

Inquiry: **Inquiry into the Use of School Buses in Rural and Regional Victoria**

Hearing Date: **27 July 2021**

Question taken on notice

Directed to: **Professor Carolyn Unsworth**

1. Mrs McArthur (Page 29)

Question asked.

I am just wondering if Professor Unsworth would be able to give us any anecdotal evidence from students who have not continued their education or not started it because of lack of transport access.

Response:

Thank-you for the opportunity to go back to the University to ask for further evidence concerning students who have not continued their education or not started it because of lack of transport access. Professor Teresa Tjia (Dean of Students and Registrar, Student Directorate, DVC Academic) was able to provide some evidence from individuals as well as some further global data representing problems the staff have noted on many occasions.

- A large number of complaints were received from students from the Ballarat Campus when the bus timetable was changed and did not allow enough time for students travelling from Melbourne/Bacchus March/ Ballan to get from the train station to the first lectures of the day at the Federation University Campus. Several of the student complaints indicated they would need to cease their studies as they simply couldn't get to class on time. Student Connect at the University organised a daily early morning bus to transport students from the station to the campus. This was funded by the students until the University and the local bus company arranged to get buses better connected to get these students to class on time.
- It's difficult to gather evidence from students who don't come to University because the transport hurdle is simply too great. We have had students who come to Open Day and are very enthusiastic to enrol. However, they describe their transport situation and talk about public transport difficulties. However, there is no direct way to follow up on these students, and there are students who simply don't enrol.
- Recently we did have one specific example of a mother on a scholarship to study at Federation University, and her daughter then enrolled the following year after the mum started. The daughter didn't have a driver license which meant the mum had to give her a ride to University each day. There were no public transport options for them, and the fuel expense was an issue. The mum couldn't afford to go back home and then pick up the daughter at the end of the day, which meant she spent all day on campus, waiting for the

daughter to finish. This also hampered the daughter's development of independence and self-reliance, which are skills honed at University.

- We recently had a student who lives 1.5 hours away from the Ballarat Campus in the Wimmera. This student loved the lockdown because she could save the driving time for study and save the fuel money. Once the online mode finished and she had to attend classes again (compulsory skill acquisition classes), she had to drop out of her studies as she could no longer afford to get to Ballarat to finish her degree.

- Gippsland campus students, in particular International students, frequently report difficulties accessing public transport to and from campus. This impacts community engagement/sense of belonging as well as employment and placement opportunities. One student reported to us that he has to be resourceful and organise to ride share with other students with access to cars so he can get to campus. However, another international student has told us that ride share is her only option and she worries about safety with this, and would much prefer to use a public bus.

- In 2021 alone, Federation University Student Financial Support have issued:
 - over \$4,000 in vouchers to assist students with the cost of food/fuel
 - over \$15,000 in expense related support (such as car registration).
 - The team note that the lack of accessible public transport places a significant financial strain on students, often forcing them to run a car they often cannot afford.

- In 2021 alone, the Federation University Scholarships Office have issued:
 - over \$170,000 in placement grants (domestic undergraduate) to assist students with fieldwork imbedded in their University course (e.g. nursing and allied health students). These grants are largely to cover the cost of transport to their fieldwork and loss of wages from their part time jobs which support these students to pay for transport.
 - Over \$14,000 in financial hardship grants – these are largely to cover the costs of expenses such as car costs (fuel, maintenance and registration) as there is no readily available public transport, and other living expenses

Thanks-you for considering this further information.

Carolyn Unsworth