

To The Committee Secretary,

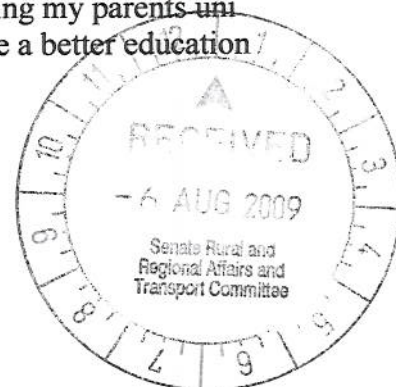
I am a regional student planning to attend university next year in Bundoorah, Melbourne. I took a gap year in the confident assumption that if I earn over \$18 800 that I will be eligible for the living away from home allowance. This course of action was strongly endorsed by my parents, teachers and older peers who have been to uni. Since I live in [redacted] over 3.5 hours away from Bundoorah; which provides the course I am interested in, I determined that I would need some form of financial assistance to lessen the burden on my family and myself. As I and my sisters are triplets, who have all obtained places at the same university, my parents decided that the best course of action was to buy a house in the city for myself and my two sisters. To help support this endeavor as soon as my exams were over I applied for jobs in and around the community. I was disappointed but not surprised at the number of people unwilling to employ me on the basis that I would be shortly moving away to further my education. Further lowering my job prospects was the number of employers offering only casual "off the books" work, which would then have the unfortunate consequence of me being unable to prove my income.

I eventually settled for a seasonal job at a farm nearby, having turned down several more attractive offers, purely for the reasons that they were 'off the books.' This was a job that required me to sign a contract that allowed the company to disqualify my sick leave, holiday pay and overtime rate. There was also no fixed number of hours, meaning that if the company required a big order to be filled, they would often call me into work at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, in an open sided shed with temperatures recorded as high as 38.5 degrees and as low as 4 degrees at my workstation. In addition to this in single 'busy' week I put in over 80 hours of work, 12 hours a day for those 7 days. Exhausted, I consoled myself that the money earned was helping me reach my target.

However, after reading an article in the Gippsland Times, I was shocked and dismayed to discover that all my hard work may be for naught. I simply could not meet the requirements of the proposed changes. In order to 'prove' independence it is proposed that a minimum of 18 months work is required, which, even though I have taken a gap year would mean 6 months at the start of my course without financial support, leaving me struggling to assimilate into uni life, set up my house and find a job all at the same time. The required hours worked during those 18 months are also impractical. A minimum of 30 hours a week requires me to land a full time job, and it is extremely difficult to persuade the prospective employer to give you the job when you inform them that you will be moving away in 6 months. One memorable remark which will stick in my memory was delivered by a local shop owner, 'Why should I waste my time and money training you up when you are going to leave as soon as you get good at this job?'

No wonder regional students, including many of my friends, are choosing instead to join the workforce. There is just not enough money for them to attend university, and so for many their dreams remain unrealized as they join their parents on the farm. The proposed changes make it nearly impossible for regional students to attend uni, which are ironically the very people that are the most disadvantaged by the transition in the first place.

With the financial crisis having the double effect of decimating my parents uni fund, saved for painstakingly over the years so their kids would have a better education



and opportunities than themselves, plus drastically reducing the employment opportunities available in the small rural communities for myself and my two sisters, we are in the unhappy position of being unable to qualify for financial assistance, but also unable to support ourselves. My parents' funds will stretch to provide a roof over our heads, and that is all. The rest of the money needed to support ourselves will have to be provided by ourselves, and considering that we have all obtained places in science based courses, simply does not leave us enough time away from campus to pursue a job of 30 hours a week

Surely sending rural triplets to uni is a special case.

Yours sincerely

Teagan Killoran

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Teagan Killoran". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T' and a long, sweeping underline.