

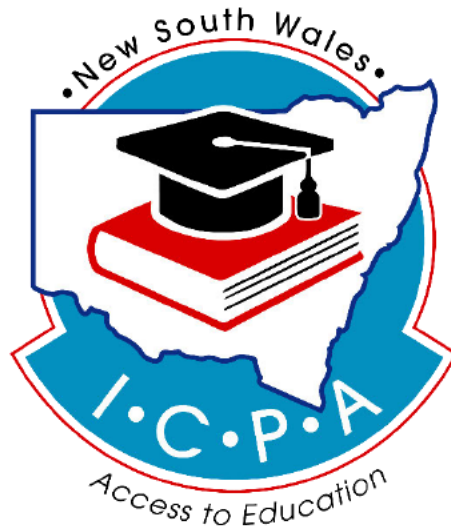
**Submission
No 15**

**INQUIRY INTO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITY IN NEW SOUTH WALES EDUCATIONAL
SETTINGS**

Organisation: The Isolated Children's Parents' Association of New South Wales
Inc.

Date Received: 19 February 2024

**Isolated Children's Parents' Association
of New South Wales Inc.**



**Submission to the Inquiry into children and young
people with disability in New South Wales
educational settings**

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ICPA-NSW is a voluntary non-profit advocacy group that has its roots firmly embedded in rural, remote, and regional areas across the state. ICPA-NSW believes that all students - irrespective of where they live - are entitled to equitable access to education that enables them to participate to their full potential in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of a community.

The NSW State Council of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association advocates for members who have children who:

- Attend a rural pre-school or access early childhood education through a mobile service,
- Attend a small rural or remote school,
- Study by Distance Education and School of the Air lessons
- Travel to school by bus or private vehicle (daily, weekly or at the end of term)
- Board away from home to access primary or secondary school at a boarding school, agricultural high school, hostel, private board or maintain a second home,
- Attend a Tertiary institution- University/TAFE/ College

ICPA-NSW would like to provide the following feedback to the Inquiry into children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings.

1. That Portfolio Committee No. 3 – Education inquiry into and report on current levels of access and attainment for children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings, and in particular:

(a) the experiences of children and young people within educational settings and measures to better support students with disability

(b) the barriers to safe, quality, and inclusive education for children with disability in schools, early childhood education services and other educational settings

“That ICPA-NSW asks the Minister for Education and Early Learning and the Minister for Health to provide funding or subsidies for rural and remote Distance Education children that require allied health support.”

Currently there is a barrier whereby remote students requiring allied health professional support are required to pay for services out of pocket as the distance education Centres are not providing the necessary support or the online allied health service linked with the school has large waiting lists. We ask that subsidies are provided so that parents of remote children can use private allied health professionals so that local providers can be accessed if available and to avoid wait lists to ensure that the appropriate support is provided in a timely manner. Allied health support for children who are not classified as disabled cannot access funding through NDIS therefore paying for it out of their own pocket.

It is a belief of ICPA-NSW that Universities should be providing teacher training that includes a standalone mandatory unit on Autistic Spectrum Disorders in the curriculum.

With the alarming rate of increase in the diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) the chance of a newly graduated teacher having a student with ASD in their class is significant, therefore knowing how to manage this condition with an appropriate level of skills and knowledge in behaviour management strategies for ASD would provide beneficial outcomes for all students in the class.

Educating teachers at the undergraduate level would be more cost effective than having to provide post graduate training during the first few years of teaching. This could also reduce the amount of time teachers need to take out of the classroom for Professional Development (PD). In some rural areas teachers are simply unable to take time out for such training because there is a lack of relief teachers available to allow for this, or they are required to travel considerable distance to attend training workshops which is often not an option for them.

(c) the specific needs of children and young people with disability in regional, rural, and remote schools, early childhood education services and other educational settings.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Rural & Remote Health for travel and accommodation assistance to be made available for rural and remote families travelling to access in person specialist Allied Health services not covered by Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) for geographically isolated and ‘at risk’ children.”

Children with specific education needs and developmental delays require access to appropriate specialist Allied Health services which often require in person consultations. Adequate and uniform assistance should be available to assist geographically isolated, vulnerable, and at-risk children accessing in person specialist sessions with expenses such as travel and accommodation when extensive travel is required to attend these consultations. In NSW, there are only a couple of services in Metropolitan Sydney that can be claimed for and are inaccessible for the majority of rural and remote families.

“That ICPA-NSW supports the Royal Far West in their advocacy for the early childhood proposal, Better Learning. Better Lives.”

