organisation on whose behalf you are submitting

Isolated Children's Parents' Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust)

I confirm that I have the organisation's agreement to make this submission. \*

Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No <input type="checkbox"/>

*Note: If you do not have the organisation's agreement, please go to the previous question and select "No" to confirm you are not submitting on behalf of an organisation.*

## Key Questions from the Framing Paper

The Regional Education Expert Advisory Group is seeking responses to the following key questions. Specifically, we are looking for practical steps to overcome the five challenges facing students from RRR backgrounds.

### Challenge A: There are fewer study options available in RRR areas

1. What opportunities exist to expand options for further study in RRR areas?
2. What potential is there for universities, vocational training providers and other service providers to better work together in RRR areas, including opportunities to expand service offerings and better support articulation between VET and higher education?

### Challenge B: Relocating RRR students face significant financial, emotional and social challenges

3. What financial supports work best for students from RRR backgrounds, including those who choose to relocate?
4. What forms of support might be useful in helping students from RRR backgrounds to continue with their tertiary study?
5. How can universities assist RRR students to feel like they belong on their campus?

### Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education

6. What actions would help to raise aspirations and support informed career choices for students from RRR backgrounds?

### Challenge D: RRR often experience multiple forms of disadvantage

7. What practical steps can be taken to support RRR students who experience multiple forms of disadvantage?
8. How can we better support Indigenous people from RRR areas to access and succeed in tertiary education?

### Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas

9. How can tertiary education providers further stimulate economic growth in RRR areas?
10. What actions would further strengthen and increase the attractiveness of regional universities?
11. What policies would attract more metropolitan and international students to study at RRR areas, including regional universities and campuses?

### Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy

12. Would there be value in establishing a National Regional Education Commissioner to oversee the Strategy and, if so, what should their role be?
13. How should success be measured? What goals and targets, including for tertiary education attainment, should be considered both at a national and individual community level?

## Please use the space provided below to respond to the questions above

The table cell will expand to accommodate your response. Please limit your response to 3000 words.

The Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia, ICPA (Aust), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy and highlight key issues and challenges raised by ICPA members concerning access to tertiary and training education for rural and remote students.

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 the 2700 member families of the Association reside in geographically isolated areas of Australia and all share a common goal of achieving equitable access to a continuing and appropriate, quality education for their children and the provision of services required to achieve this.

ICPA (Aust) believes engaging in tertiary education at an institution of their choice and in vocational education and training (VET), should be an option for all Australian students who have the ability, ambition, motivation and desire to pursue their goals and succeed regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location. Tertiary and training education is an important pathway to successful employment for Australian students as the job and skills market grows in size and complexity. Lack of affordable access is severely restricting equity of entry to such institutions for young Australian people and in particular for rural and remote students.

ICPA believes that the rural and remote students, isolated from tertiary and training education due to location must be recognised as a distinct disadvantage group so that assistance is provided to enhance access. These students, whose only choice to continue post-compulsory study is to relocate from the family home, face many barriers to accessing tertiary and training education including costs of relocation, travel, accommodation, and on-going living expenses.

**It is critically important that the Federal government address the distinctive and onerous disadvantage that relocation brings to young people and their families.**

### **Challenge A: There are fewer study options available in RRR areas**

#### Online

There are numerous benefits for students studying online from home, such as affordability, choice, ease of access, the potential to speed up learning and the ability to enter the workforce more rapidly and better balance work and family demands due to flexibility in course delivery options. For certain students, some or all of these elements may be beneficial as they undertake their tertiary study, however online tertiary education is not appropriate for everyone or every course. The benefits however, may apply more readily to online learning for the ongoing professional development of qualified professionals who live in rural and remote areas such as teachers and nurses.

The opportunity to partake in face-to-face campus, social, sporting, cultural and academic life is seen by many students as a vital component of tertiary study and a critical element of relationship building and gaining communication skills and personal development. These factors are even more important when considering rural and remote students who may have spent their entire formal education in a small school or distance education classroom with associated educational and social disadvantages.

Rural and remote students should not be restricted to on-line learning because the financial elements associated with relocating away from home to study are not affordable.

**It is vital that online learning is available as an option for students but not be seen as the learning mode providing equity to rural students or meeting all student's educational needs.**

Focus should NOT be on ensuring rural students do not move to the city but should be on attracting graduates from all backgrounds to rural and remote areas by offering certainty of sustainable, vibrant communities, gainful employment and an opportunity to be valued for the skills they can provide. Rural students should be afforded the same choice as their city counterparts of studying where it best suits their need.

