



BIEDO Fast Facts

Issue Two, December 2010

Information compiled and researched by BIEDO specifically for the Inland Burnett

Welcome to our second edition of BIEDO Fast Facts!

In the first issue "Rural Students and University", we presented some key factors that would act as barriers to rural students to participate in higher education. There are many programs (run mainly by our universities) to remove those barriers and to improve the representation of the equity groups (see outlines of groups below) in higher education.

In this Edition of Fast Facts, we focus on school outreach programs run by universities, mainly aimed at raising students' aspirations towards higher education. Then we also present some issues about financial assistance.

If you'd like further information about this newsletter, please contact our Goomeri office on 4169 7851 or email biedoadmin@burnett.net.au.

What are the Equity Groups

The Australian Government has identified six groups that are under-represented in Australian higher education:

1. women in non-traditional study areas
2. people from non-English speaking backgrounds,
3. people with disability,
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders,
5. **people from rural and geographically isolated areas of Australia,**
6. people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (SES).

Even though there is evidence of improvement in the access and participation of some of these groups, three groups in particular continue to be significantly under-represented:

- people from low SES backgrounds;
- Indigenous people
- **people from regional and remote areas**

(Ref: CSHE 2008)

Topic One Cont'd: Rural Students and University

"Since 2005 the Australian government has required publicly funded universities to operate and report regularly on an outreach program with the aim of attracting people from one or more of the equity groups (see descriptions below)."

The outreach programs run by universities include a vast range of components. As well as focusing on campus visits and mentoring programs they also provide equity scholarships and entry programs for students. A survey funded by DEEWR (Dept of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations) was conducted in 2008 to identify the nature and extent of pre-Year 11 outreach programs operated by universities. The survey received a response rate of approx 70% from all Australia universities. The key findings of the survey concluded:

- Most of the interventions targeted year ten students. This is considered too late as the schooling system has already sorted students into particular pathways.
- Most of the outreach programs aimed at raising students' aspiration towards higher education. Financial assistance for the students was the least commonly reported aim.
- The intervention program only extended to a one-off event due to funding availability thus only giving students a taste of university life.
- Students from low SES backgrounds were the most significant target group, followed by Indigenous students and then students from rural and remote location.

For many universities, school outreach programs are overlapped with recruitment activities in some degree. Therefore, outreach activities have been primarily designed to identify academically capable students in their final years of school, and encourage them to apply for university.

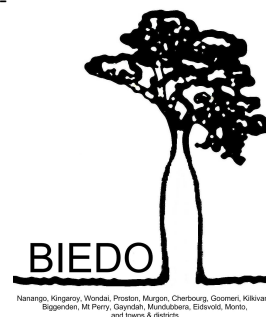
Conclusion: As most of the outreach programs were poorly evaluated mainly due to under-funding, it's difficult to tell how effective they are. However, we have good reason to question the effectiveness of those programs as there're low involvement of communities. Students' aspirations towards higher education is deeply impacted by their family's and community's culture and attitude towards higher education. Universities by themselves are not able to bring about the cultural shift within the community (Stewart 2008).

However there is some good news for outreach programs!

- To assist eligible universities to meet the Australian Government's 2020 target (that's 20% of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level to be from people with a low SES background), \$108M over four years has been allocated to enable universities to develop partnerships through outreach activities with stakeholders, including schools, State/Territory Governments, VET providers and community groups.
- A further \$325 million over four years is allocated as support loading for low-SES. Universities receive funds based on their respective share of the indicator of domestic undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds. However, the money can also be used for outreach.
- Universities within Qld have reached an agreement on collaborative outreach programs in order to secure federal competitive grant money.

Sources used in this newsletter include:

www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/
www.adcet.edu.au/
www.equity101.info/



Counting the Cost

In our first edition we raised the challenges that arise for rural students wanting to attend University. Research suggested that regional students are under represented in universities. One of those reasons is that students and their families face the additional burden of relocation costs on top of higher education fees. Lack of educational alternatives in rural and regional areas means rural students must leave home for tertiary education. Course availability was stated to be the major factor in students choosing to relocate from rural and regional areas to study at metropolitan universities.

