

## Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

*Please accept my submission to the inquiry mentioned above.*

Our family live between Wangaratta and Glenrowan in the North East of Victoria. We have 3 teenage children. One of our children is in her gap year and the other two are in secondary education in Wangaratta. Our biggest concern is being able to financially support our children's higher education living costs.

\*Our eldest daughter finished year 12 in 2008. She has been offered a tertiary position at La Trobe University in Melbourne and has deferred until 2010. This year we decided that she works so that she can be considered independent and therefore access Youth Allowance whilst she studies. After much searching she was able to secure a casual relief Bank Teller position.

Finding work in a country town the size of Wangaratta is difficult in normal economic times and much more difficult in the current environment. To her credit she accepts any work offered to her whether it is local or involve travel as far as Albury, at least 1 hour drive away each way. The proposed changes to Youth Allowance has left her very despondent and having to review her and our plans for Tertiary education.

\*We feel it very unfair to change the rules for students currently in their gap year. Our daughter with us has planned her studies around what was the current ruling for independent Youth Allowance eligibility. She has made sacrifices only to wonder if she has done the wrong thing in deferring. Students that finished their study in 2008 and elected to do a gap year should be honoured in good faith.

\*To send our daughter to the University of our/her choice and one that offers the course she is interested in we need to send her away from home. Supporting our child whilst studying away from home will be a financial burden on our family. ***Although we qualify for Family Tax benefit A we would not receive any Youth Allowance under the new proposed rules.*** Our family are by no means well off. To finance our daughter and our other children's studies my

partner or I would need to find a second job. This would put a great stress on our family.

***\*The proposed changes require students to be considered independent to work for 30 hours per week for 18 months over a 2 year period. This raises a number of concerns.***

-Firstly, our daughter has already taken a year off to work. At present she would not have worked 30 hours per week and so therefore would need to take another 2 years off to attempt to meet the requirements. After earning money for 2/3 years it would be very difficult for her to live the financially restricted life of a university student.

-After 2/3 years working the age gap between her and other students would widen. This has negative social implications for this age group and particularly country students. Moving away from home can be difficult for some children as they adjust to new friends, city or another country town life. Students need to be reasonably happy to put the best into their studies. The age gap would not encourage her to pursue further studies.

- If a student takes 2 years away from studies to earn independent status would universities allow them to defer for this period of time.

-If our daughter attempted to attend University as well as work 30 hours per week I would be concerned that her studies would suffer.

- Working and studying would also mean that weekends would be taken up working. As a consequence she would rarely be able to travel home on weekends to spend time with her family. Country students can take time to settle into a new city/country environment. They need family support and the opportunity to visit their family at weekends if needed.

-Another concern is the availability of work for students particularly in country towns. We feel very fortunate that our daughter was able to find work and has been able to keep this job. In the current economic climate a number of her friends are losing their jobs or hours as employers struggle to keep their country businesses viable.

***Please consider the new rules for Youth Allowance very carefully. Our family will be greatly affected by the proposed changes to the extent that we will need to consider if our daughter can pursue her studies. I am happy to speak to you at any time.***

Regards