

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

Having had four children attend a small rural school who have to leave home for secondary education, university and TAFE, I am writing this on a personal note and will address the terms of reference as such.

- As we don't have daily access to secondary schools, universities or TAFE our children have to leave home at the age of 12 or 13 and begin to live an independent life of their siblings and parents, dealing with everyday issues socially and physically well before any child from urban Australia would have to (unless we take into account those who are forced to live on the streets). So then why is it our children are required to work unreasonable hours before they qualify for independence status with Centrelink to access payments to assist them at university or TAFE? Attending secondary school is at least recognised by the Federal Government as a 'right of the child' with the AIC not being means tested, why then is it that we discriminate against our rural and regional students by applying a means test for them to access uni or TAFE with no allowance to cover at least accommodation for these students? The true cost of sending our children away to school, uni or TAFE is not recognised as we have to set them up in the first instance with extra bedding, clothing (at home mum can wash uniforms to assist with having to purchase 5-6 shirts etc as they do whilst boarding) etc. When our students set up to attend post compulsory education it is a bigger burden on the family fitting out and moving into accommodation for them to access the metropolitan institutions. If a student is from the metropolitan area it is their *choice* to move out of home, with our children it is *forced* upon them and they are required to keep house, study (the reason for leaving home) and also work (so often long hours) to support themselves – is there any doubt the attrition rate is higher for rural and regional students? Many students feel the burden of the financial pressure and leave because of this, losing potential nurses, accountants, etc from our regions. Our regions also suffer from families leaving to educate their children as it is far cheaper to have your children at home than have to pay boarding for them thus the whole family may move or be forced to live separately and in most cases eventually all move to the metropolitan area, this drains the small regional centres of youth in our sporting associations, volunteers for our communities and clients for local business etc.
- Alternatives available for our secondary, uni and TAFE students are limited and for some they are adequate such as Distance Education or E-lessons but for the vast majority this is not an acceptable method of teaching and is very isolating and requires a huge amount of self discipline and motivation beyond their age and experience. For those choosing education of this sort there is need for more mentoring for the student and the supervisor, especially during secondary education.
- The Federal Government is negligent when providing for our rural and regional student as the cost for educating these future leaders is put

upon the parents by imposing means testing. Most agricultural (farms & stations) businesses are valued at extremely high prices but these are not a true value and should not be taken into account as an urban student is not means tested by the value of their home to be able to stay at home, have his/her needs tendered for (emotional, physical and financial) but our regional students are without the choice of staying at home – where is the equity? If our children have to work for 2 years to earn enough to qualify to be ‘independent’ they quite often choose either not to attend uni or TAFE or are lost in work other than that requiring a degree or qualification because they don’t want their parents to carry the extra financial burden for them to attend directly from school. Our students should be eligible for an allowance similar to AIC (non means tested) to commence tertiary education and then a Youth Allowance to continue their studies.

- I would bring to your attention the study done by Naomi Godden on rural students attending further education “THE RURAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION” Submission to the 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education. Naomi Godden, Social Researcher, Department of Social Work, Monash University, PO Box 197, Caulfield East VIC 3045