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

Response from BSW Region, DEECD

Most of the following data is extracted from the annual On Track Survey of school completers and early leavers. On Track follows up young people, in the six months after they leave school to find out about their post Year 12 education, training and employment destinations.

The first part of the analysis relates to BSW data compared to Victorian data and the second part looks at individual school data. Part one uses aggregated BSW data which combines data from Geelong as well the more remote parts of the region. The 3 part of the analysis uses anecdotal data but this relates to 2007 completers while the On Track data is uses data from 2006 completers.

1. In Victoria as whole 9% of Year 12 Completers defer university study. In the BSW Region the figure is 14%, a considerable difference in itself but one that is distorted because Geelong schools feature in the data. The deferment rate in regional and rural areas is much higher (See Part 3).

The reasons given by On Track respondents for deferring university study vary but financial factors generally rank highly. In the BSW Region these are again higher than for Victoria generally.

On Track gives respondents up to 14 reasons for deferring study and 7 of these are directly or somewhat directly related to financial resources. These are: hard to support self, awaiting youth allowance, costs of study, financial pressure on family, costs of travel, not worth building HECS debt and only offered full fee paying place. In the BSW Region, 4 of the top 5 ranked reasons for deferring study are financial and in each of these cases the BSW region percentage is much higher than the Victorian figure. For example, the Victorian figure Hard to Support Self is about 47% while the BSW percentage is 60%. Perhaps the most telling statistic here though is in the Awaiting Youth Allowance category. The only way that many regional and rural students can afford to study away from home is through this allowance and it is telling that for Victoria 42% of students give this as a reason while for the BSW Region the percentage is 64%.

Clearly then, financial reasons are a major factor in the decision of many BSW Year 12 completers to defer study, especially in the SW of the region. This has the added disadvantage, for these areas, of deferring students (who do not take up their offer 12 months later), generally ending up in low paying, low skilled jobs in retail and hospitality.

2. The second part of this analysis relates to school specific data. Here Geelong schools were excluded and only regional and rural centres looked at. The larger schools in larger centres will be looked at separately to the smaller, more rural schools although all school data is examined across school networks.
The largest schools in the SW of the region are in the regional city of Warrnambool and here financial reasons rate highly in students choosing to defer university study. One of these large secondary schools had 5 financial reasons in the top 7 reasons for deferral while the other had 4 in the top 7. The other government school in the network with a secondary component was a small P-12 college where 3 of the top 7 reasons for deferring study were financial.

One of the other larger regional centres is Colac and here the 2 secondary schools, both of medium size, had 3 and 4 financial reasons in their top 7. It is worth noting that Colac is within an hour of Geelong and this may be a factor compared to Warrnambool. The smaller schools in the Colac network were similar with school responses showing 3-4 financial factors in the top 7.

The Portland and Hamilton networks are similar in makeup with one large and one and 2 small secondary schools respectively. Both networks had similar responses with 3-4 financial reasons featuring in the top 7 reasons for deferring university study. In each network the larger secondary college had the higher number of financial reasons.

The last network in the SW part of the BSW Region is the Corangamite network which consists of 5 P-12 schools and one secondary college. One of the P-12s did not have enough year 12 completers to provide a statistically accurate response. In this network financial reasons for deferring university study ranked highly with all P-12s having 4-5 in their top 7, while the stand alone secondary college had 3 of 7.

Clearly then, financial barriers are an important reason for many young South Western Victorians deferring university study. Other major reasons are students not being ready for more study and having to leave home.

3. The 3 part of this analysis comprises data that is anecdotal in that it is not verifiable at this point in time. But it is consistent over 4 schools and therefore has some validity. The data and associated comments come from the Term 1 meeting of the Warrnambool and District Careers Teachers Association where deferral rates for 2007 students were discussed. A medium sized P-12 disclosed deferral rates of over 20% while a smaller p-12 on the opposite side of Warrnambool said deferral rates there were around 50% The 3 large Warrnambool schools also expressed concern over large and growing numbers of deferrals. One had a deferral rate of 48% of those offered university places while the other large state school had a rate of 40%. The medium size Catholic College, while not disclosing actual deferral rates, did say these were an issue and a growing one. All 5 schools said that the cost of accommodation in Melbourne was the main issue in deferrals.

4. Conclusion:

Secondary school students in rural and regional areas of the Barwon-South Western Region of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development face considerable hurdles if they wish to participate in higher education. Apart from the cost of living in Melbourne or other large centres, a cost that is often an insurmountable barrier for many families, students face issues such
as having to live away from their families, that many metropolitan students do not have to cope with. In addition to the training and education issues associated with this and the cost to the Victorian economy, an unacceptable number of year 12 completers in country areas end up in low skilled and low paying jobs.