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

Online Submission

17/04/08

Ms Barbara Medhurst, Parent, Nyora

I would like to offer another comment in regards to my situation, which is probably a little different than most. Some background information. I am a radio/instrumentation engineer living in the Gippsland area. I have an 8 year old child (grade 3). I have 20+ years working experience. I currently only work intermittently and interstate in a highly sort after trade. (EG there is lots of highly paid work for me everywhere in Australia except here). I like to learn! I have always been passionate about training and education, but I didn’t realise how passionate I was until I enquired about doing more study myself. The goal was to become a high school mathematics/physics teacher – given my 20+ years of actually using the knowledge being taught to high school students, and the fact that the Victorian Government was screaming out for Mathematics and Science teachers. All ‘local’ Victorian universities offered only internal courses, and the closest university was a 1hr20min – say 3 hours round trip, per day if you include trying to find a park etc – which works out to 15 hrs a week. Compare that to the usual amount of study time suggested by universities as 12 hrs per week per subject. I must also pick up & drop off my child at school – needless to say there is also no after school care options here either. After spending considerable time looking at many different universities (and for other technical & scientific courses) I found my cheapest, most time & cost effective option was to do an external course with Central Queensland University. And that included all the airfares and accommodation I needed for my residential school!!!! As for external/correspondence based scientific studies, I haven’t found a ‘local’ university that offers courses such as chemistry or physics. Again, interstate universities seem to lead the way. Even RMIT, which has long been considered the ‘guru’ university for science and technology only offered not much more that management as a distance option for undergraduates (I hope things have/will change). When I look around me an see the lack of training and education facilities for anything technical or scientific, and consequently, lack of job/business opportunities in this region, I wonder what my child sees as his place in the future. It almost certainly will not be here. My skills have taken me all over Australia and gives me the option to travel the world. I want the same option for my child, and short of joining the Australian Defence Force, he has few options. For this reason ONLY, I am planning to be moving in about 5 - 8 years (probably interstate) because there is no real life on offer for my child to stay here. He has no real interest in agriculture. I am one of the fortunate parents who understand what it is like being a uni student, being a parent, living away from home and studying away from family and friends.
I am aware of the issues surrounding university life and the working world. I am also one of the fortunate parents who has the ability and willingness to leave if a brighter future is not available here!!

B R Medhurst