

To the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee - a letter about the possible future education and personal experiences of Ellen and Thomas Ferguson, written on their behalf by their mother, Liz Ferguson.

Hello.

Craig and I have 2 children-Ellen, who is 18, and completing Year 13, and Thomas, 16, who is completing Year 10, in South Australia at Mt Gambier High School. We are a single income family. As a teacher of 35 years experience, I am earning \$70,000, with a taxable income of \$56,000 to support the 4 of us. I am soon to be faced with finding up to \$15,000 a year to support my child to attend university, because to follow her skills and interests, she will need to move to Adelaide. Then in 2 or 3 years time, it will be Thomas' turn.

My two children have been extremely fortunate. They have attended their local public high school, Mt Gambier High, during the principalship of Mr. Garry Costello, and they have had world standard educational opportunities, even though we live 477 kilometres from Adelaide, and are in a regional township.

Ellen is now in her last year of school, and looking forward to her life in the big world beyond. She hopes to attend university, particularly to study History, as it is her passion. She wants to make her way in the world, and is looking forward to experiencing life at University, meeting new people, ideas and passions, and growing into the wonderful adult I know she will become.

She is hoping to study an Arts degree, combining History, possibly Music, Psychology and Italian. She is looking at most likely 6 years of University to achieve the educational background she desires.

Thomas has yet to settle on a future goal. He is a good sportsman, interested in Science, Maths and computer games. He may study science, or teaching or marine biology-who knows? He will develop into a warm and caring adult.

We are absolutely committed to helping these children achieve their dreams-they work hard, have been excellent students, and will be great workers when they settle on a career. We will do everything we can to help them.

To attend university, and study the subjects of their choice, for their interests, skills and passions, both Ellen and Thomas will need to leave the Mt Gambier region. They will move to Adelaide, where we have friends and families to support them while they live away from their parents.

They will need to pay for rent, food, transport, text books, clothing, Internet access, communication, health care, heating, entertainment, travel home to see their parents!!! (very important). **They will be living independently, making their own day to day decisions about their safety and survival, financially, morally, emotionally, educationally.**

We will have to travel to Adelaide to see them, we will have to support them, supplementing their daily living expenses and the expenses of attending an educational institution so that they have the time and mental energy to involve themselves in their courses and do the best they can.

We will have to help them pick up the pieces of any mistakes or accidents that life deals them, while living 477 kilometres away.

We will miss them dreadfully.

We will do this, to give them the best chances they can have, to be the future people we want them to be.

The current proposed changes to accessing Youth Allowance add another 2 years to the time when they will be able to begin their educational careers. This means that probably the next 8-10 years will be a financial struggle for them and us. Then of course, they will have their HECS debts, as part of their financial futures.

(How are the universities addressing the issue of students who do well in Year 12/13, apply for Uni, but then need to defer for 2 years, to be eligible for financial support to help them take up their uni place? Will their place be held for them?)

While they are doing their 30 hours of work, for what is basically a full time job, they are precluding other older people who really need the full time job to support themselves and their families from work opportunities.

I would rather see my children out of the full time work force, and into Uni, being a full time student who receives some government financial support and works part time to support themselves as they go through uni, experiencing the struggle with ideas and passions as they educate themselves vocationally and developmentally for their future lives.

I would like to see support from the Australian government as an investment in both my children, as future workers and citizens of Australia, and of course all the other Ellens and Thomases out there, who will parent the next generation of Australian children.

That support could be **active**, such as helping them financially as students from rural and regional Australia, to provide some equity and parity with the city students who are often not faced with the same financial and emotional burdens, to attend university, through bonds, grants, scholarships, start up allowances etc, that they would be eligible for.

If not through such active support, at least I would like to see the government not make it really hard for us as a single income family to support them while they are living away from home.

I would like the Federal government to acknowledge the financial and emotional burden of having our children living away from home in some way-even some kind of **tax relief** would be helpful, to help us manage the costs associated with the other household we will be supporting, to keep our children safe and physically, emotionally and mentally healthy. Take the \$15,000 or whatever it will cost me to have my child in Adelaide, off my gross income, and tax me on what's left!!!!

We will help our children to get a university education, as a background to the choices they will make in life. I ask that my country's government support us through this process-and all the other children from rural and regional Australia who have to move away from home to have educational opportunities that suit their skills and passions- to help them to develop into the kinds of citizens Australia needs.

Thank you.

Liz Ferguson
7th August 2009.