This program is being offered by the Royal Far West which is a not-for-profit provider of allied health and mental health services predominantly for country kids. The Better Learning. Better Lives. proposal is a proposal that has been put to the Department of Education in July of 2023 and it desperately needs the funding it deserves to be able to assist these at-risk students.

It is a five-year funding proposal that aims to assist five identified rural, remote communities in New South Wales and out through around thirty schools and preschools. It’s a flexible program, but the aim is to include services such as early intervention and screening, allied health therapy, wellbeing mental health services; capacity building for parents and teachers; and community navigation and service coordination for families so that they can find services more easily. As part of that, Royal Far West would visit the schools twice a year and services like mental health, speech, and OT, would be provided through telehealth. It aims to support kids and families that have been identified as most in need and I guess what we have found over the last three to five years is the significant increase in the need for allied health and mental health services. A lot of rural and remote communities just don’t have access due to their location or the support service has a long waiting list so this is where the Brighter Beginnings program can help. ICPA-NSW wholeheartedly supports this program and urges the Government to fund the program in its entirety so that rural and remote students don’t suffer any longer.

ICPA-NSW believes that rural and remote schools have access to in person counselling sessions for students and that boarding schools have access to psychologists to assist students with their mental health.

Many rural and remote schools do not have access to an in-person counsellor. Compounding this is the fact that many children are away at boarding school trying to cope with the pressures of a drought back home. Students are being disadvantaged without real access to in-person counselling sessions to support their academic, social, and emotional welfare and it is especially vital given the long-term impact that may occur.

(d) the impact on children and young people with disability and their families associated with inadequate levels of support.

ICPA-NSW is aware of the various impacts on children and students who are not able to access appropriate levels of support. This is extremely disappointing when mostly the support is not available because of the location of the family. It is hoped that this inquiry will identify this problem.

(e) the benefits for all children and young people if students with disability are provided with adequate levels of support

ICPA-NSW feels that it is important that rural and remote children receive access to early intervention programs, and regular allied health appointments.

(f) the social, economic, and personal benefits of improving outcomes for students with a disability at school and in further education and employment settings.

These children are tomorrow's leaders and business entrepreneurs. They deserve equity to access to education and services like their city cousins.

(g) the experiences of teachers, early childhood educators, learning support staff and others with a role in educating children with disability and measures to adequately resource and empower those educators.

"That ICPA-NSW requests the relevant ministers to ensure that universities provide teacher training that include a stand-alone, mandatory unit on Autistic Spectrum Disorders in the curriculum."

With the alarming rate of increase in the diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) the chance of a newly graduated teacher having a student with ASD in their class is significant, therefore, knowing how to manage this condition with an appropriate level of skill and knowledge in behaviour management strategies for ASD would provide beneficial outcomes for all students in the class. This early training could also lead to a reduction in the high level of early burnout with between 40% to 50% of teachers leaving in their first five years of teaching because they feel that they don't have the skills to deal with the challenges of having children with ASD in their class. Educating teachers at the undergraduate level would be more cost effective than having to provide post graduate training during the first few years of teaching. This could also reduce the amount of time that teachers need to take out of the classroom for professional development. In some rural areas, teachers are unable to take time out for such training because there is a lack of relief teachers available, or they are required to travel considerable distance to attend training workshops, and this is often not an option for them.

Very little learning happens when children are not engaged. Teachers need the training to recognise when a student's coping skills are not working. They need to recognise the signs and be able to avoid a meltdown before it happens. They need to be proactive so that they won't have to be reactive. Dealing in a reactive way when the student has lost the ability to cope creates a stressful situation for everyone. With adequate training a teacher learns to create the environment that will reduce the likelihood of a meltdown. A teacher can learn these things the hard way over many years, but, by then, coupled with the curriculum and extra curricula activities expected of them, they are looking for the door. The cost of the four-year degree is wasted not to mention the toll on the teacher's health. The biggest cost is the damage done to the students, not only those with ASD but also to every child whose education was impeded by a teacher, through no fault of their own, who didn't have the necessary skills and support to teach the wide variety of students who are now in every classroom. The reason we have chosen Autistic Spectrum Disorder is because the behaviour issues related to a child's inability to cope with learning, that are displayed because of ASD, are very similar to that of

children diagnosed with Dyslexia, Asperger's, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHA), Axis II Personality Disorder (APD) and many others. By training to understand ASD behaviour related issues, a teacher would have a strong grasp of a student's inability to cope regardless of their disability and have the skills to deal with the situation.

