

Education & Employment Senate Inquiry

Friday, 6th March 2015.– Education Reform Inquiry

Janie Halls Education Story

Growing up in a typical middle class family in the 80's I was fortunate to enjoy and be part of the last technology free childhoods. My parents grew up during a time where the importance of education was not valued as highly as getting a good job and raising a family. They believed they were not smart enough to continue their education and ultimately both left school after Year 10. They worked hard and even when times were tight we never wanted for anything, especially love.

I was always a bright child with a wild imagination, and often found myself with my head in the clouds much to my teacher's frustration. Over the course of time I too adopted the belief that I was not a natural scholar and followed in my parent's footsteps leaving school after Year 10. Despite leaving school my insatiable curious mind and hunger for knowledge and understanding ensured I continued to educate myself. I did a Certificate in Hospitality at the local TAFE College for six months upon leaving high school and this would be my last certified training for over a decade.

Fiercely independent and ambitious I couldn't wait to start work and secured my first job as soon as I was legally able. My first role was as a checkout operator for BIG W where I excelled and discovered my love of people and customer service. From here I went on to do hospitality, administration, sales, marketing, recruitment and management in various forms and within various industries and countries. Over the course of my twenties I lived many lives and often joked that I was a perpetual student of the University of Life majoring in psychology and human behavior.

It wasn't until I was around 27 years of age that I started to accept and appreciate that I did in fact have an incredible capacity for learning and retaining information. It was at this point in my life that I started investing more heavily in my education through multiple courses and programs on wealth creation, property development, and trading and online business concepts. Despite learning an amazing amount about myself, business and life I was frustrated that despite gaining the knowledge none of these programs were nationally or internationally recognized.

I have invested tens of thousands of dollars into courses, mentors, and education material over the years. I went through stages of considering formal education and researched my options thoroughly. My main resistance was that the courses were all so expensive, inflexible and required far too much money, time and resources than I could possibly invest. So I again, gave up the idea of ever getting a degree and instead focused my energies on building my experience and personal learning with books, audio and seminars.

In January 2013, I launched myself into the scary world of business and went out on my own as a People, Leadership and Performance Consultant. Working with both businesses and individuals alike my business has been relatively successful and I have enjoyed wonderful results with my clients. However, despite my extensive knowledge and experience in business there is a lot I do not know about running and building your own. It was at this point I decided to recommence my research into formal learning options for business.

The fantasy of doing a Business degree was still present however I felt due to my lack of prior education and absence from study for over 18 years it was a distant dream. On the 3rd October 2014 my partner and I started researching my options with a focus on Business diplomas and similar as a bridge to potentially doing a degree. After several days of pawing through the overwhelming amount of information and courses available I decided to sign up to attend the opening night at Martin College. Prior to the open night I was contacted by one of the ladies in the Sydney office and she discussed at length and with great passion and enthusiasm the courses available and information about the courses. She advised that my professional experience would be far too advanced for a simple diploma and encouraged me to consider the advanced diploma instead.

When I arrived at the open night I was very impressed with the intimate yet very professional premises and the open friendliness of the staff and students. The first person I spoke with just so happened to be Dipu Sabastian who is the head of Higher Education. We discussed my vision, experience and lifestyle before he suggested that I would be much better suited to go straight into the Business Degree. He clearly outlined the program options and investment. I was very impressed and loved the personal feel of the college. The investment was almost half that of attending a university and the flexibility was far more appealing.

The next day I submitted my application online and was incredibly surprised at just how professional, efficient and easy the process was to enroll. With no bridging courses necessary and being enrolled as an online student I was feeling quite nervous about

how my new commitment would unfold. The support, guidance and involvement from the college was exceptional. It just so happened to work out that despite being an online student the unit's I had chosen to study were held on the same day and I was able to negotiate my schedule to accommodate attending these lectures.

So exactly one month after commencing my first google search I was starting my Business degree at Martin College. Having no idea what to expect after hearing stories from numerous friend's University days, I was surprised to enter the class room on my first day and discover no more than six other students. I chose Economics and Marketing and discovered that I was in fact more than capable of learning in this environment. In actual fact I flourished, the intimate and interactive style of tutorials quickly became my favorite part of my week. Our lecturers are not simply academics and have real world experience and are out there living what they teach. I was very surprised at just how much I enjoyed Economics having had little to no interest prior to the course. I was especially shocked when I discovered that I had achieved a High Distinction on my Economics Assignment and Distinctions in both classes overall.

My friends are often envious when I tell them of my experience at the college, most of who are either currently attending or have previously studied through a University. Their experiences are vastly different being in tutorials of 100 plus students, little access to lecturers and minimal support from the university. Often feeling like just another number and of little consequence to the overall picture. One of my very good friends has recently started her degree as a mature age student and she was shocked and incredibly disappointed on her first day to discover she was in a room where everyone had to stand, couldn't take notes and people were spilling out the doors.

I love that Martin College provides a wonderful opportunity for their students to continue their learning moving through the various levels of programs and now have the ability to offer higher education. There are numerous students at the college who have the ability to really excel yet their social and economic backgrounds I believe would otherwise prevent them from such opportunities if it were not for private providers like Martin College.

My greatest disappointment is that despite doing the same course of study and accessing the exact same government support I am penalized for going through a private provider with a 25% administration fee on top of my course costs. This effectively increases my student debt by nearly \$20,000. This additional fee is a great disadvantage to not only myself but especially those who are from a lower socio economic demographic in their attempt to move up in their social standards and make

a more self-sustainable life for themselves and their families to break free from the welfare system.

As a nation, it is in our greatest interest to invest in Human Capital if we are to continue to evolve as an international leader. Education should be made accessible to every Australian despite their socio economic demographic or high school achievement. It is my observation and personal experience that a lot of very capable and intelligent people are not sufficiently supported and inspired by the secondary school format. I believe the barriers to entry being imposed by poorly thought out policies, taxes and fees have both short and long run economic implications for the government and the nation as a whole. I appreciate that there are quite a few private education firms who have not acted with integrity and consequently tainted the rest of the providers.

Following my experience with Martin College who are acting in the best interest of their students whilst still maintaining a strong business model I am a massive advocate for improving the support and fee structure for their students. Following my experience at the Senate Inquiry on Friday, 6th March 2015 I was left feeling incredibly disappointed by the dogmatic resistance and contempt for the proposed reforms and private providers overall. It seemed there were far too many short sighted, self-interested ego's at play and not nearly enough focus on the greatest outcome for the nation as a whole.

With great appreciation,

Janie Hall

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Martin College