

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

Submission by Gabrielle Collins

A. The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;

My husband and I have 3 boys, two at tertiary level and one at secondary level. In order to access the degrees they wanted at their chosen university our 2 eldest boys had to relocate to Sydney and pay board/college fees. There is no option to live at home and save money.

As well as this there is transport to and from home (5hrs by car/7hrs by train-one way) during the university holidays. If we want to visit the boys during term we need to find accommodation in Sydney which is a further expense.

If the boys rent a house this is an extra cost of around \$36000 for 2 students renting and \$54,000 if you have 3 children at university (based on \$350/wk/child for 52 weeks).

This is a direct cost that can be avoided if your child is able to live at home while attending university. Of course there are other extra living costs on top of this.

B. The education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;

Our boys were not interested in the degrees offered at U.N.E.(Armidale.) While some degrees are well recognized, others do not have the impact of a degree from a Sydney University with prospective employees.

Also a student from Tamworth would still have to relocate as it is a 3 hour return trip to Armidale (our closest university).

C. The implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;

Under the present system, because our joint income was over \$79,117 our boys were unable to get youth allowance based on our income.

So they earned around \$18,000 within 18 mths and were able to access independent allowance early on in the university year.

If they hadn't been able to do this and our income was say \$140,000, over a quarter of it would be going on rent. The boys could always work part-time while studying, but if you have a degree with a heavy work load this is not feasible.

Under the proposed plan this cut-off is around \$139,000 for two children away from home.

So, nothing has changed for parents who earn \$140,000.-they still need to give a quarter of their income to relocate 2 children to a metropolitan centre, over a third for 3 children.

It is important also to stress that this is the cut-off - you only get the full allowance if the parental income is less than \$42,559 (\$32800 on the present system).

Yes, the proposed plan is offering a start-up and a relocation scholarship, but this is only for those eligible for youth allowance.

The proposed changes to independent youth allowance rules means they would have to work full-time for 18mths in a 2 year period.

This raises three problems.

1. In regional areas full time jobs are much harder to come by than part-time jobs when the person is unskilled.
2. Many potential students will remain in the workforce and not return to further education, and
3. 2 years away from study makes it harder at university as you are out of the correct study and work habits.

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

At present I think the system is adequate. This would not be so if the proposed changes go ahead.

F. The educational needs of rural and regional students;

These are the same as those of city counterparts. Everyone should enjoy equal access to a quality secondary or tertiary education.

G. The impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities;

The main problem according to some newspaper reports, is that the system is being rorted by city kids who gain independent youth allowance and still live at home or at college (due to choice rather than need).

Surely that can be stopped without such radical changes.

Regional students will be seriously disadvantaged by these changes. There is a relocation cost that increases with every child at a metropolitan university. This is not a choice and either has to be met by the parent or the student.

If the government is serious about the dearth of professional people in regional areas these proposed changes should be seen as a definite retrograde step.

Please reconsider this important equity issue.