

INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REGIONAL ACCESS TO SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES



Background

Our family lives in Coongulla, a very small town of 300 people, 230kms from Melbourne, 53kms from Sale, our closest major centre and 26kms from Maffra, our closest town that provides facilities. I am the mother of a 19 year old VCE student 2008, who attended Gippsland Grammar in Sale. Saada, my daughter, achieved a place in the undergraduate Monash Medical degree at Clayton in Melbourne, but deferred her course in 2009 to work as an Outdoor Education Gap student at her old school. Her plan was to achieve independent status, under government policy, in order to access youth allowance during her many years training to be a doctor.

The government has been actively pursuing country students to enter medicine, with the knowledge that many will return to regional areas to practice upon qualification. For example - RAMUS (Rural Australia Undergraduate Scholarships), the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarships (MRB), the Extended Rural Cohort (ERC), the Deans List at Monash gives access to interview to select country students. My daughter is committed to returning to the country to further her career upon qualification.

HOWEVER the new criteria for youth allowance has effectively blown apart her financial plans for university and study.

- a. Financial planning for the families of country students, who intend to study away from home at TAFE or university, is not done overnight. Our family planning for Saada (her desire to become a doctor) started in her year 10, with private school tuition fees, subject selection, extra tuition, READAC course and finally Med Entry UMAT course in year 12, all at added expense. It has cost us financially for her to even get into Monash medicine, let alone the cost of her studying in Melbourne – Mannix College residential fees \$14,000 plus university costs plus living expenses. We also must consider our son Jakob who is also likely to go to university and be there at the same time as Saada. Our family will have 2 students living away with associated costs.
- b. Saada cannot study undergraduate medicine except at Monash Clayton. Monash Churchill does have a Medical program, but it is for graduate students and she is not eligible. There are no other education alternatives in this state for her to study medicine directly from VCE.
- c. The implications of current and proposed government measures mean that it will be tougher for Saada and the family to cope financially. In a highly structured and intellectual course such as medicine, we are unsure just how much extra time is available for her to work to support herself. (if there are indeed jobs available during depressed economic times) With contact hours, tutorials and study to schedule in, we would not want her university standard to suffer because of the necessity of supporting herself.

It is also not practical for students to undergo 18 months work for an average of 30 hours per week to prove independence (effectively 2 years) No student committed to a long university course such as medicine, would want to extend their time to

qualification still further. Also statistics show that the retention rate for students taking 1 year off and returning to tertiary study is far better than those who take a 2 year break. Most universities will not defer for more than 1 year in any case, and with a very competitive course to get in, such as medicine, I do not believe our daughters place would be saved.

- d. Because of the increased costs associated for country students, I believe that less will be inclined to aim for university, Tafe and leaving home. The youth allowance was their life line to financially support themselves and even with the new changes that assess parental income, and even if the family come under the umbrella of \$90,000 for one child, the amount the student will actually receive (unless family income is close to \$43,000) will be rather small compared to what they would have received, if they were deemed independent.
- e. I believe that the government must take into account the distances involved with attending the courses of choice as well as the financial stake a family makes in their children's education. It costs a family and the student a lot more to relocate to another area and live for an extended period of time as well as travelling expenses back to their families during the year.
- f. Rural and regional students must have the same opportunities as metropolitan young people to pursue the courses of their choice. Often they have overcome many disadvantages to gain entry to Tertiary institutions. Not only financially, but the tyranny of distance not only to attend university, but the travel times involved in attending secondary school, encroaching on study time, the lower standard of education in regional areas and peer group pressure to leave school and work. (more prevalent in country Victoria)

Respectfully submitted,



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