

SUBMISSION TO SENATE ENQUIRY

IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

I live in the Lake Macquarie region of New South Wales and have teenagers who hope to attend university. Both my husband and I are employed and, while we will assist our children financially as far as possible, it's become clear that study in a metropolitan centre is likely to be impossible for our children.

Given the fact that our eldest child has been accepted into a metropolitan university to study a course which is not available locally at the University of Newcastle, this is incredibly disappointing. Especially so as our daughter is academically gifted and it seems likely would do well in tertiary study. The cost of living in metropolitan centres is too prohibitive for us to fund without government assistance. The amount of money she is can earn to support herself is likewise insufficient. The means test imposed by the government means that, given our mortgage and the fact that she is not an only child and we will other costs coming up, we are unable to supplement her costs enough to allow her to study in the city.

I am extremely concerned that the government does not seem to have adequately tackled the issue of financial support for young people wishing to study. This is especially important in now when it is difficult to find work and students are particularly vulnerable. I believe the government's policies are also based on an unrealistic expectation of how much financial support parents can provide (ie. That the means tests penalise young people who have working parents but little disposable income).

In particular, we are concerned about the recently announced changes to Youth Allowance. My daughter completed her HSC in 2008. Along with many other students we know, she deferred enrolment at university in the hope she could work and qualify for Youth Allowance and thus attend the course she has worked towards (in Melbourne). She has worked several jobs and long hours to achieve this.

We (my daughter, her family and her friends in a similar situation) were very distressed to discover the government's plans to alter Youth Allowance eligibility from 1 January 2010. This is in effect a retrospective amendment, as all the would-be students who finished school in 2008 are caught out, unable to qualify under the terms that were advertised when they made their decision to work in 2009 (or in some cases, spend a year not working when they were unable to find sufficient employment). This change unfairly penalises all those prospective students who are working so hard in the hope of attending university.

I would urge the Committee to consider carefully the huge costs for students from regional and rural areas who wish to study in the city. In the longer term better assistance to encourage study is a must. In the short term I ask the Committee to recommend the government at least defer introduction of the changes to Youth Allowance eligibility till after a date by which students who matriculated in 2008 can qualify.

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