**ICPA (Aust) urges the Regional Education Expert Advisory Group to consider the necessity of enabling rural students, wherever their family home, the ability to access an appropriate tertiary or training course via the delivery mode of their choice.**

#### Communications

Studying online is reliant on efficient, effective and affordable internet services. While internet services continue to improve, access for rural students lags well behind that available in metropolitan areas.

Reliable connectivity **with regard to speed, quality, capabilities and cost** is necessary to provide quality education in rural and remote Australia and must be a priority for state and federal governments to ensure the gap between urban and rural education does not continue to widen.

Many of our members have no option but to utilise the nbn Sky Muster™ satellite for their internet needs and some continue to experience problems with the service including dropouts, poor speeds, slowed services, insufficient data amounts and connection difficulties.

The provision of an Education Port is a huge assistance for primary and secondary students learning via distance education however the nbn Education Service is not currently available to students' studying at tertiary level.

An added bonus for many families has been Telstra's initiative which has seen the unmetering of educational websites on mobile broadband. This has assisted many families who need to access their curriculum this way by allowing them to reduce data usage significantly, however only those in a mobile footprint are able to take advantage of this benefit and once again the assistance offered is mainly for primary and secondary study.

#### Training

Rural and remote students need to be encouraged to pursue post-secondary education and receive financial assistance to access study options. Rural and remote students who choose to study VET courses or commence an apprenticeship are faced with similar challenges as tertiary students in accessing financial assistance for relocation and eligibility for Youth Allowance. For many students living in rural and remote areas, it is necessary for the majority to relocate to larger centres to access training centres and businesses with the capacity to train them. It is difficult to undertake training opportunities due to their inability to meet relocation, tuition and living expenses.

The incentives and provisions for apprentices and trainees are welcome but the Living Away from Home Allowance (LAFHA) for apprentices is inadequate in rural and remote areas as it does not reflect the real cost of living for these young people. The gap between this allowance and the actual cost borne by rural and remote apprentices living away from home is substantial.

**ICPA (Aust) requests that urgent consideration be given to an increase in the LAFHA for apprentices from rural and remote areas to reflect their actual cost of living expenses.**

The following points must be considered in order to support students who relocate for training:

- The needs of VET students living in rural and remote locations differ considerably to those living in urban areas and recognition of these needs through separate targeted funding is vital.
- While VET Student Loan assists in paying the upfront course costs, it does not assist with living expenses or with the costs of accessing the courses. Recognition of the additional expenses of relocation and accommodation while attending training institutions away from home incurred by rural and remote students is needed. VET students are unable to access the Youth Allowance' (YA) Relocation Scholarship.
- Recognition also needs to be made that rural and remote students may need to relocate to short-term accommodation while attending training institutions and/or compulsory practicums away from their usual residence and consequently incur travel and additional accommodation costs.
- Strategically placed regional hubs should be available for online learning/support for VET students.
- Financial assistance should be offered to attract suitable, qualified staff to rural and remote areas, enabling students to engage with educators with skills relevant to courses studied.

VETiS provided to school students can play an important role in helping young people prepare for work. Vocational learning delivered within the curriculum will assist secondary students explore the world of work, identify career options and pathways, and build career development skills. With this knowledge, students considering the option to commence VET while still at school, will have sound information to help them decide which qualifications best suits their needs and help them get a job.

#### Regional Study Hubs

ICPA (Aust) supports the expansion of regional learning hubs to assist in online learning. However, most students who live in rural and remote areas would still be required to relocate considerable distances even if they chose to study at a Regional Study Hub or Regional University. Regional hubs may be able to be shared by multiple institutions/programs and include VET programs.

The staffing of regional study hubs and regional universities with the capacity to provide quality tertiary and training facilities with quality educators willing to live in rural, regional and remote areas may be problematic.

#### **Challenge B: Relocating RRR students face significant financial, emotional and social challenges**

##### Relocation and Tertiary Access Allowance

ICPA members strongly voice the high cost of accessing university and the lack of adequate financial means to fund this access as having the greatest impact on their ability to attend university. Currently the aspirations of rural and remote young people are being driven and dictated by their ability to obtain financial assistance while they study. Most rural and remote students wishing to access an appropriate tertiary education must relocate from their homes and families to attend education institutions whether that be in a regional or metropolitan centre due to limited universities, training centres and opportunities where they live.

The high up-front set-up and ongoing costs associated with relocation for students whose family home is in rural and remote Australia: travel, accommodation set-up costs (rental housing bond, electricity connection or residential college fees), living expenses and communication (telephone, internet) along with the rising costs of basic living commodities are all impacting on student access. Some of these costs are borne not only in the first year of a student's course but are recurrent over the duration of their higher education.

