

## Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Opportunities

An assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, with particular reference to:

### **a. the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;**

Rural students attending a metropolitan university must relocate. Living at home is not an option. The costs associated with relocation to a university college or rented accommodation are at least \$200 to \$300 per week. University college fees are often inclusive of board, food and utilities. This is a fixed fee with few hidden extras. Other colleges offer self-catered living with expenses often fluctuating. Rented accommodation has rental, food and utilities expenses and these are often difficult for students to budget for. For students going straight to university from school, the cost to parents of having to fund a second household is a huge financial burden. For students who may have worked for 18 months prior to beginning at university, the burden of having to make both ends meet from year to year is a huge pressure on rural students. They do not have the backup of living at home should things get tight financially.

### **b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;**

Rural and regional students have access to regional universities. Many still have to relocate to be able to study. Rural students wishing to attend TAFE for the most part have to relocate to a regional area. There are very limited TAFE opportunities available in rural areas.

It is important to keep in mind that not all rural and regional students want to study in regional areas. Many make very conscious choices to study at metropolitan universities because of particular courses and also for social reasons. Not all country kids are country kids. Many, many country kids are city kids. Many rural and regional students wish to study in regional areas and wish to return to regional and rural areas to work and live. It would not be equitable if any kind of system which supports students who attend their closest university. This would be both patronising to rural and regional students as well limiting in terms of their course choices. It would also deny many city students the course of their choice.

**c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;**

The most frightening implication of current and proposed government measures is that we will have fewer rural and regional students accessing tertiary education. It is already of great concern that rural and regional students participation in tertiary education is well below the average.

The proposed changes to IYA will mean students will have to defer a university offer for two years to earn the required income. They will then in all probability lose their place as universities usually only offer a one year deferral.

In recent times in rural areas the employment situation has provided few opportunities for regular work for 30 hours per week. Rural communities are currently unable to support the number of people looking for casual work. Prospective students would have to move away from home to find these 30 hours per week and that in itself becomes a financial burden.

In order to qualify for the IYA students wishing to go straight from school to university will need to find 30 hours per week in their new term time home and 30 hours per week back at home or elsewhere during vacations. Maintaining and juggling such an arrangement would be very difficult. Then there is the university study! A full-time university course and 30 hours work per week would be more than a challenge.

Do we want a generation of students whose main concern is whether or not they will have enough to eat or be able to pay the rent, or do we want students who priority is a commitment to their education?

In the past many rural and regional students have worked seasonally in their university breaks to support themselves in some way during the year. This will no longer be enough to qualify for IYA.

Way too many students from families from rural and regional areas will not be able to attend university as they will not have enough money to support themselves.

**d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;**

Quite simply only those who whose whom is near a regional university or TAFE college will have access to such an education.

**e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;**

Government measures do not provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study. There is no longer a living-away-from-home allowance which enabled many of the parents of current to relocate from the rural and regional areas to study in metropolitan universities. Students who live in country towns are not eligible for assistance for isolated students.

#### **f. the educational needs of rural and regional students;**

The educational needs of rural and regional students are as diverse, as varied and as important as those of metropolitan students.

Rural and regional students need equity of access to tertiary courses of their choice. They need equity of access to secondary courses of their choice. The smaller the school the fewer the choices. A class of 3 students or distance education is not always the most stimulating means of study.

If the survival, vitality, growth and integrity of our rural and regional areas is to continue we need well educated young people in our communities. If tertiary education opportunities are denied rural

#### **g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities; and**

Unless rural students are able to receive financial support to enable them to live away from home, we will unfortunately have fewer students from rural areas attending university. If we do not have a well educated young people in our rural communities, these communities will wither. They will cease to be vibrant and cease to be places in which young people might want to live or to return to.

#### **h. other related matters.**

It is a huge struggle to maintain a child at university if you live in a rural or regional area distant away from your child's university of choice. Even when the student on holidays rent and college fees have to be paid to ensure the student has a roof over their head for the next semester.

Many rural families go through great hardship to ensure their child has the opportunity for a tertiary education. The bottom line is that the student has to leave home, relocate, set up home elsewhere and then support that home. They cannot live at home and attend university.

Rural students attending TAFE have very real difficulties meeting their commitments. They cannot just hop on a bus or a train and go to and from TAFE each day because there is no public transport. The cost of providing transport to and from TAFE is often prohibitive. The travelling distances often mean that young, inexperienced drivers are on the road early in the morning, attending TAFE all day and then returning home at night. So often this becomes all too hard and all too expensive and they drop out.

Some very real financial support from government, tailored to the particular needs of students who have to leave home to study at TAFE or University would ease the burden for many families and provide equity of access to tertiary education for the many for whom it is not an option for financial reasons.

We really do have some very clever young people in the bush who are not able to go to university because neither they nor their parents have the financial resources to support two homes.

**Anne and Steve Longworth**