

The Committee Secretary, Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

a. The financial impact on the family that has to send a rural student to a metropolitan university is huge. When leaving secondary school very few students have sufficient funds to pay for their relocation to the university. Students from properties great distances from a town do not have the access to part time work that students living in a rural town have. If government funds, in the form of Youth Allowance are not available, it is up to the family to provide for the student. It impacts on the family as they have to go without necessary items. It impacts on the student as they feel they are a burden on the family. These students cannot do many things their friends on Youth Allowance can do. They have no money. They feel guilty if they spend money on entertainment. They feel socially isolated. Students who have to go hundreds of kilometres away because the closest university does not offer their chosen course are isolated from families and friends. They do not have the funds to return home. When our daughter was mugged on a tram we couldn't afford time away from drought feeding to visit and she wouldn't spend our money to travel home. This was an extremely stressful time. When students go away to university they need money for a bond and to purchase essential household items. They often need a vehicle as transport options are inadequate. Students require money for expensive text books and a computer. Our daughter has gone without purchasing some of the course textbooks to save us money. Our daughter received a government scholarship of \$2000 a year. As she is doing a medical course much of the scholarship money was spent on compulsory items for the course. We estimate it costs us about \$20,000 a year for our daughter to attend university. If our daughter was living at home it would cost less than half this amount. It should not cost a rural student more to become educated than a city student. We only see our daughter at the end of semester breaks - twice a year, plus a few days at Easter. It is too costly for her to return home for the mid semester breaks. Needless to say she misses all the family celebrations.

b. It is pleasing to see more universities being established in regional areas. They are still a poor cousin to the metropolitan universities. Our son is a full time student at the nearest university and has had to do distant education subjects as there was little choice of subjects on campus. The courses are extremely limited and the drop out rate appears to be very high. We have been extremely disappointed in the agricultural course offered at the local university. It basically provides students with the business side of farming and would be beneficial if the student wanted to work in business or in a bank. The courses offered by Agricultural Colleges such as Yanco were far superior in that graduates had skills to be able to work effectively on farms. The courses offered need to be relevant to the local area. If students study in the local area they are more likely to continue to live there.

c. The existing system has been used by many students after they have enjoyed a gap year. It seems to be a waste of a year unless the student is unsure of a career path. Society is in need of graduates and yet we are postponing their entry into the workforce. By making the period 2 years before Youth Allowance will be available will, at least, waste 2 years before these valuable graduates enter the workplace or, at worst, allow them to take up employment and decide not to bother with university at all. Once again society is the loser. We need to find a system that is fair to all students. Why should some students get Youth Allowance while others get stressed out and handicap themselves, by not purchasing the prescribed texts, because they don't want to be a burden on the drought affected farm family?

d. Courses have to be relevant and well funded if the tertiary institutions are going to attract enrolments. There is no point establishing regional universities if funds are not available to run appropriate courses in well equipped buildings, and attract lecturers of standards equivalent to those in metropolitan universities.

e. The measures that are in place now for students who are required to leave home are totally inadequate and very unjust. Some students have government funded financial support and others who need it don't. Students worry parents will not be able to support them for the semester let alone the whole course. Students go without appropriate materials essential for their courses because they find it demeaning to have to ask struggling parents for money. The present system discriminates against some students.

f. The education needs of rural and regional students are similar. Country students just cost so much more as many items such as computers, printers internet connections etc need to be duplicated when

they set up in another area. Country students are disadvantaged in that they often don't have easy access to government departments and good libraries and bookstores

g. If students are able to attend local universities they will be more likely to continue to live locally.

This has many benefits for the local community. Having a tertiary institution to serve a regional community

brings many benefits in the way of employment, entertainment, shopping and improved education health and sporting facilities. When students leave to complete tertiary studies they become disconnected from the local community and seek work elsewhere when they complete their course.

h. There needs to be a system in place that does not disadvantage or discriminate against any student. Students doing 5 year courses should not have to 'waste' 2 years just to get financial support. These students are prepared to pay costly HECS fees for the privilege of doing these difficult courses. We need them in the community using their knowledge not taking an extra year in the form of a fun-filled gap year to qualify for financial assistance if they need it. Lecturers don't know if students are doing assignments without access to the appropriate texts because they can't ask their parents for money. Students simply pass or fail on the content. Government assistance must be fair and just. It hasn't been and the new system will be no better except for the relocation allowance. Please work to achieve quality education for all students.