

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

Submission:

There are limited opportunities for students wishing to study in regional areas, unless they want to attend an agricultural college, as most secondary schools and universities are located in major metropolitan areas. I am not aware of any Queensland secondary boarding schools west of Toowoomba or Warwick, or further inland than Rockhampton and Charters Towers.

With regard to university studies, living at home is not an option for rural and regional students, who then have to pay accommodation costs and living expenses. While youth allowance is beneficial, it does not cover the living expenses of full-time students. Part-time employment, necessary to help pay their bills, then reduces the amount of allowance these students receive.

There are limited scholarships available for students who choose to defer their studies for a year. My daughter chose to defer, and worked for that year. She was not eligible for any scholarships until her second year of university, when she successfully applied for a Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship.

Changes to independence rules (youth allowance eligibility) will force many rural and regional students to either defer their studies for two years, or abandon any thoughts of obtaining a university degree. These young people will be disadvantaged throughout their working lives if these educational opportunities are no longer available to them, and this will be reflected throughout their communities through lower incomes.

Whilst many rural and regional families may be asset-rich, the income obtained from the farm assets is not usually sufficient to enable families to support their sons and daughters through three, four or five years of university studies. Without youth allowance, full-time university, on campus, would have been an unobtainable dream for my daughter, as her degree is not available externally (a method of study which does not suit many people).

Thank you.

Robyn Bell