(h) the resourcing available to educational settings and educators, including infrastructure, to support the needs of children and young people with disabilities in New South Wales.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Education and Early Learning ensures that rural and remote schools have access to in person counselling sessions for students.”

There are students requiring counselling in person in rural and remote schools, however, due to the lack of services being available locally, they don't have access to an appropriate face to face counselling service. Our local TPI School, Naradhan Public School, has not had access to a regular school counselling service for over three years. The school has a significant need for regular face to face counselling to support students academically and emotionally and are being disadvantaged by not having this support. This year, a school counsellor has been allocated half a day per fortnight to the school (the same day is shared with another school in the district), however, in this time the counsellor needs to travel to the school and does not allow sufficient time for cognitive assessments to be administered in the school counsellor time allocations, nor does it allow for discussion with the staff about the next steps needed to be addressed for each of the students requiring any other services that may or may not be provided for through the Department of Education. The school is required to pay for OT visits from its own budget and with this limited funding, it is not sufficient to employ an SLSO (Student Learning Support Officer) to assist students. Schools are obligated to fund services for students' needs outside of Department of Education services due to wait times and lack of facilities in the area. The teaching staff are also feeling the absence of a regular school counsellor, who had previously provided support with classroom management strategies and learning adjustments to ensure every student was supported.

ICPA is aware of the NSW Centre for Effective Reading, which does provide a valuable service with multidisciplinary assessments to students of primary age in rural and remote New South Wales by their referral system from schools, the department and non-government schools.

“Within that multidisciplinary assessment we have education psychology and speech assessment which is usually free at one of our hubs or even remotely. If in that referral process the child has co-morbidities and they need to attend they can come to us in the city and access the Child Development Unit where they can get that diagnosis for ADHD and autism and support. After that they have twelve months' support within their school. We provide everything and all the school needs to do is provide a tutor.”

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Health and NSW Minister for Regional Health to implement an incentive program to encourage allied health professionals to come to rural and remote areas.”

Children benefit the greatest from early intervention. To give one example, a speech issue is usually identified at preschool. Parents are then referred to the relevant therapist at a local allied health service, however there is an increasing gap and turnover of health professionals in towns like Balranald, therefore parents may need to travel over 300kms one way to access a speech therapist or occupational therapist. The disadvantage of access to allied health professionals in rural health services settings was recently highlighted during the pandemic as health professionals and appointments were made near impossible due to border closures, covid regulations and the redistribution of health specialists in our health system. Telehealth was a highlighted benefit of allowing access for health specialists and their patients, but there is nothing more important than in-person appointments so that health specialists can properly perform their assessments and referrals.

(i) the measures necessary to ensure the learning environment is safe and inclusive for all students, teachers, and school support staff.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Department of Education (DoE) to incentivise students who are studying Early Childhood qualification by assisting with study costs, to enable remote preschools to be staffed adequately.”

After a protracted process Louth Branch is delighted to have, pending at the time of writing this explanation, three of the original ten sites identified as needing practical access to preschool, running as preschools. These are at Weilmoringle, Louth and Wanaaring and staffing is a critical component to their success. It is obvious that in these areas there is a dearth of early childhood certificates, diploma and degree qualifications amongst the people who live there.

While there are local people interested in training, to take these positions, they will need to be supported financially to complete the required training.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Regional Health to prioritise workforce health capacity with targeted scholarships as part of a program to incentivise employers.”

There are many vacancies in some health fields, especially for professional medical technicians like sonographers. For example, to become a sonographer an individual must complete a post-graduate course.

These courses require the student to be employed as a trainee in the field before they can enrol in the university course. However, employers want qualified employees not trainees for whom they still must pay. By offering rural students’ scholarships the employer is freed of the financial obligation and will be more inclined to accept trainees.

(j) the impact of policies regarding suspensions and expulsions.

(k) the impact of policies regarding the use of restrictive practices.

“That ICPA-NSW continues to request the relevant authorities to consider the emotional wellbeing of boarding students when implementing covid management plans in boarding houses.”

Many boarders commenced boarding with a “drop off” where parents were not allowed on the school site, and unable to leave school premises for any reason, including medical appointments. Many of these boarders share classes with day students who return home daily with freedom to come and go from school. In many cases, it would seem boarding students are being isolated on school grounds to avoid isolation in the future. This could become detrimental to the emotional and social wellbeing of students if it is to continue for prolonged periods of time, as well as affecting their ability to perform academically.

