

Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

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

I make this submission as:

- a) a parent of a Year 10 student in Tamworth currently exploring the options for tertiary study, with younger children in Years 8 and 5.
- b) a teacher of senior students with recent experience in both Sydney and Tamworth, and with 25 years experience as teacher, Principal, Curriculum Co-ordinator and College Resource Manager (Business Manager) in Sydney, Tamworth, Central Australia, PNG and the USA.
- c) a student myself in tertiary study, with current postgraduate study being undertaken.

I refer you to a submission by my colleague Susan Barrett to the Inquiry and wish to add the follow comments, in the light of my experience.

1. When my family and I moved to Tamworth from Sydney at the beginning of this year one of the factors we considered was the likely impact of relocation to a regional centre on the educational opportunities of our three children, the eldest of whom is now in Year 10 and who has expressed the desire to undertake tertiary study. Colleagues and family in Sydney warned that one of the potential costs of relocation might be the need to support a child during study. While not specifically looking at the impact of Independent Youth Allowance on our financial planning and provision for our children at the time, it is disappointing to find that a legitimate source of support for our children in their future studies might be made more inaccessible, and that the warnings given while not being valid at the time, were becoming valid, remarkably in 2009, with a more onerous and restrictive work requirement for Independent Youth Allowance. I will be taking on part-time work to help fund my children's tertiary study, a situation we were trying to avoid by our move to Tamworth. I will not ask my wife, an Intensive Care Nurse, to work more, as we have experienced that situation before, with negative consequences for her and for us as a family unit.
2. I have no doubt that the burden of providing financial support during study has now become crippling for many students, even in upper secondary education. To add a further burden and distraction from the main task of learning, at either secondary or tertiary level, will be counter-productive in terms of the impact on student course completion rates and the quality of learning being undertaken. Many times in Sydney, teaching in Marrickville, I have had need to counsel students about the excessive hours of work being undertaken, in many cases to

provide necessary financial support for families. I am now able to confirm that this problem is also shared with secondary students in Tamworth. It would only be compounded by adding the proposed extra private financial burden on students and their families by changing Independent Youth Allowance requirements.

3. As a current student myself in postgraduate studies, and having recently completed a Masters in Education, with a focus on Computers in Education, and being no “computing luddite”, I have no doubt that the ability to shift to “online” versions of courses will be used as a justification for reducing the level of financial support for students wishing to relocate from regional centres. At a very recent postgraduate study weekend in Bathurst, it was confirmed by the lecturers and course providers that online versions of courses had a far lower success rate than the face to face versions of the courses and that student satisfaction with learning in online versions was far lower, but that these were being promoted because they reduced the per head cost of tertiary study. I have undertaken a number of online courses, and have worked in this medium with my own secondary students and have yet to be persuaded that they can provide anything near the experience of being able to discuss an issue or concept in person with a lecturer or tutor. To attempt to provide courses in online format as comparable to face to face, when the option of attending is being withdrawn due to systemic financial restriction, is to risk downgrading the educational opportunities of regional students, who have little physical choice in the matter.

We, as a family, have found the move to Tamworth from Sydney immensely rewarding. It is unfortunate that the proposed change to the funding of tertiary opportunities for our children may punish them for the move.

Yours sincerely,

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