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

Online Submission

20/04/08

Mrs Deborah Keiller, Parent, Myamyn

As a parent of a student from south west Victoria currently studying at university in Melbourne, I wish to make the following comments with regard to this Inquiry.

Students from country areas of Victoria are less likely to apply for university courses, or take up an offer, primarily because of economic hardship as a direct result of having to relocate to a major city, set up a "home" and pay living expenses for the duration of the course. As students have generally been living at home during their secondary school years, they are still considered as dependent on parents even though they have moved (in our case 375 kilometres from home).

Students are not entitled to any CentreLink support if they have not earned in the vicinity of $18,900 in the previous 18 months. An impossible task for a full-time student (on junior wages). The assets and income of the parents are taken into consideration in determining if the student (living away from home) is entitled to any government assistance. No consideration is given to the hardship caused to families having to suddenly afford to set up a home, pay rent or accommodation charges, food and services, travel for a student who has no choice but to live away from home in order to study at university.

In our case, our daughter lives on campus. To pay for accommodation alone, the annual charge is in the vicinity of $20,000. This does not include other costs associated with study, general living and so on. Can you imagine suddenly having to lose over $20,000 from your family budget. Over three years, this amounts to over $60,000 which has to be found by a "RURAL WORKING FAMILY".

Students contemplating studying at university that live in rural areas have not only to decide what their future career is to be, but also come to terms with having to leave their familiar surroundings, family and friends to move to an alien environment knowing that if they do go to university, they are going to cause severe financial hardship to their families. No wonder university participation by rural students is so low. Government financial assistance is imperative to encourage more students from rural areas to apply for and take up places at universities.