

31 July 2009

The Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural  
And Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission – Independent Youth Allowance Criteria

Thank you for the opportunity to put forward a submission regarding the 2009 federal government changes to eligibility criteria for independent youth allowance. My wife, Pearl, and I live in regional NSW and have three children who have all attended public education. We both obtained a tertiary education and although I work full-time, my wife has worked part-time since our first child was born, and full-time since our youngest commenced school 8 years ago (our youngest child has just started high school). Our son, Daniel, completed the HSC in 2006, worked in 2007 as a gap year, and commenced a Science Degree at Newcastle University in 2008 (located 500kms from our home), and he is currently in his second year. He receives independent youth allowance and lives in rented accommodation.

Our second child, Michelle, completed the HSC in 2008 and has deferred acceptance to Newcastle Conservatorium of Music until 2010 – she is currently working two part-time jobs with the aim of qualifying for independent youth allowance. Michelle will also need to reside 500kms from the family home and live in rented accommodation. I would like to address the terms of reference to be addressed by the Senate Standing Committee as follows:

- a) Financial Impact – Students who need to move away from the family home in order to attend university are at a disadvantage in comparison to city-based students who can remain in their family home – they must find the necessary accommodation finance as well as live independent of family support. Our son applied for on-campus accommodation, but was unsuccessful due to high demand.

It has been necessary to provide furniture and home accessories.

b) Education Alternatives For Rural and Regional Students Wanting to Study in Regional Areas – The courses both our son & daughter have been successful in gaining acceptance to are not offered in the regional university campuses; even if they were, Lismore is located 80kms north-west and Coffs Harbour 130kms south of our family home, so it would still be necessary for them to live away from home.

c) The Implications of Existing and Proposed Government Measures on Prospective Students Living in Rural and Regional Areas – Our daughter Michelle has deferred acceptance to Newcastle Conservatorium of Music until 2010. Her course does not offer mid-year enrolment. If the proposed changes to eligibility criteria change retrospectively, so that she must work a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months, she will not be able to commence her course until 2011; two years after completing the HSC. Also as a decision is not to be made until October 2009, she will have been out of school for 12 months before she knows exactly what the eligibility criteria will be. Work availability in rural/regional areas is limited; it is very difficult for young people to secure 30 hours per week consistently for 18 months, and verifying such employment would involve the scrutiny of something like 77 weeks of payslips by Centrelink staff.

d) Adequacy of Government Measures to Provide for Students Who Are Required to Leave Home for Secondary or Post-Secondary Study – Our son Daniel currently receives independent youth allowance and lives a frugal life, with some financial assistance from his parents. He is accumulating the HELP debt @ \$936 per subject x 8 per year (\$7,488 per annum x 3 years = \$22,464). His final debt of \$22,464 will increase by CPI which in 2009 was set at 3.9% or \$876.00. His total Centrelink taxable income for independent youth allowance in 2009 was \$9,434.00 which is \$181.42 per week. Because he lives in rented accommodation his rent is still payable during university vacations. As parents, the prospect of having to support our daughter without independent youth allowance would be



very difficult, and would impact on the quality of education for our youngest child who is currently twelve years of age and just commenced high school this year. Wages in rural/regional towns are generally lower than city-based wages.

e) The Education Needs of Rural and Regional Students – We have aimed to provide our children with a well-rounded education. They have attended public schools and have been involved in extra-curricula sport and music. In order to be competitive or take advantage of learning experiences, it has been frequently necessary for them to travel away to city venues, involving entry fees, travel and accommodation for them as well as a supporting parent in many instances. For example, in 2008 our daughter Michelle was selected as a Featured Artist for the Schools Spectacular at the Sydney Entertainment Centre in November. She had to travel 640kms to Sydney for the initial audition in May, which was repeated for a call-back audition in June. Rehearsals in Sydney commenced in August. During the two weeks study prior to HSC examinations commencement in October, she travelled to Sydney twice for rehearsals – this involved driving herself 130kms to Coffs Harbour airport to catch the plane, followed by trains to Lewisham and then she stayed with a relative who kindly offered accommodation. This was then repeated when she was a Featured Artist in the Opening Ceremony of the Youth Olympics in January 2009. Whilst we have found the experience of raising our children in rural/regional NSW has given them a good upbringing, it is expensive and demanding.

f) Meeting the Workforce Requirements for Rural/Regional Areas – It is a known fact that it is difficult to entice city-based workers to take up positions in rural/regional areas. The best place to source employment is from rural/regional people who have trained in the city and then returned to rural/regional areas to establish their families. I left this area as a teenager to train as a boilermaker in the mid 70's and returned with my wife to raise our family in the 80's. Our daughter's music teacher has done the same, and our daughter hopes she will be able to secure employment back in the country in the future. Government's should support

rural/regional students and make it possible for them to obtain a higher education away from their home.

In conclusion, I believe the system as it stands should remain unchanged for students coming from regional areas, thank you.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. Ryan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mr John Henry Ryan