

Scathing report reveals SA unis failing on country enrolments

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A scathing new report has revealed how few kids from regional SA make it through uni compared to their city colleagues, as country kids have their say on the sales pitches.

SA country kids are attending university at one third of the rate of their city cousins, and universities have been told to lift their game when encouraging regional students.

Scathing feedback about country student marketing by universities has been provided by SA schools and students, and published in a joint report from UniSA, Newcastle University and Country Universities Centre.

Nationally one in every three city students ends up with a university degree, but this drops to one in ten for country SA students, the report warned.

Universities tour the state to inform school leavers of their best options at Adelaide campuses, but when interviewed for the study, some students were scathing of the visits to their school.

“They come in and do a fun activity with us and then try to sell their uni. How stupid do they think we are? We know it is marketing,” one country year 11 student said.

And another: “They just bring a PowerPoint and talk about how great their uni is”.

Many students said they were given no information about how they would cope with how to “live, eat and travel around the city” compared to their country homes.

Speaking in Port Lincoln, Commissioner for Children and Young People Helen Connolly said the feedback supported negativity commonly expressed to her by country families and students.

She said the lack of help for country students added to the already difficult task of relocating their lives.

“Many young people living outside of Adelaide aspire to higher education but are put off by the sheer scale of the undertaking,” she said.

“Not only do they have to leave their home and come to a large city to live, they have to also ensure that they or their family can cover the costs of living away from home, or travel long distances to attend if this is not possible.”

Flinders University Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students), Professor Romy Lawson said it was improving the information flow to country schools and students.

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“We have a deep connection with communities around South Australia and the Northern Territory, reinforced by its health and medical rural and regional education programs offered at 11 campuses and locations from Darwin to Mount Gambier,” she said.

The researchers conducted a survey and one-on-one interviews with students from 14 SA regional high schools with a total of 5000 students, after they had hosted university marketing and recruitment days.

The study found; “When asked in the survey which people have impacted on their decisions about what to do after high school, fewer than half (46 per cent) reported any significant impact (some impact to very strong impact) from ‘university students and staff visiting my school’.”

In the most surprising result, researchers found the opinions of friends had more of a “very high or very strong impact” than university visits.

The biggest influences on student choices were found to be; parents/guardians, role model or other respected adult, teachers, University open campus days, friends, university visits to schools, sisters/brothers and career advisers.

The report found universities should put more emphasis on practical help.