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

Online Submission

04/06/08

Wonthaggi Secondary College

This submission is made on behalf of Wonthaggi Secondary College.

We believe that the rate of participation in higher education by our students is significantly affected by where they live. When compared to students from the metropolitan area our students are at a considerable disadvantage.

Wonthaggi Secondary College has an enrolment of around 1170 students. We have a lower Year 7 – 12 retention rate than the state average with typically around 65% of our students completing Year 12. Historically our students, when compared to the rest of the state, have also been less likely to pursue tertiary education.

Recent data suggests that while more of our students are now applying for university places they are also becoming increasingly less likely to actually take up offers that are made. The number of our students who apply for and are offered university positions has increased in recent years. The number of our students who actually enrol in university has remained steady at about 20%. On – Track data however (for 2003 to 2006) has shown a marked increase in the number of our students who are offered university places but who opt to defer studies:

- 2003 7% deferred
- 2004 12% deferred
- 2005 16% deferred
- 2006 23% deferred.

There are no university options that are geographically close to Wonthaggi. Monash University (Gippsland) is physically closest but too far away to commute. Most of our students apply for Melbourne campuses. Although further away than Monash (Gippsland) transport options are better. Very few of our students have family or friends with whom they can stay in Melbourne so economic considerations are important.

As outlined, an increasing number of our students opt to defer their university course for a year. Although there are some advantages to students deferring for a year most of our students do so out of economic necessity so that they can work and qualify for Government assistance. Students from lower income families can often access university the year following Year 12. This can be because they can access Government assistance without the need to qualify.
They can sometimes also access a range of scholarships and other support targeted at lower income families. Students from middle income families can often be the most adversely affected group when it comes to developing an independent financial capacity to access tertiary study. They are not eligible for Government assistance and often not eligible for many scholarship and other support options.

We believe that the most significant challenge faced by country students trying to access tertiary education is the financial challenge. We would welcome any outcome which addressed this. Having the money to live and study away from home, without having to work excessive hours in part time jobs, would alleviate some of the other factors that affect our students such as homesickness, isolation from friends and lack of time to travel home.