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

Online Submission

8/05/08

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The subject of Higher Education is very important to myself and my family at this time. I have spent at least 3 years researching courses, universities, accommodation and financial options for both of my children. I have a son who has completed year 12 in 2007 and has been accepted into a course at a Melbourne university. He has deferred the commencement of the course until 2009 for financial reasons. I also have a daughter studying year 11 this year.

My husband and I have always encouraged our children to attend university if that was appropriate to gain further education for the field that interested them. It became obvious that the course that my son was interested in (mechanical Engineering) was only offered at city universities and that he would need to move to the city. We live in semi-rural West Gippsland. The expense of this move including books, rent, food, transport, furniture etc is quite considerable. And of course what ever financial help we give our eldest child, we would have to give to our second child. This would cripple us financially. Even if our children were blessed with genius minds there is no guarantee that they would receive a scholarship. We would not fall below the income threshold so in most cases would not be eligible to apply for a scholarship.

The only option was to defer his place at university and qualify for the youth allowance. The decision for my son to defer his course has been a difficult one. Will the break from the demands of study be a good thing or will he forget all the study habits he learnt from year 12 ? Will he get the "taste" of earning money and financial independance and perhaps decide to continue with the job? If he does attend university will the break away from study (16months) be too much? Will he decide to leave after all the hard work he put in to get there in the first place?

Sixteen months is a long time to stay focused; to stay committed to something that will still be financially difficult even with the youth allowance. He will not have the "spare time" to commit to a part time job as engineering is quite demanding. He will need to use some of the money he has earnt to support himself for the first 2 - 3 months of university. This will be quite a large sum as he will need books, bond and rent in advance etc. The reason(s) seem quite clear why Victorian students of all ages find it difficult to choose to attend and remain in university.
1. The expense of supporting themselves near the university that offers the courses our children wish to participate in.
2. In order to qualify for independent Youth Allowance the student needs to defer his/her course for 18 months.
3. The lack of distance education courses offered by the Victorian universities.
4. Local universities not offering a wide range of courses.

I feel our government needs to look at the Youth allowance again and make it more attainable for more Victorian kids and their families. It needs to be more available (and the amount increased for our country kids), not just for those that are really struggling on $30,000 p/a., but for those of us earning a reasonable sum of money. An income that just can't stretch to totally support 2 or 3 children living away from home.

Yours sincerely, Therese Baker