

August 2, 2009

The Receiving Officer,
SENATE INQUIRY



To Whom It May Concern,

We are writing in relation to the **Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.**

We understand that this inquiry will act, in part, as an assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions.

We moved as newlyweds from Melbourne to the beautiful Gippsland Lakes region in East Gippsland, Victoria over twenty years ago. We enjoyed working as youthworkers for eight years and our first two children were born during that time. We believed it to be an ideal environment for children to grow up in, and indeed there have been numerous benefits which would not be available to them in the city.

Our sons watched and supported their Mother achieve her double degree as a mature-aged student, after she had stayed at home to look after them until the youngest was at school. She worked hard to study and maintain a family, and travelled around 180 kilometres each way to lectures three times per week over six years. It was an enormous burden to her physically and emotionally and, at times for the family. It was also a very considerable cost in time and fuel and wear and tear on our family car, which took some years of working to recover from. Currently the boys are watching their Father work through his Degree by distance education. Whilst it is progressing reasonably well it would not be possible to maintain motivation and juggle the work-life balance, such as it is, without 47 years of life-experience to draw upon, a reasonable income and considerable job flexibility. It is far from ideal though, and the study often has to take a very low priority which makes it a less-than optimal use of the opportunity.

As our children progressed through adolescence it became clear that there are few employment opportunities locally beyond the take-away food franchises and supermarkets or food processing plants. Those jobs have little chance of providing careers or vocation with any future worth achieving.

The two oldest boys have left home to pursue further studies and opportunities. We are not wealthy and have not yet established the equity to purchase any sort of base for them in Melbourne (or any other study centre). The eldest left to study architecture and live with relatives until we could find an alternative. Within weeks the financial difficulties had stretched our resources to the limit and before the end of first semester he had left full-time study to find more time to work to support himself. Two years later he is stuck in a factory job with no prospects of advancement at a time of growing unemployment and is struggling to get back into study of some sort, long since having given up the dream of architecture. It was simply too stressful for him financially, even though he is a hard worker and has been working part-time since he was in Year 8.

Our second son is also currently living with relatives in Melbourne with a university place deferred intending to commence studying next year having had his sights set on the Diplomatic Service for some years. He is working part-time as a kitchen hand, having commenced work within two weeks of completing his VCE exams as an all-out effort to qualify for the Youth Allowance. He cannot stay with relatives permanently and we are currently trying to find finance to purchase some sort of base for him to live in and share with either his brother or other tenants. We are having difficulty borrowing even a small sum and so his chances of study are diminishing.

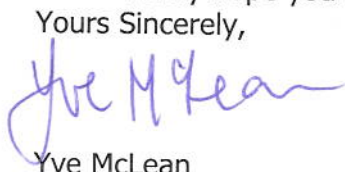
Local friends and colleagues tell us they have been saving for years and have set aside \$15,000 - \$20,000 per year for their children's accommodation while their children work many hours part-time per week to support themselves through their studies. We are not crying poor. We are both teachers now, and on adequate incomes to support children who live at home and study. However, there are no possibilities for university studies within 180 kilometres and even those are limited and do not appeal to our children. The local TAFE, where I teach, struggles to provide pathways to significant vocational opportunities within the area - there are simply not the employment possibilities in this economically depressed region. So the only possibilities which appeal and seem to fit with their talents and abilities are at least 300 kilometres distant. Our wider family who have adult children studying find the financial burden considerable but manageable, because they do not have to find a second place of accommodation. For us it is simply impossible to support the children living away from home even with their considerable part-time income.

By withdrawing the financial support which was in place when our second son deferred his university place the government is creating a seemingly insurmountable impediment to him being able to study next year. He will struggle to survive financially as he will have to work full time to support independent accommodation and living in the longer term. His university place is under threat as the institution has agreed with others that they will not hold the place another twelve months. We are very concerned that, like his brother, because his parents are not wealthy enough to own two homes or pay tens of thousands of dollars per annum extra to accommodate our children while they study away from home, he will not be able to pursue his goals to achieve a degree, at least not any time in the foreseeable future.

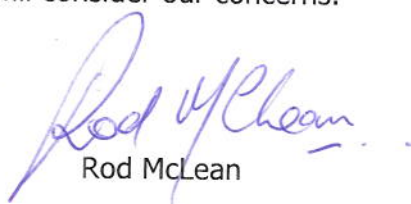
It seems impossible to believe that the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance will not impede or obstruct many others in a similar position to us. We are well off by local standards and have typical aspirations for our children. However more and more we hear our friends and colleagues concerns which echo our own that tertiary study is simply becoming unreachable for our children. We were counting on the Youth Allowance for our second son as it would make the difference between him being able to undertake studies or not – and we would be very grateful for the assistance. However, without it, we believe our children are being disadvantaged because they come from regional Australia and do not have very wealthy parents.

We sincerely hope you will consider our concerns.

Yours Sincerely,



Yve McLean



Rod McLean