

Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

Submission

The financial impact on our family with one tertiary student currently studying Speech Pathology, and two secondary students planning to study for individual degrees in Behavioural Neuroscience and a Diploma of Education, will be deep and profound. Our dry land rural property produces cereal and legume crops. Off farm income has allowed our family to not rely on drought assistance, and has enabled us to meet our expenses.

Our lifestyle is measured to ensure we live within our means. Our children's relocation to distant tertiary institutions expenses are within the range of \$15,000 to \$20,000. The costs are associated with relocation costs, course costs, equipment, reference and text books, and ongoing living expenses.

Meanwhile the farm and original family domestic costs do not decrease substantially with the decrease in the number of people remaining at home.

Potentially, two of our children will study at a regional tertiary institution, however that distance is greater than 145km from our home, making daily commuting difficult. In our families' situation the desired courses are not offered at tertiary institutions within a commutable distance, therefore relocation is necessary.

Our children wanting to qualify for the youth allowance will be required to work for a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months over a 2 year period. The consequence of this is to apply for their respective University courses and hope the relevant University will allow deferment of the course for 2 years instead of the usual 12 months. Alternatively, the University may accept them as mature aged students two years after completing their secondary study.

This will then potentially put them behind their particular age group commencing the University course. Those students would have been their peer group and support network.

If our children cannot qualify for this financial assistance the cost borne by the family and student could place such pressure that relationships may suffer. In addition the four to six years of sustaining such financial costs per annum to ensure our children can fulfil their career goals will take many years to recover, in our working life.

The educational needs of rural and regional students can be impacted on by the management and size of the closest appropriate government primary and secondary school. Classes and staff availability can have a direct consequence on the subjects offered thereby reducing the options to select pre-requisites of various tertiary courses.

To limit the educational outcomes for rural and regional students is discriminative. The Victorian Governments Department of Education and Early Childhood Development advertises 'every child every opportunity'. The recent Victorian

Education and Training Committee Final report on the 'Inquiry into Geographical Difference in the Ratio in which Victorian Students participate in Higher Education' tabled in the Victorian parliament on the 28th July this year found there was a real need to provide greater financial support to universities delivering programs in country and outer-suburban areas, and encourage a greater range of delivery models.

A living away from home allowance whilst undertaking fulltime studies may be an option to ensure these students could relocate and commence a relevant tertiary course. Once these studies are completed and employment found, these qualified students will value add to the community and take their place as full tax payers, therefore not be a liability to our country by being a social welfare recipient.

Our circumstances are not unique and there are other rural families in complicated cash flow situations which makes it very difficult to fit into Centrelink income categories. I truly believe under the current proposed changes to the youth allowance many students will not get an opportunity to take up the higher education they so rightly deserve.