The lack of consistency around these requirements has led to confusion and stress for many families and children. Some state health authorities have defined all boarding students within a boarding institution as close contacts of each other, while others have different rules. Some are allowed to have students isolated within the boarding house, while others have been told they cannot do this, and any child who is unwell, deemed a close contact, or positive with Covid 19 must be collected immediately. This obviously presents logistical problems with many families unable to make a return trip from home to school safely without needing to stay overnight along the way due to distance, but unable to do so with a student with covid.

These scenarios present constant concern and worry for boarding staff, students, and family, causing building stress and worry for all involved, while the wider community returns to a greater sense of

normality while living with covid. The gap is widening for the rural and remote students accessing education through boarding school. With ICPA-NSW continuing to advocate for these students, their wellbeing can be at the forefront of the relevant authorities.

“That ICPA-NSW strongly requests ICPA (Aust) to advocate for boarding school students, to ensure state governments follow and implement an explicit National Code for Boarding School Students.”

As states learn to live with COVID-19 spreading within the community, there is concern from families that restrictions placed on boarders puts them at a disadvantage compared to their day student peers. We understand that restrictions are necessary to protect boarding communities but feel that the restrictions placed on boarders could be more flexible and consistent. Boarders, as a cohort, are already at a disadvantage and are vulnerable.

That ICPA-NSW supports ICPA (Aust) to request that a permanent Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item number for telehealth consultations is assigned to telehealth Allied Health Services, specialists, and consultations, including but not limited to Speech Pathology, Paediatricians and Psychologists and to support the specific educational needs and learning difficulties of geographically isolated children.”

Many allied health services are unavailable to rural and remote families. In border regions this unavailability is heightened for example, Qld practitioners cannot see patients who live in NSW and vice versa.

Barriers are:

- that people must travel long distances sometimes to have the appointment cancelled
- People must join lengthy waiting lists to access practitioners located in the metropolitan areas
- little or no access to allied health services, particularly for children with special needs and developmental delays (often on more than one domain)
- financial hardship caused by travel and accommodation costs while accessing treatment
- low socio-economic families living in rural and remote areas do not have the means to travel for treatment
- rural and remote people are often unable to find their way around or unfamiliar with metropolitan areas to access treatment
- most people needing National Disability Insurance Scheme plans are unable to navigate the system and without access to services they are unable to utilise their plans,
- we are aware of many families rejecting National Disability Insurance Scheme plans due to lack of access to services.

Utilisation of telehealth services can be of great benefit to families in geographically isolated locations who would otherwise have to travel considerable distances or encounter lengthy delays to access face to face consultations with relevant health professionals.

Students with developmental difficulties require frequent and timely consultations and these can be enabled via telehealth services for many families otherwise unable to access allied health professionals due to living in rural and remote areas.

Some specialist consultations, such as speech pathology, can be satisfactorily delivered using telehealth services where the technology is available. These services are already providing improved access to health services for some children in geographically isolated areas. The cost to families to access such services should also be equitable.

“That ICPA-NSW lobby the ministers for education and health to invest in the availability of on the ground youth and adolescent Mental Health services in rural schools and communities, furthermore, provide incentives for these specialists to remain in our communities.”

While there is some access to services, supply in many rural areas does not meet demand, to the point of failing to refer and lack of disclosure. If these services are not available locally, the expenses and continued trauma associated with travelling to access services are prohibitive for many families. By not providing incentives for specialist to remain in our community's it creates a fly-in fly-out mentality, a perception of a lack of care and a continuation of a lack of referrals and disclosure

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Transport to provide tertiary students with a travel subsidy, similar to the School Drive Subsidy.”

Providing a subsidy based on the distance from their home to the tertiary institution as a kilometre rate, assisting with travel costs at the start and end of each semester.

Dependent tertiary students still live at home with their parents but are required to move away from home during semester time to access their tertiary education. With limited access to transport links in rural and remote NSW, it is an equity issue that these students have access to a travel allowance like the School Drive Subsidy for travel at the beginning and end of each semester. We are aware of the Fares Allowance but not all students meet the criteria to receive it.

(l) the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Department of Education ensure a more accessible school-based platform for assessment and diagnosis of any learning and well-being support requirements of children living in rural and remote NSW. This enables early identification and timely interventions without the need to access consultation outside the school.”

