

Dear Mr Turnbull,

I want to thank you for making the effort to come to Bunbury for the meeting this morning. I must admit I was sceptical about you actually showing up. I thought you may send someone 'on your behalf'.

So very pleased to see you there and equally pleased you appeared to have a reasonable awareness of the main issues. I do understand the many millions of things that must come your way daily, so I appreciate you making this a priority.

While it was important to allow the people present to share their stories and situations, I feel the limited timeframe meant we could not really explore the deeper underlying issues that are of great concern.

Firstly, I'd like to give you an outline of our own situation, then some further ideas about the future of Education in this country.

My husband and I lived in a very rural town called Kojonup, where we both worked extremely hard at several jobs to try to get ahead and out of the welfare cycle. We chose to have four children in five years because we believe in 'family' - helping, supporting and growing up together for the benefit of all. The primary education options were good in Kojonup, and we elected to send our children to the tiny Catholic school which was brilliant. The secondary schooling option was less than desirable, only a state funded school available with massive discipline, educational and morale problems.

So after persevering for the first year, we made the very hard decision to send our two eldest children to the closest boarding school, which happened to be in Bunbury. The cost of that decision was tremendous. Approximately \$28 000 per child per year. While the children soon settled and were quite happy there, it became clear we would be unable to maintain that opportunity for all of our kids, so we had to make another tough decision.

My husband applied for work in the mining industry and was successful in getting a position with a company operating a gold mine at Telfer in the far NW of WA. The money was a huge bonus, although the trade-off was that he had to live away from us for 16 days at a time and was home for 6. This meant I was left at home on a farm which needed management, while also working full time as a primary school teacher managing two young boys at home and two teenagers away at school, all of which needs a massive amount of energy and stamina. Everything was fractured and emotionally devastating.

We managed (barely) this arrangement for two years, which was like a nightmare. Finally, on the verge of a complete breakdown, we decided yet again to change our situation and we left Kojonup to come live in Bunbury so we could make the most of the bigger town and opportunities that existed here. It also meant the children could live at home which greatly reduced the costs of education and we had our family back. I now work on a part-time basis which enables me to manage our lives more easily. However, 5 years later, Drew still works away in Telfer because we still have costs involved with raising a large family. No help from the govt for anything, missed out on the ridiculous baby bonus payments, child care allowances, no concessions etc. But things are manageable and we are happier.

So here we are now, with our eldest opting to work and not go to University. Our daughter is an academically gifted girl who was accelerated through primary school and graduated Year 12 last year aged 16. She has accepted and deferred for 12 months a position at UWA in a Bachelor Of Science course. Anna was dead keen to head off to Perth straight away, but after much talking and questioning she agreed to a gap year. Our decision to defer was two pronged, a) to give her a little longer at home before she moved to Perth, and b) enable her to work so she could qualify for the Youth Allowance. A big problem arose when we realised she could only be paid as a 16 year old for the first 6 months until her birthday in May, which meant she would be unable to earn the required amount of \$19 500 to qualify for the allowance, in a full time job. She therefore had to work as a

casual because the pay rate is higher, but that meant she could not be guaranteed work and so has had to juggle three jobs at once.

So with all this coming clear over the last 6 months, we had already decided in April to apply to the Uni to see if they would consider allowing her to defer another 6 months which would mean she could start in the mid-year intake, July 2010. The Uni had agreed to that in an email and were waiting to confirm it after receiving the request in writing from Anna. The Budget came at the same time and now we are all in a complete state of confusion and stress.

As it stands now, we have no idea what to do next.

- UWA has offered everyone a deferral option of 2010 or 2011, however that has many disadvantages too and they require an answer by July 31st – three weeks away.
- Trying to work 30 hours a week and have adequate time to attend lectures, study and prepare for pracs etc is utterly unreasonable.
- Living in Perth is expensive. I have done a bit of a budget and think it will average out to about \$350 a week to live, work and eat. Equals approx \$18 000 a year, times 3 years, equals \$54 000.
- On top of that are the actual course costs. Approx 24 units over three years at an average cost of \$1800 per unit if she does not take on a HECS debt equals \$43,200. Unit costs average at \$700 per unit if she does take on a HECS debt, equals \$16 800.
- Basic overall cost therefore: either \$97 200 or \$70 800. Still not including texts, etc and other costs.

Anna has said, “Don’t worry, too expensive, I won’t go,” which is of course an unacceptable option for any kid in this nation.

If, after all this effort she/we have put into securing her future, we get no support to help with her education, we are thinking that she may as well start in January 2010. We can’t afford to, but somehow we will just have to. What a RIDICULOUS waste of her time this last year has been. Had we known, she could have gone this year and be done sooner.

We will have to reconsider ,yet again, our situation, as we have two more children who look like wanting to enter University when their time comes, (2012 and 2014). The most likely thing will be a move to Perth, something we have never wanted to do, can’t really afford to do, but can’t see a choice. Yet another family moving away from a regional/rural area. This should be a major concern for any Govt.

So you can see our own situation is difficult. I am sure there are many worse and many better. I am not complaining as such. We believe in getting out there and doing it for yourself and doing it with dignity and integrity. We have been in the welfare cycle (briefly, thank God) and NEVER want to go there again, so we are not asking for handouts either.

Just a fair go for our kids..someone said they are our future and this is true on so many levels. We are Australians...proud, capable, resilient and resourceful. What are we doing to the future of our country if we continue to accept major barriers to the future educational prospects of our own children? I just struggle to fathom why this idea of tertiary education is viewed as something different and apart from primary and secondary education. It is all education, all necessary, all valid and should be supported and covered by the Government. Our governments over the years have abused the rights of Australians to a just and fair education for all. Lots of “talk” and very little “walk”.

My own experience with ‘education’ has been varied. Attending primary school in three states, all with different curriculum, assessment, expectations, even handwriting! Then to high school in two states, same problems. Then to Uni in two states, same problems. Then teaching in state and private schools, same problems. Now my own children have been in the Catholic, State and Independent school systems, while govts have been experimenting with ‘major educational reform’. What an absolute joke. Might be considered amusing if it were not having such serious repercussions for my children. I am tired of being in systems that change tack at the drop of someone’s report, throwing

away excellent educational policies and practises for the 'new' ideology, being forced to learn, relearn, relearn, relearn stuff I already know. Ridiculous, expensive, impractical and downright damaging to the educational credibility of this nation, the teachers and particularly the KIDS..the calibre of adults who will eventually run this nation has been seriously undermined in the last 12-15 years. And now, on top of it all, we have many clever, savvy, intelligent young Australians facing the insurmountable costs of developing themselves into clever, savvy, intelligent older Australians. Once again, a knee-jerk reaction at the whim of an ill-informed Government, who is meant to protect us and move us forward. Baloney!

I am keen for you to understand that while I did not vote for Kevin Rudd in the last election, this situation is not about politics or political parties. This has no agenda other than pleading.

Will SOMEONE take a hold of our whole Education package and treat it with respect?

More than any other component of our system, education has the greatest impact on every other facet. If we aren't smart, our hospitals fail, our business communities fail, our banking and financial institutes fail, our defence forces fail, everything. Thought provoking isn't it??

Finally, at the end of the meeting you made the comment that this situation has come about because a government has made a decision without really considering the way it will affect people at the grass roots level. If/when you become the next leader of our country, I challenge you to remember your words and not do this to any of your fellow Australians.

Regards

Monica Jessop