Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

Online Submission

24/03/08

Ms Traci & Mr Jeff Wilson-Brown, Parents, Wulgulmerang

We live in a very remote part of Victoria, 2 hours drive from the nearest Secondary College. We have 2 children, the eldest, Rebecca is 19 and has just begun 2nd year Nursing at Churchill. Our youngest, Brianna is currently in year 12 at Nagle College in Bairnsdale. In order for both of our children to attend secondary School, we rented a house in Buchan, 1 hour from Bairnsdale where ther is a daily school bus to Bairnsdale.

We receive the Federal Assistance for Isolated Children Allowance to assist with the cost of maintaining a second home. This allowance is only available for secondary students or tertiary students up to the age of 16. When Rebecca finished year 12 we stopped receiving this allowance for her, yet our rent in Buchan actually increased as well as having to also pay for her accommodation at University. As my husband and I both work full time in order to afford to live in 2 houses (and must live in either Buchan or Wulgulmerang to get to work), our children are not eligible for Youth Allowance, so other than the AIC allowance we get for Brianna, we receive no assistance at all.

The issues for children from remote areas are many, from the simple day to day problems of accessing after school activities as there is no public transport as an alternative to the school bus when in secondary school, to the more complex issues that arise once they reach tertiary education. University means that students from remote areas MUST move out of home. There is no way that they could live at home and commute to any form of tertiary facility. Churchill is the nearest campus to us, but there is very limited public transport to & from Churchill and no public transport to Wulgulmerang. The closest is the Buchan Bus which will come to Gelantipy, but it only goes to Bairnsdale 3 days a week and only does one round trip each of these days. This of course does not ever fit in with the University timetable so is not an option for getting to and from Uni. Thus this also means that children from remote areas MUST have a car.

The other problem with remote areas and campuses such as Churchill is that there are very limited opportunities for students to obtain part time work to help financially with these costs. Students enrolling in City campuses would actually have much better access to public transport and part time work. The other issue is that wages in rural areas are on average lower than wages in the City, making this even more difficult AND fuel prices are vastly higher than in the city. Current Buchan fuel prices are around $1.60 per litre for diesel and $1.47 for unleaded, making travelling home on weekends out of the question most weeks, thus making family support for students less achievable than we would like it to be.
The scholarships that are currently available seem to all be targeted at students who already are eligible for Youth Allowance, there doesn't appear to be anything for remote students who cannot get Youth allowance. We would like to see an allowance developed for Rural & Remote students to assist with the cost of living away from home where it is not possible for them to live at home and access tertiary education, this needs to take into account accommodation costs as well as transport costs where there is no available public transport.

We would also applaud the extension of the Buchan Bus and additional public transport into remote areas early on Weekday Mornings and late on weekdays to allow secondary and tertiary students to get to and from their campuses via public transport when the School bus is not an option. There are some tertiary facilities in Bairnsdale, but accessing these from Buchan and beyond is not possible without a car.

yours sincerely

Traci & Jeff Wilson-Brown