The NSW Department of Education schools have psychologists allocated to their schools through the school counselling service however they are unable to formally diagnose conditions such as ADHD, autism, mental health conditions and specific learning disorders, for example, dyslexia. In rural and remote areas there is often very limited access to health professionals or specialist services. These are generally also highly transient positions making it extremely difficult for patients to develop any rapport with that professional - one of the most important factors of childhood diagnostics. Accessibility of services should run parallel between young people in rural and remote areas and their metropolitan counterparts. Specialised support can be extremely difficult to access by these families who are already vulnerable and disadvantaged due to isolation. Taking into consideration the additional needs or complexities is paramount especially because multidisciplinary assessments are often required, further delaying diagnosis. The follow-on effect delays support and early intervention and impedes a child's ability to grow and thrive.

We are not asking for additional learning support allocation and fully understand the shortage of specialised services within rural and remote areas. Utilising the current psychological health and wellbeing resources available within the NSW Department of Education would provide timelier and streamlined assessment and therefore earlier intervention processes within the schools.

Growing up in a rural or remote area should never be seen as a disadvantage. There should be no barrier for accessing services especially those that can change the trajectory of a life.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Department of Education to strongly promote and emphasise the benefits of early transition programs into rural and remote schools throughout NSW.”

In 2019 Clare Public School introduced the early transition program for the four preschool aged children in the community that would be attending in 2020. Apart from fortnightly access to the Hay Mobile Preschool, these children would otherwise have had no other access to an early education due to the huge distances involved - for some a trip of 180kms one way. The early transition program introduced at Clare Public School allowed these children to access the program in mid-2019 instead of later in the year. This early transition program allowed the children to have access to education

resources and was received positively by the children, who showed great advancement in their school readiness. The universal 600 hours of preschool recommended by the Federal Government is difficult to achieve. Many children from rural and isolated areas barely, if at all, receive the recommended hours of preschool education because of the limitations in their community. By encouraging more rural and remote schools to introduce the early transition program the NSW Department of Education would be allowing children to have some preschool education before attending primary school.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 3 - EDUCATION

(m) whether existing regulatory and oversight mechanisms are sufficient to protect and promote the rights of children and young people with disability, and protect those children and young people from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Regional Health for travel and accommodation assistance to be made available for rural and remote families travelling to access face-to-face specialist allied health services not covered by Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme (IPTAAS) for geographically isolated and ‘at risk’ children.”

Children with specific education needs and developmental delays require access to appropriate specialist allied health services which often require face-to-face consultations. Adequate and uniform assistance should be available to assist geographically isolated, vulnerable, and at-risk children accessing face-to-face specialist sessions with expenses such as travel and accommodation when extensive travel is required to attend these consultations.

In NSW there are only a couple of services in Metropolitan Sydney that can be claimed for, and these are inaccessible for many rural and remote families.

“That ICPA-NSW requests the NSW Minister for Health and the NSW Minister for Regional Health to investigate antenatal, postnatal, and infant support available to rural and remote parents, especially the provision of services that are accessible and supportive of geographically and socially isolated families.”

The health and wellbeing of children and their parents is vital to promote growth, establish foundational skills, knowledge and understanding to support success in preschool, school, and adulthood. Isolated parents and their children are unable to access adequate support, especially in the early childhood stages of infancy. This means families are relying on social structures, a compounding problem as rural communities are becoming smaller and more isolated as agricultural practices become more efficient and populations change. With decreasing populations, and increasing isolation there is a need for focused and coordinated support that is designed with isolated rural families in mind. Currently there is no formal mothers group provided to rural mothers, online resources suggest inaccessible support such as in home supports, clinics, and localised programs. Targeted and tailored programs for isolated children and parents are needed to ensure equity of access to support, especially in 0-3 years to ensure children start preschool without disadvantage because of where they live.

“That ICPA-NSW request that the NSW government change the criteria for bypass to not be based on subjects alone but to include socio educational advantage and individually assess a school.”

Once again, we acknowledge the effort made by ICPA-NSW State Council to address this issue over the years but sadly our members and our community remain in need. Walgett Community College (WCC) should be the most obvious choice for bypass in NSW and added to this existing list of two schools. This is not an option for these families, and this is becoming and always has been a great injustice. We also accept this isn't just a school problem but an entire community battling alcohol,

drugs, abuse, domestic violence, and generational government dependency and this creates an environment that makes it difficult to learn in.

The criteria for bypass include subject restrictions and as most subjects are available, there are very few, if any students, doing the subjects. We understand and are willing to accept that as stated on the Department of Education Procedure for Bypass printed by the Queensland Government that it would need to be assessed every two years. We also see on this document that the HR assesses student enrolment numbers and that for Years 11 and 12, criteria is given to schools with less than 25 students in Years 11-12. This also makes WCC eligible.