**Financial assistance is imperative to increase the engagement of rural and remote students in tertiary education.**

Far too many young rural people are deferring, not returning to study or simply do not even contemplate studying at the tertiary level as it is often beyond their and their family's financial means. Due to distance from schooling, some families are educating younger siblings at boarding schools when their older children enter higher education, exacerbating financial pressures. In addition, some courses cannot be deferred, deferment is not always an acceptable option and academically some students are better suited to maintaining continuity of academic application and moving directly from school to tertiary study.

**ICPA (Aust) requests that the Federal Government introduce a Tertiary Access Allowance** as financial assistance, for all students who must relocate from their rural and remote home to study their chosen course to ensure rural and remote students have equity of access and affordability to a tertiary education that is available to most Australian students living in metropolitan locations. This will provide assistance to students to access their place of study, secure accommodation, and assist with relocation expenses, travel and other set-up costs associated with leaving home to study. This allowance should ideally:

- Not be contingent on students receiving income support payments such as Youth Allowance.
- Be an annual payment aligned with the Relocation Scholarship amounts for the duration of the student's full time course.
- Not be received in addition to a Relocation Scholarship.
- Be a non-means tested allowance and not be classed as income and not jeopardise the student's eligibility for existing support payments such as Youth Allowance.

#### Youth Allowance

ICPA (Aust) expresses their gratitude and appreciation for the Federal Government's changes to Youth Allowance: the removal of the family asset test and the family actual means test, the introduction of the family pool and the increase to the parental income and the reduction in work time required for rural and remote students qualifying under the workforce participation criteria for Youth Allowance as an independent. These changes will have a very positive impact for rural and remote students. Further changes including the immediate increase of the parental income to the dependent Youth Allowance parental income limit would ensure equity of access for rural and remote students and provide a predictable, straight forward pathway for families to access financial assistance.

Feedback from ICPA members indicates that the current measures for student income support, including Youth Allowance, Austudy, and ABSTUDY, do not adequately recognise the extra costs incurred by a rural or remote student attempting to access higher education. Rural and remote students must be recognised as a separate disadvantage group when being assessed for Youth Allowance to address the distinctly unique requirements of this cohort. These students must be able to access income support in their own right and must be considered independent of their parents for the purpose of accessing financial assistance once they commence their tertiary studies.

The financial impact that relocation has on both the rural and remote student and families in their transition to university is highlighted in ICPA's Tertiary Access Research (May 2013) <http://www.icpa.com.au/documents/browse/85/icpa-tertiary-access-research-may-2013>. The research found that travel distance and the huge financial cost of relocation were the major hurdles in a student's ability to access tertiary education.

The introduction of the Relocation Scholarships was an acknowledgement by the Government that relocation has an associated cost and can pose a real barrier when accessing higher education. Currently it is only available for recipients of dependent Youth Allowance, yet does not recognise the additional costs incurred by **all** rural and remote students having to relocate each year to access higher education including independent Youth Allowance students.



Students who wish to commence tertiary studies immediately following completion of their secondary education or are unable to defer their studies in order to meet the workforce criteria for gaining independent Youth Allowance, invariably require assistance to get to their chosen tertiary institution.

In addition to the financial barrier to access post-secondary education or training, students are physically and emotionally isolated from the support networks that their family and friends can offer them. It is often too far and too costly to return home regularly to maintain this physical contact. The negative emotional impacts endured by rural and regional students and families, in the situation of a student needing to relocate to pursue their education, must also be recognised.

**The Fares Allowance criteria for Youth Allowance must be changed and be aligned to the ABSTUDY Fares Allowance by removing the six month waiting period at the commencement of the payment to ensure the travel cost difficulties rural and remote students experience are recognised.**

#### **Challenge C: Raising aspirations for tertiary education**

Information on post-compulsory pathways is imperative to allow rural and remote students to make informed decisions about courses available, course delivery options, institutions to apply to, entrance requirements, alternative entrance options (early entry, school recommendations and scholarship entry), application processes, costs, accommodation options, campus facilities and support available.

Information on all aspects of tertiary and training education for rural and remote students must be delivered in different modes (phone, on-line, face-to-face or through schools, teachers or career advisers) as 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.

ICPA (Aust) welcomes the recommendations of the Transparency of Higher Education Admissions Processes, including the website *Course Seeker* and appreciates the timely implementation of all the recommendations. Expanding these measures to the training sphere would be beneficial for those rural and remote students contemplating this career pathway.

