SUBMISSION TO THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ENQUIRING INTO GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES IN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

The information contained here is based on experience gained in visiting rural schools, speaking to students and parents living in rural locations, and implementing initiatives designed to increase rural awareness of, and participation in post compulsory education.

Factors affecting participation in post compulsory education

1. Peer role models

Students with ability are often sent to city based schools, by rural parents seeking to obtain maximum educational advantage for their children. This can have a negative impact upon teachers in rural schools, and upon the students themselves.

2. Occupational role models

Rural students have more limited exposure to potential roles they may aspire to.

3. Aspirational ethos

Many rural students do not consider themselves as post-compulsory education material. In many areas, few of their peers have proceeded to this level, and occupations not requiring tertiary qualifications may be held in high esteem and be considered worthwhile personal achievements.

4. Relocation

Cities can be daunting for rural people. Continuing with post compulsory study invariably involves relocation and a number of issues such as accommodation, transport, friendship groups, social adjustments etc.

5. Costs and income support

Rural families have to endure a much greater financial burden than their metropolitan counterparts.

6. Availability of subjects

Year levels and class sizes at rural schools tend to be smaller, thereby affecting the range of subjects available to students and restricting their choice of post compulsory options. A compounding factor is that many schools in rural locations experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified teaching staff which may impact upon continuity of study, and subject availability.

7. Self knowledge

Many rural students are uncertain about their personal abilities because they have a much small pool of peers with which they can compare themselves.

INITIATIVES HAVING POSITIVE IMPACTS UPON RURAL PARTICIPATION

1. Pre University Residential Programs
These are taster type programs spread over several days providing students with exposure to university lecturing, residential accommodation, and other aspects of university life. Students meet some of the costs of such programs and subsequent take up into tertiary education is high.

2. Adjustments to Course Entry Scores

Tertiary institutions and nominated schools can work together in determining agreed criteria by which entry scores can be varied. The performance of students so admitted can be monitored, and additional infrastructure and support provided.

3. Provision of work experience

Tertiary institutions provide work experience for significant student cohorts from given schools, the intention being to “normalize” the institution and to have students accept it as an achievable destination.

4. Enhancement lectures

University academics visit rural locations and make themselves available to students for a day, and present enhancement lectures linked to year 11/12 studies

5. Careers and other orientation advice

Tertiary careers and student services personnel spend a day in nominated schools being available to spend time in answering at length student questions

6. Availability of financial support

Provision of scholarship assistance to students from designated rural locations eg the former Teacher Studentships provided unique opportunities for rural participation in post compulsory education and subsequent access to professional careers

7. Additional support for designated students entering university under special arrangements

There is conflicting evidence whether students respond well to initiatives indicating they are being treated differently from their peers

Lionel Parrott, Croydon