

Senate Enquiry Submission – Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunity

The proposed Youth Allowance changes in the May Budget are potentially destructive to students from rural areas of Australia who have ambitions of attending University.

My family lives in rural Western Australia and my son is completing Year 12 at the local Government Secondary College this year. He is intending to have a gap year in 2010 before moving to Perth to undertake a course at Murdoch University in 2011. He has secured a fulltime job at a local retail outlet for 2010 during which time he will earn the previously required \$18,000. This would have allowed him access to Youth Allowance with rental subsidy. Under the proposed and ill conceived changes, he will now have to work for 2 years to qualify for youth allowance. Murdoch University will only defer his course for one year, so he will have to sit the STAT test to gain entry if he defers for two years.

We have no alternative than for him to go to Perth, the local University is only new and there are only a few courses on offer. If his course was offered locally we would be supporting the local university. We have no family in Perth or any contacts that may be able to assist with accommodation for our son; therefore it will be entirely up to us to cover the cost of accommodation either in a shared residence or on campus. We are average income earners who still have another child to educate at home. It will be very difficult financially for us to support my son entirely whilst he is at University. Our situation is such that it will require me taking on a second job to be able to financially support him.

Rural youths who leave home to go to University lose the support network a family provides, it is a difficult transition for young people and now it will be an even more financially difficult transition. Obtaining a part time job in Perth is not necessarily an option because my son intends doing a double major to make the most of his time at University and will have a heavy workload. A part time job will not allow him the freedom to return home for holidays and reunite with family. Rural students are really being disadvantaged because of the new changes. Their welfare has been disregarded. The entire transition from regional high school to city university has become a major concern and many students will make the decision to take a different pathway and never realise their university aspirations.

The decision by the Government to make these changes beggars belief that the changes were well thought out. They clearly discriminate against rural students and send a message that the Government doesn't support regional students to attend university. Do they think the brain pool resides in the city areas? Regional students who attend university are more likely to return to the regional areas, once qualified and enrich the community with their professional expertise. The Government should be investing in growing their own professionals rather than importing them from other countries. It should be making it easier for talented youths to attend University so the country can be self sufficient in producing its own professionals.

I think this decision will come back to bite the Government, It should be heavily investing in all areas of education in this country; the skills shortage and the shortage of qualified professionals is highly evident and our country is becoming increasingly reliant on importing qualified professionals from overseas. This government should be leaving its mark by genuinely supporting and believing in its youth and providing every opportunity to allow interested students to attend universities and achieve their dreams. By changing the youth allowance rules, the Government has slapped rural youth in the face , to the detriment of the future of Australia.

I hope the Government accepts they have acted hastily and rethinks this tragic error before thousands of rural youth are forced to abandon their dreams of attending Universities across Australia. It really is a shameful thing to rob Australia regional youth of their right to a University education.

Please reconsider!

Yours sincerely
Jacky Patience
23/7/09