

Submission on Behalf of Manjimup Visions Committee

To Whom It May Concern.

The Visions Committee of Manjimup makes the following submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Group on behalf of the Manjimup community and the surrounding areas that it services in relation to proposed changes to Youth Allowance. The impact of the new Youth Allowance eligibility criteria on students and families and the future educational directions in the Manjimup Community is a key concern for our group. It is the view of the Visions Committee that the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance Scheme has the capacity to have a significant effect on the students studying Tertiary bound subjects in the Manjimup community.

The Visions Committee is comprised of representatives from the Manjimup Shire, DEC, Employee organisations, representatives from the community and all the Educational facilities, both private and public, in the town of Manjimup. The committee has been in operation since 1992 and has played a significant role in determining the directions of Education in the Manjimup Community, including the development of a multi purpose campus comprising Manjimup Senior High School, Manjimup Primary School and Manjimup Education support Centre.

Manjimup is situated approximately 300 kilometres South West of Perth and contains the only Private and Public Senior High Schools in the inland corridor of the Warren Blackwood Education District. Manjimup SHS has a current student population of 670 students with an SEI of 97.17, placing the school in the second lowest SEI band; Kearnan College has an SES of 91 and has 19 students studying four or more Tertiary Entrance subjects in 2009. The two High Schools attract students from surrounding areas including Northcliffe, Pemberton, Boyup Brook and Bridgetown. The SEI and SES data indicate that students do not come from affluent backgrounds.

“The 2006 census statistics showed that all Shires across the southwest showed decreased disadvantage with SEIFA scores increasing except for Boyup Brook, Manjimup and Collie. In Boyup Brook and Collie this increase was marginal but in Manjimup there was a marked increase in disadvantage within the community”. (South West Health and Community Profile, Health Information to Inform Service Planning, SW Population Health Unit, June 2008). The decline of the Timber and Plantation industries within this region will only exacerbate this situation. The declining employment opportunities for students, who wish to take a gap year and seek employment in their local community, is a significant concern.

The short term impact of the proposed changes can be seen by those students from Manjimup Senior High School who completed their Tertiary

Entrance studies in 2008. All 41 students in this cohort, who participated in 4 or more Tertiary Entrance courses, were successful in being offered University places with Manjimup SHS being the 1st ranked school in the state for highest percentage (87.8%) of students gaining their first choice of University course. Of these 41 students 33 decided to defer or take a gap year in order to earn money to finance themselves through University and/or qualify for the Youth Allowance Scheme. These students made these decisions in good faith and with the current information available to them. We believe that this group of students will be severely and unfairly disadvantaged by the proposed Youth Allowance changes.

The proposed changes to Youth Allowance poses the prospect of a substantial impact upon the Manjimup Community. Without Youth Allowance families face an increased financial burden, with the prospect of being forced to relocate to the metropolitan area in order to give their children the opportunity to participate in University studies. Many families in the Manjimup region will not be able to maintain the ongoing costs of two residences, particularly in tough economic times. There is the real likelihood of students, who may be eligible to study at University will not take up this option because of the financial impact on them and their families. Country students and their families are clearly disadvantaged and the Youth Allowance in its current form is a mechanism that assists to redress this disadvantage. Students from rural areas not only suffer from financial disadvantage when they relocate to pursue further education and training, they also have less support structures and less access to facilities which are afforded to their metropolitan counterparts.

In the long term there are also the possibility of significant impact on students and the curriculum offerings in Manjimup. If a critical mass of students make the decision not to study Tertiary bound subjects, a possibility considering they may not have the financial means to further their studies once they have completed their Secondary Education, then this pathway may not be viable to run. Future students wishing to study a Tertiary pathway may be forced to transfer to another regional or metropolitan centre (at least 125 kilometres away), which would once again see people moving out of the Manjimup community.

Youth Allowance with the old eligibility requirements was the life line for many rural families to be able to afford university education for their children. We strongly urge you to review the new eligibility requirements for Youth Allowance to enable equitable participation of rural students.

Manjimup Visions Committee