SECTION 1:

SOME FACTS ABOUT TERTIARY EDUCATION AND REGIONAL STUDENTS

1. Country Victorians have the highest rate of terminating their education upon completing Year 12.*
2. Whilst almost 50% of metropolitan students will enter university, the rate for country students is just of 30%. *
3. Larger numbers of country students are deferring their placements. *
4. Melbourne Students have better access to tertiary education, whilst some regional towns have annexes of tertiary institutions and offer only a narrow range of courses which means that country students must move out of home to continue their education.
5. Given that the estimated living expenses for a student relocating to Melbourne is almost $20,000 per annum, country students often simply cannot afford to pursue an education. Students not only have to meet the cost of accommodation but also of books, Union fees, transportation and some meals (lunches and weekend meals).
6. It’s worth noting that the lowest mean of taxable incomes is within the Central Goldfields and Loddon regions which on average is approximately $33,000 per annum. Half that figure would be required to pay living expenses for their son/daughter.
7. Youth allowance is the reason for many students deferring their tertiary education. However strict means tests dictate these payments. These payments also do not keep up with the cost of living and wages.

* .... source “on track data”.

SECTION 2:

THE EXPERIENCE OF OUR SCHOOL

We are a Regional Co-educational School in country Victoria. In any one year over 90% of our students receive a Tertiary offer but many of them are forced to defer. The deferment rate at our school crept from 8% in 2004 to over 20% for the 2006 cohort and came close to 30% in 2007. Students claim that they have to defer so that they have can work and therefore meet the financial criteria to receive Youth allowance. Even so, they will still have to work many hours in part-time employment whilst at university in order to cover the short fall between Youth allowance and the real cost of living.
In 2004 we had 95% of students taking up their tertiary offer. By April 2007 this figure had dropped to 75%, again indicative of the high costs for Regional students attending metropolitan universities. Anecdotally parents tell us they cannot afford the combined costs of accommodation, books, fees and all of the other living expenses entailed in living away from home. The cost of a tertiary education, including a residential college at a metropolitan University, is currently estimated at $17,364.50 per annum. Taking out shared rental accommodation but with the other standard costs is no cheaper at $17,884.50.
Herald Sun, Wednesday March 12, 2008.
By: Jane Metlikovec (Education Reporter)

“Cost of living double for uni students from the country”
“A calculated expense”

“Rural students who have moved away from home for university can expect to pay almost double what city students fork out in expenses over the duration of their course. The Australian Scholarships Group has designed an online cost calculator, which takes into account course costs, accommodation, textbooks, food, computer and internet access, utilities, transport and entertainment. It also includes mobile phone bills, medical costs, and HECS or tuition fees. Students can enter their future profession to calculate how much they will spend during university. ASG General Manager of Communities Warwick James said the university costs calculator was useful for students and their families. According to the calculator an engineering student living away from home can expect to pay up to $121,000 over their four-year degree. They would only pay $70,000 if they lived with their parents.”
SECTION 3:

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

More subsidisation of a tertiary education for rural students is critical. Rural areas are suffering acute shortages of professionals and skilled workers in spheres. Country students will very often return to the familiar country environment upon completion of their degrees and thus contribute back their expertise. Also, at the current costs of gaining a tertiary education for country students, too many students of merit are being denied this opportunity or are being forced to pursue careers (not of first choice) because they have to choose from the narrower range offered at the Regional Universities or TAFES. This is an inequity which should not be tolerated in a country which prides itself on "a fair go". There is no comparison between the costs of a tertiary education for a metropolitan student and for that of a regional or country student. Yet, the financial criteria for Youth Allowance are the same for both and the quantum is the same for both. While some regional students may qualify for some rental assistance, this bears no resemblance to the real costs of the accommodation required.