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

Online Submission

17/04/08

Ms Heather Webster, Parent, Barnawartha

Thankyou for the opportunity to submit my thoughts on an area close to my heart. I am a sole parent of four young adults who have all chosen to go on to university after school. They are currently 29, 27, 25 and 22. Even though I was working in a position which gave me a reasonable salary, there was no way I could afford the living away from home costs for uni attendance for even one, let alone three at once, so I gave my children the alternatives I could see as viable: - either choose to attend a local uni (living near Albury Wodonga we have local choices), win a scholarship, or work for a year between school and uni, and therefore be able to receive Youth Allowance. My first daughter chose to attend a local uni, Latrobe Wodonga, to study Behavioural Science, and also won a scholarship which paid for her books and HECS fees. My second daughter worked for a year between school and uni, and then studied Arts Asian Studies at ANU, Canberra. She was not successful in receiving a scholarship, despite receiving a TER score of 94.5 and a Premier's Award for coming 5th in the state in one of her subjects. My son was awarded a CO-OP program scholarship, to study Mechanical Engineering at UNSW. His scholarship met his living away from home costs, but meant that his course required an extra year of study (one year of work for two of his sponsors) and 10 weeks work during each of his first two year's holidays working for the other two sponsors. My fourth child worked for a year between school and uni and is currently studying Forensic Biology at Deakin Geelong. The limited income the students receive from their Youth Allowance means that country students like mine have real issues with the costs of books and course materials, healthy eating, managing to get home (home is at least 4.5 hours away), and need to own cars to be able to get to uni or part time work in areas where public transport is not available. They also postpone things like going to the doctor or dentist (and don't tell mum till the situation is desperate!) My youngest daughter was living on campus for her first two years, and was the only one of her large group of friends who had to have a part time job - the parents of the others supported their sons and daughters. However not all parents are able to manage extra regular money, even though they would love to. What needs to happen so that country students get a fair go whilst attending uni if they so desire? Obviously the actual cost of living needs to be taken into account when determining such allowances as Youth Allowance. It is not a difficult job for the Government department responsible to work out a budget and make sure that this is met by the allowance that these students need to survive. If we want the brightest future for our country, then we MUST give our children the best and fairest chance to succeed.