Financial costs of students moving away for tertiary education The annual cost for students to study away from home was estimated to be \$15-20,000 (plus vehicle) - estimated in 2007 (which could be an underestimation today). Those costs include:

- Start-up expenses of \$3-6,000 for travel and accommodation to enroll, attendance at Orientation week and sourcing accommodation, bond, computer, moving costs, setting up a house and a vehicle.
- Living expenses of \$250-400 per week either in private rental accommodation, or university residential accommodation, parking fees, phone, transport, clothing sporting fees, work uniform and travel, health, socializing and unexpected expenses.
- Study related expenses such as printer, internet connection, stationary, lecture notes and text books, short courses, and student association fees.
- Travel home and travel and accommodation costs for family to visit.
- Tuition fees including upfront TAFE fees and Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) - Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) fees (if not deferred) (Godden, 2007).

Youth Allowance provides assistance for people aged 16-24 years old who are studying full-time or undertaking a full-time Australian Apprenticeship. The maximum rate of Youth Allowance for a single student living away from home is \$371.40 per fortnight (Centrelink Fastsheet, 20 Sep-31 Dec 2009). Currently, eligibility for Youth Allowance is based on a parental means test, or by applicants meeting criteria that demonstrate their independence. The criteria are too strict that it excludes many regional families.

On-campus accommodation

There is evidence highlighting the benefits of pastoral care available in on-campus accommodation for students living away from home, particularly in their first years of tertiary study. On-campus residential accommodation was believed to be a very positive experience. It provides emotional and academic support, security and friends. Campus Accommodation costs vary depending on where you chose to study and course availability, for example:

- UQ's St Lucia campus has 10 residential colleges. The price varies from about \$312/wk to \$485/wk (depending on self/fully catered)
- QUT's Campus Living Villages manages student accommodation near Kelvin Grove campus. Prices start from \$220 per week, per room in a 5 or 6 person shared apartment. Or there are Student Lodges and Hostels, which are similar to residential colleges, but are not located on or necessarily near the grounds of a university. Prices for hostels that provide meals start from \$200/wk and become cheaper for lengthier periods of stay. QUT students can apply for a place in a residential college at UQ or Griffith University.
- Griffith University Village offers a 52 week period accommodation. Prices range from \$195.50 per room in a 5-bedroom apartment to \$262 for a 1-bedroom studio.
- Central Queensland University's Capricornia College is \$280 per week. Students can rent one or two terms.

However many students reported that the lack of affordable campus accommodation and the very long waiting lists made finding accommodation difficult.

Distance education could be an option for rural and regional students. However, some research highlights the importance of face-to-face contact for students studying for their first post-secondary qualification. After students have completed their first degree they cope better with online courses for postgraduate study (Committee Hansard, 2009).

Income support for students

On 17 March 2010 the Senate voted to pass amendments to the Government's student income support legislation (Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Income Support for Students) Bill 2010). The following changes have come into affect:

- Lowering of the age of independence to 24 years of age.
- Changes to the means testing of equity and merit scholarships.
- Introduction of Student Start-Up and Relocation Scholarships.
- Relaxation of parental income test for Youth Allowance.
- Tightening of the workforce participation test for independent status (except for certain rural and remote demographics).

From 1 January 2011:

- Lowering of the age of independence to 23 years of age.
- Start-Up Scholarships paid at full rate from 2011 onwards.

From 1 January 2012:

- Lowering of the age of independence to 22 years of age.

Private rental accommodation

The price of private rental accommodation varies a lot depending on the location and condition of the place. However, one thing for sure is that the price goes higher and higher each year. Moreover, students need to continue to pay for rental accommodation through holiday periods when they return home if they want to retain the accommodation. Rental agencies look less favourably on university students as tenants. And there are also other concerns such as finding a suitable person to stay with.



