

August 2009

To the Senate Enquiry,

I am a Year 12 student from Wangaratta, hoping to study an Arts/Science degree or a new generation degree at the University of Melbourne. After having considered various options, I had no choice but to defer for a year in order to earn sufficient funds to pay for the course and the significant relocation costs. During this year, I planned to work and earn enough money to qualify for the Youth Allowance. However, after hearing of the proposed amendments to the Youth Allowance, my pathway to university has been thwarted.

My 'living away from home' expenses, including travel costs, will reach approximately \$20,000 a year. Additional educational expenses such as a laptop will add to this cost. I have talked to a number of students who highly recommend onsite accommodation at university during the first couple of years. They assure me that it is especially valuable for rural students who are unlikely to know many other students in the city. Unfortunately if the Youth Allowance changes are implemented, accommodation at such a college, let alone any other accommodation, will be out of the question.

There is a much wider range of university courses on offer in capital cities such as Melbourne than in rural Victoria where I live. Why should metropolitan students have more options than country students? I want to experience city life and broaden my horizons. However my ultimate goal is to return to a regional environment.

Generally universities only allow students to defer their courses for one year. Forcing students to delay tertiary education for two years so that they can qualify for the independent rate of Youth Allowance will cause them to lose their places at university.

By providing the appropriate levels of support and reducing the financial burdens, more regional students will be encouraged to undertake tertiary studies which will provide benefits back to their local communities. Regional communities are continually crying out for further help in attracting suitably qualified professionals in health and education services. With government support for students, regional communities will have the chance to prosper when these students return. The outcomes for these communities would be far greater than if the young people of the area were prevented from attending university and were not afforded the opportunity to provide essential skills and services to their local communities in the future.

Why do you think the Northeast was one of the two regions in Victoria that had the highest percentage of students taking a gap year? In 2008, forty percent of students took a gap year in my region compared to 10% of metropolitan students. This statistic cannot be ignored. This difference will not be addressed by merely raising the parental income threshold for qualification and it will not offset the relocation costs.

In closing, I believe the Rudd government must do more for regional Australia

and more to protect and nurture regional young people so that they are much more likely to return to their communities as more highly skilled professionals. I have another two siblings who also have intentions of studying in Melbourne. One of my siblings wants to study medicine. With the proposed changes she hasn't got a hope in hell.