

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

Summary

My family and I would like to make a number of points based on our experiences.

Unfortunately country parents pay an extraordinary amount of extra money to give their children the same educational opportunity to follow their dreams and their passion as those children living in the city have on their door step.

There is no equitable access to post secondary educational opportunities for rural students attending metropolitan institutions because:-

S1) The need to leave family, friends and the town they grew up in puts rural students at a severe financial and emotional disadvantage to their metropolitan counterparts.

S2) The situation is even more acute if the student wishes to commence study directly after completing Year 12, rather than wasting one to two years on a “gap period”.

S3) The Parental Joint Income test of \$66,000 odd is totally inadequate for Youth Allowance as it costs at least \$15,000 per year (with after tax dollars) just for board & lodgings in metropolitan institutions. The Income threshold should be in the vicinity of \$250,000 as this is the sort of wage that would be able to fund a rural student attending a metropolitan institution.

Thus considering only board & lodgings for a 3 year course the cost would be $3 \times \$15,000 = \$45,000$.

We have three children $\$45,000 \times 3 = \$135,000$.

A substantial amount of (after tax) money to find you would have to agree. Please note this doesn't include HECS fees, computers, textbooks, travel to/from the institute, travel to/from home town, parental travel and accommodation costs.

S4) Kids today are told “to follow their dreams”, “we need to up skill Australia” and “work smarter not harder”, and the gap period doesn't support this. It forces kids to waste a year or two working in some dead end job (because jobs in their area of interest are unlikely to be readily available for this short period of time) merely to get enough money to show financial independence . Hopefully at the end of this period they still have the interest and passion to pursue their study.

S5) The government is happy to pay job seekers the “dole” and pay them to attend training courses to give them extra skills to make them more employable. Yet they are not prepared to pay for students who are so eager to better their skills, they uproot their whole way of life from a small country town to attend a metropolitan institution before they have “financial independence”.

S6) To put the financial and emotional impact into perspective, our son completed Year 12 last year and has moved to the eastern suburbs of Melbourne from a small town (there are no traffic lights) in the Riverina area of NSW to pursue his passion in music, it is six hours drive to Melbourne.

Terms of Reference Comments

a) the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan institutions

Country students and their families are financially disadvantaged by attending metropolitan institutions because:-

- i) parents jointly earning more than \$66,000 cannot receive any assistance for a child studying in a metropolitan area unless the student qualifies for “financial independence”, this is impossible if they decide not to waste a year or two with a “gap period” and go straight from year 12 to further education.
- ii) It currently costs us \$15,000 a year for food & lodgings for our son to attend educational facilities in Melbourne.
- iii) Transport to/from the institute, clothing, telephone costs, etc are met by our son from his mega savings. He lives on a shoe string budget spending as little as possible as he just doesn't have the money.
- iv) Living six hours away from our home town our son cannot return home on weekends for work.
- v) Living six hours away from home it is important for our son to return home on institute holidays which makes it difficult to maintain part time work in Melbourne. Also if he continued to work through the holidays he would need to find alternative accommodation as the residence where he lives in Melbourne shuts down during the holidays.
- vi) When returning home during holidays work is limited as it is a small town and employers know the students are only home for a few weeks and are therefore reluctant to displace their regular casuals.
- vii) Music students cannot defer an offer from an institution for a gap year as auditions are required for entry.
- viii) Rural students have added emotional pressure as they feel guilty about having to rely on their parents for the significant cost of following their dream.
- ix) Very few scholarships are available for non essential services, particularly entertainment.
- x) Practical based courses are not available on-line so students must attend classes, making employer friendly time available for part time work difficult.

b) the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas

There are very few educational alternatives for rural students to pursue their chosen careers in regional areas.

My son's chosen career is music, and the only regional options were Lismore or Canberra. Again these locations are 4+ hours drive away with similar costs to the metropolitan areas.

Other career options would be in a similar situation, for example Engineering.

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

The ludicrous implication is that students will be forced into taking a gap year or two solely because they and their parents cannot afford for them to go straight from Year 12 to higher education study. Two years of productive learning is wasted.

Kids these days are told to “follow your dreams” the system doesn’t support this in fact it actively promotes wasting two years in a job most likely in an area of work which is unrelated to their study preference merely to earn the required money. Whilst kids who don’t want to go to higher education and do want to work in these areas eg hospitality probably can’t get jobs.

Unfortunately due to the financial pressures of our eldest son going straight from Year 12 to studying in Melbourne we are being forced to tell our other two children they will have to take a “gap period” which is upsetting us greatly.

I would contend that the gap period is also bad for the employer, as they put a significant amount of time and money into training & supervising an employee who is going to leave in 1 to 2 years at best and may not be interested in what they are doing.

But the real tragedy is that the x student is not getting to follow their passion, the nation is not capturing that enthusiasm and employers are getting skilled individuals two years after they could of. That is of course assuming that after wasting two years of their life students are still prepared to go and put in the sacrifice to study.

d) *the short and long term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional institutions*

Short and long term enrolments of these institutions will fall as students drift out of the system due to the “gap two years” as kids are forced to the cities to find the jobs to earn the required income, they will be reluctant to return to a regional institution unless it is in their home town.

Also, once the enthusiasm and passion are replaced with a couple of dollars from a dead end job the dream may die and they may never get around to going back to a life of study and no money.

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

The government measures are totally inadequate for students wishing to go straight into tertiary study after completing Year 12.

Our son receives no government assistance because my wife and I jointly earn more

than \$66,000 odd. I consider a joint income of at least \$250,000 would be required to support a rural student studying in a metropolitan institute.

Our income is well short of this mark and therefore we are struggling financially to keep our son in Melbourne. He may have to leave his course mid way and get a job to earn the required money so he can go back to the course as a “financially independent” person, this would be most disruptive to his studies.

Our son could not pursue his passion for music at any higher educational facilities in the small town we live in, in the Riverina area of NSW.

Thus he had to move to Melbourne, and we have had to search for a place for him to live so that he can attend his preferred institute in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. These facilities are hard to find close to the institution with adequate public transport.

This move has come at great emotional and financial strain for our son and our family as our son has had to endure the emotional stress of leaving his family, friends and peers to move to a city over 500km away where he knows no one, to go to an institution where he knows no one, to live in a residence with 50 other kids he doesn't know, to share a small room with someone he doesn't know.

This would be traumatic enough, but on top of this he has the added pressure to succeed as he knows it is costing his parents \$15,000 a year to have him in Melbourne and he no longer has the part time jobs he had in his home town, so he has no money to live on. He knows it will be difficult to get a part time job in Melbourne and focus on his studies so he spends as little as possible on himself and gets as much part time work as he can when he comes home in semester breaks.

f) *the educational needs of rural and regional students*

Rural and regional students and their parents are seeking the highest possible standards from their educational institution, their teachers and administrative staff. The incentive scheme which allowed rural postings to be given a higher weighting for advancement should be encouraged and integrated with ability assessments to give the best results possible for rural kids as well as helping talented teachers to quickly advance their careers.