ICPA (Aust) was very grateful for the introduction of Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships. Continuation and expansion of this initiative will further improve access to educational opportunities for regional, rural and remote students.

Promotion of a tertiary or training career pathway must be commenced in schools and support for rural and remote schools in terms of career education and career advisors is vital. Students need to be exposed to all post-school options and provided with the support to pursue whichever pathway caters for their personal aspirations.

#### **Challenge E: Attracting people and jobs to RRR areas**

Potentially, many rural and remote tertiary and VET students will return post-course to rural communities, bringing back skills which in turn will help to strengthen their communities and assist in further attracting and retaining residents, thereby boosting the economic and social sustainability of these communities.

Active recruitment of businesses to offer compulsory practicums and support students to undertake them in rural and remote areas, will assist all students to experience the work place offered in rural Australia and potentially encourage future jobs be taken following this placement.

A higher weighting for course consideration for students who express a desire and commitment to return to rural areas upon completion of their course and incentives for rural and remote students who follow through with this return to rural and remote Australia would be beneficial. For regional universities and training facilities to attract more students, a more extensive course structure must be offered.

Alongside courses, accommodation availability and affordability is an issue for many rural and remote students relocating away from home. College environment which provides an educational, pastoral and social support network, is the accommodation of choice for many rural and remote students and for some, it is their only option. These networks need to be of a high quality for all students attending the regional university or training institution.

**Challenge F: Implementing and monitoring a national strategy**

The establishment of a National Regional Education Commissioner would ensure the focus remains on post-compulsory education of students living in rural and remote Australia that is accessible and affordable. The Commissioner will be able to lead the Strategy and ensure the promotion and understanding of the needs of students living in rural and remote areas striving for a tertiary or training education. Ultimately, rural and remote students' education outcomes can only improve because of the proposed collaborative approach and will ensure the recommendations of the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* are introduced.

## Please provide a short summary of the key points in your submission

Please limit your response to 300 words— **note:** any text above 300 words will be excluded from your submission. The table cell will expand to accommodate your response.

ICPA (Aust) strongly believes in regional development and generating employment and training opportunities in rural and remote communities. Access to an appropriate education is a key element in assisting the sustainability and viability of rural and remote Australia. The added costs inflicted on rural and remote students in their quest to access a tertiary or training education are depriving Australia of a wealth of independent and innovative young Australians.

It is essential that young people from rural and remote areas are encouraged and supported in their pursuit of education and training as they are the future of a sustainable rural and remote Australia.

Rural and remote students continue to be under-represented at tertiary and training levels and the sustainability of rural and remote communities is in part reliant on the return of graduates to the communities with their skills.

Rural and remote students must be afforded the same choice as urban students to attend the university or training institution that delivers the course they have the ability, ambition, motivation and desire to pursue.

# Privacy Notice and Terms and Conditions for Submissions

## Purpose for collection of information relating to submissions, and the use and disclosure of that information

The Australian Government Department of Education and Training (the department) invites you to make a submission in relation to the development of the National Regional, Rural and Remote Education Strategy (the Strategy).

Through the submission process, the department will be collecting certain information, including personal information. The information collected may include your name, your email address, the organisation you represent (if applicable) and any other information that is included in your submission.

The department may use and disclose this information for the purposes of informing or contributing to the Strategy, policy development related to the subject of the Strategy, publishing submissions (including by making submissions publicly available), and providing feedback to the department's Minister about the Strategy and submission process.

The department may also contact you to provide updates on the progress of the Strategy, if you have indicated in your submission response that you would like to receive such updates.

## Publishing submissions

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The department reserves the right to amend or redact prior to publication, or to not publish, any submission if it considers the submission to be defamatory or derogatory in any way, or if it includes information relating to individuals.

The department also reserves the right to modify or adapt submissions for the purposes of web accessibility and any publishing formatting requirements.

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If you are making a submission on behalf of an organisation, or represent that you are, you must ensure that you have that organisation's agreement prior to making the submission. By making a submission, you represent to the department that you have such agreement.

If there is information in your submission referencing an individual, which is not otherwise publicly available, you must ensure that you have the consent of the individual to whom the information relates to include it in the submission. By making a submission, you represent to the department that you have such consent.

By making a submission, you further represent to the department that your submission does not contain any confidential information about any individual or organisation.

## **Privacy policy and contact**

For further information about the department's privacy policy and how it deals with information, including how you can access or correct your personal information, please see the department's [privacy policy](#).

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