Counting the Cost cont'd

It's reported that even at the maximum receipt of Youth Allowance, it doesn't cover all of students' living costs. Students are supplementing Youth Allowance with part-time work and parental assistance (Godden etc, 2009). What's more, most students from rural and regional Australia are not eligible for Youth Allowance. How much does Youth Allowance actually benefit rural students? We will have an insight into this question here.

Income threshold and regional families

- With the same income level, the rural person has to find additional moneys to have their child relocate to undertake higher education. Even the government raised the Parental Income Test threshold (from approx \$32,00 to approx \$43,000), it's still considered as too low and unrealistic. Many middle-income parents in the rural and regional areas above the thresholds cannot provide \$10-15,000 a year to each child studying away from home, especially when there are more than one child accepting education at the same time.
- The assets threshold is particularly inequitable for farmers or small business-owners. For many farming families, their assets (including land) providing income and cannot be sold — they are 'asset rich but cash poor'. Assets only have value when sold.

Many farming parents expressed anger that farms are considered as assets when the primary home is not:

"[Our farm is] not like a holiday house, it's not like a second home, it's not a luxury. That's where our house is and that's our income"

"...if you live in a house in the city, valued at a million dollars, because it's your primary residence, it doesn't come into the equation."

- Parent (from focus groups of Godden's study, 2007)

Workforce participation test and rural youth

- Many young people in regional communities deferred their studies after Year 12 to work for Independent Youth Allowance eligibility and there has been a steady increase in the number of students deferring (Godden etc, 2007).
- Some students show positive attitudes towards 'gap year'. One of the interviewees in a previous telephone interview (conducted by BIEDO) even said that she strongly recommended school leavers to take 'gap year' before they attend university. Positive aspects of deferral identified in some studies include maturity, preparation, earning money, opportunity to travel, remaining with their peer group, and reconnecting with family (particularly if the child attended boarding school). However, there are evidence that negative attitude to deferral far outweighed the positive attitudes.
- The biggest concern about deferral is that regional young people may not return to university after deferring their studies, which had been observed in many studies. Young people who defer may lose motivation with their study. However, the dominant issue is that regional young people must give up an income and a lifestyle to participate in tertiary education. Some young people just got used to a different lifestyle and didn't want to return to study.
- The income amount and working hour criteria are considered as too high. In many regional communities, there is limited employment for young people to earn enough during their gap year and holidays. Thus, many young people must leave home to find employment.

How do regional young people cover the expenses?

Regional young people must have a combination of methods to cover the expenses of studying away from home. The combination may include some of the following financial sources:

- Parents' contributions
- Youth Allowance
- Semester and holiday work
- Gap year (a break between Year 12 and tertiary education)
- Scholarships (such as Student Start Up Scholarship and the Relocation Scholarship)
- Debt

Workforce participation test

Before the changes, for students to demonstrate independence through workplace participation criteria they must:

1. Have worked full-time (at least 30 hours a week) for at least 18 months in the last two years (30 hours a week for 18 months criterion); or
2. Have worked part-time (at least 15 hours a week) for at least two years since leaving school (part-time for two years criterion); or
3. Have been out of school for at least 18 months and have earned at least 75% of the maximum rate of pay under Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale in an 18 month period (fixed amount in 18 months criterion).

From 1 July 2010 most prospective students will only be able to apply for the Independent rate of Youth Allowance based on Workforce Participation if they have worked for an average of 30 hours per week for at least 18 of the prior 24 months. Students from Outer Regional Australia, Remote Australia or Very Remote Australia in the AGSC can still access the old rules if their combined parental income for the appropriate tax year is less than \$150,000.

References:

www.parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/

www.centrelink.gov.au/

www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee

www.csu.edu.au/research/

www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/resources

Want to know more? If you'd like further information on this topic, please contact BIEDO on 4169 7851 We're also keen to know of other topics you're interested in. We can research these for you too!



Narrango, Kingaroy, Wondal, Proston, Marong, Charbourg, Goonem, Kilklan, Biggenden, Mt Perry, Gayndah, Mundubbera, Edgely, Morlo, and towns & districts