



WACSSO

Western Australian Council of State School Organisations

Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Robert Fry', written over a large, stylized flourish.

Presented on behalf of:
Robert Fry JP
President
WA Council of State School Organisations

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Background and Rationale for Submission

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations Inc. (WACSSO) was founded in 1921 as the representative voice of parents, citizens and students associated with government schools in Western Australia. WACSSO is a non-party political and non-sectarian body. There are currently over 750 government schools throughout the State with approximately 650 active P&Cs currently affiliated with WACSSO. WACSSO is therefore well placed to offer comments, feedback and suggestions for future developments relating to public education and training matters.

WACSSO has a mandate to influence the direction of education for the benefit of all students. Underpinning the workings of WACSSO are values and beliefs about children and young people and the importance of education. The following statements indicate the philosophical basis for this WACSSO submission and reflect our commitment based on informed appreciation and understanding about the place of public education for the future of all Australians.

WACSSO is committed to a public education system available to all young people irrespective of their age, socio-economic status, culture, gender, level of ability or where they live.

The philosophy underlying WACSSO policy centres around the principles of equality, excellence, and participatory democracy and recognises that all human beings depend on each other and so the future well-being of individuals is dependent on the future well-being of all.

All persons attending government schools have the right to an unrestricted and effective education of the highest quality to allow them to develop their full potential as individuals. As empowered citizens, these students can take every advantage of social, political, and economic opportunity; obtain fulfilment of their reasonable aspirations within the range of their abilities; contribute their skills and knowledge for the betterment of Australia; and be able to participate harmoniously in all aspects of society.

WACSSO believes that these tenets form an essential statement of principles for guidance in its practical activities toward achieving an excellent, empowering, public education system for all.

WACSSO knowledge and information pertinent to government schools and community development approaches in public education are relevant to the inquiry's terms of reference. The focus of our submission will be on the responsibility of parents and schools in particular, as WACSSO believes partnerships to be the heart and soul of a local community and the most important government investment in the future of the country. Any and all, negotiations by governments that affect the nature and wellbeing of our school communities are of concern to WACSSO.

Matters Considered:

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

Rural and regional students are faced with significant financial ramifications when the decision is made to attend secondary schools, universities or TAFEs in the metropolitan areas. These

financial imposts include travel, living expenses including food, boarding and extracurricular activity expenses that may not have been present in the rural and regional areas.

The financial ramifications are not limited to the student, but to their families and the general community. The student's family must now travel and pay accommodation expenses when visiting them. The general community does not benefit from the student leaving the area as the family and student may expend their funds when in the metropolitan area where generally the cost of items is significantly less than in the regional areas. There is more variety and availability of goods in the metropolitan areas which therefore may lead to greater expenditure.

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

An alternative that may be considered is to provide opportunities to study university courses and the like in an on-line environment similar to the existing model of the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). Universities and TAFEs could be funded to provide this service with stringent reporting requirements as part of service agreements.

Mobile facilities could be increased as a way of addressing some of the difficulties of providing training facilities in rural and remote communities. Support can be sought from local businesses to become involved in the provision of education and training within their communities. Partnerships between local businesses and training providers could be investigated.

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

The government fails to recognise the cost of appropriate provision of education in 'thin market areas' and current funding models do not adequately address the issues facing rural and remote communities e.g. Small class sizes and/or a range of educational opportunities. Current funding models also limit subject choice and students can be forced to study in a range of subject areas outside of their desired career pathways.

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

The various governments through the opening up of the training market has created for rural and remote areas a significant impact by creating a more thin market regime by having private providers choosing to offer the less resource intensive training and leaving TAFE to supply education in the resource intensive areas. The TAFE funding model does not allow them to function appropriately due to the expectation that the cross support of softer training and more resource intensive would assist in the overall funding is therefore not available with private providers creaming of these areas and this will, in the medium to long term, see the demise of public providers in training in the rural and remote areas.

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

WACSSO believes in the home being the centre of the community and the family life and as such it is imperative that the government provide adequate services of education within communities so the students do not have to leave home. It is recognised that the students most impacted on in this area are those of the rural industry and taking the child out of the environment potentially discourages them to return and continue in a business that is deteriorating within Australia.

f. *The educational needs of rural and regional students;*

As above

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

As above

h. *Other related matters.*

The changing of the schooling age in Western Australia in recent years means that there is more requirement for the governments to be able to provide educational facilities to meet the growing need of Year 11 and 12 students and their families. It is unreasonable for the government to expect to be able to increase the school leaving age without providing acceptable education facilities.

With the non-government education sector reducing their high-school intake age to Year 7s, the impact this is having on rural and remote communities in some cases is devastating. The exodus of Year 7 students from small communities will impact negatively in many ways. Within the school a reduction in numbers results in less teacher and aide time with an impact on the education of the entire student body, as well as lead to a loss of employment by staff.

Community related activities such as sport will be affected by students having to move to metropolitan areas for education, no matter at what age they are expected or required to move. Junior teams would most likely fold due to lack of numbers, which would be devastating for the children of the town.

Summary

In summarising, WACSSO believes that every child is entitled to a quality education irrespective of family and personal circumstances. All parents and carers must be given every opportunity to ensure their children receive an education including support and encouragement from all stakeholders. In Australia today there is no such thing as a private school as every school receives government funding and as such all should be treated the same and the same expectations of accepting students should be placed upon the so called private sector as it applies to the public education system. Governments must be held accountable for the provision of quality education without placing inappropriate burdens on students, families and communities.