The list of criteria should also include student behaviours. The WCC has a history of assaults to Teaching staff and to other students. After receiving documents from the Freedom of Information Act, we were made aware of police being called to the school on a number of occasions with weapons, drug exchanges, assaults on students and at least four teachers assaulted in 2019 alone. In 2019 we noted a serious assault where a student physically harmed a teacher. There are many of these incident reports available and these are increasing every year. This doesn't include injury to staff who are trying to protect other students from assault.

Of the five applications for a statement of support for Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) only one student was successful and that was because they were in Year 12 and the subject was not available. In November 2019 we were made aware that a teacher, after trying to save another student, was assaulted leaving the staff member with a broken vertebra leading to surgery and of course, as we all know, mental and physical trauma. We feel that these statistics and incident reports and student safety issues should assist WCC in becoming eligible for the bypass and should be added to the required initial criteria by the NSW government to support all students residing in the Walgett Shire.

“That ICPA-NSW request the Minister for Education to review the implementation of out-of-zone enrolment policy as it pertains to the enrolment of students who are experiencing bullying in small rural schools.”

The out-of-zone policy is used by the Department of Education to prevent students from enrolling in schools outside their designated areas. The policy is largely used to manage over-enrolment in urban areas. In rural areas where numbers are not under pressure, the policy prevents students who are experiencing bullying from being able to access an alternative public-school education without families moving to a new town. In the case of bullying in small schools, the small numbers in the cohort often prevent the issue from being resolved or effectively managed. In an example from our branch, a child had been bullied to the point where she no longer felt she could attend her zoned school. Despite the efforts of the parents to have the issue addressed at their current school they felt that the only alternative for their child to access education was to move to another school which was accessible from their home but out of their zone. The student was not only denied enrolment to the out-of-zone school but also to School of the Air with the out-of-zone policy used to prevent enrolment. The parents have had to rent a house in the new school zone for their child to be able to attend.

(n) whether children and young people with disability should be included under the remit of the Ageing and Disability Commissioner.

(o) developments since the 2017 Upper House inquiry into education of students with disability or special needs in New South Wales.

(p) measures to implement the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations in relation to inclusive education.

(q) any other related matters.

“ICPA-NSW supports the Country University Centres in their request for additional funding.”

It is paramount that further funding is provided by the Government to ensure that these Centres continue to operate. These Centres have experienced a greater participation rate than originally expected. In Broken Hill there are 200 students utilizing the Centre compared to the original student rate of 70. Student increases are evident across many campuses including Cooma, Griffith, Leeton, Narrabri, Moree, Grafton and Goulburn.

Country University Centres have been a great initiative in keeping people in local areas and studying without the expense of moving to major cities to study at university campuses. It is also hoped that these students will be keen to find employment in their regional area. This potentially will assist with the shortage of workers in rural and remote areas.

“That ICPA-NSW supports ICPA (Aust) to request the Minister for Education to consider ways to condense tertiary training, such as at Marcus Oldham Agricultural College.”

Several member families have expressed concern about the “time wasted” when their young adult children are completing a tertiary qualification. Students who live in a very remote context by necessity relocate many kilometers away to access training and study.

In most instances the training/study institutions’ destinations are expensive places to live. Isolated students are entitled to access independent Youth Allowance once they have proven their independence.

The Youth Allowance rates allow for rent and living costs, leaving very little if any at all once they are deducted. Accessing extra part time work prevents students from receiving the full Youth Allowance rate. Thus, it is often a frustrating time, and the reality is that remote parents need to financially assist their children whereas peri-urban and urban families can arrange accommodation which is cheaper or free.

These stresses could be alleviated if the courses were able to be completed in a shorter time frame, such as provided at Marcus Oldham. It would be advantageous if public universities could consider offering that flexibility to condense their courses too.

ICPA-NSW would like to see that remote students have access to (some of whom find study more difficult) an accommodation institution at which they study daily from “nine to five” (40 hours/week) so that they finish their courses at a speedier rate. We have mentioned Marcus Oldham as an exemplar of education delivery, not because of its agriculture courses, but rather because its model is based on high student contact hours, small class sizes and devoted lecturers.

Another benefit would be students possibly returning in a shorter time frame to their remote communities with their skills.

- **Preparing VET for the future.**

Additional funding for Country University Campuses is preparing VET students for the future. ICPA-NSW believes that this is the future and would encourage the Government to continue the funding across the State for these Centres.

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