



Department of Education
and Children's Services



Government
of South Australia

Kimba Area School

PO Box 63, 69 West Tce
KIMBA SA 5641
Tel (08) 86272 074
Fax (08) 86272 401
Email admin@kimbaas.sa.edu.au
Website kimbaas.sa.edu.au



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

Friday, 24 July 2009



To Whom It May Concern:

I am the Principal of Kimba Area School and have had a long time connection with rural communities both as a teacher parent and actively involved community member.

I am deeply concerned by the proposed changes to the legislation regarding young people's eligibility to claim independent status for the purposes of qualifying for Youth Allowance for tertiary studies.

I will address my concerns according to your terms of reference.

a) *The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary, schools universities or TAFE.*

Students from rural areas who wish to gain tertiary qualifications have no choice but to relocate to capital cities or larger regional centres to access this level of education.

This means they need to find accommodation and associated living expenses (power, gas, phone, groceries) that their urban counterparts do not – they do not have the opportunity to remain living in their childhood homes.

Naturally these young people still want to remain in personal contact with their parents and home communities – this adds extra costs for transport and telecommunications.

Rural students rarely have networks that urban students have to secure work – part time or full time to support themselves whether in study or their 'gap' year or to access 2nd hand texts and other materials required for their study.

b) *The education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas.*

Rural and regional students can complete their secondary schooling in their home towns but under considerable disadvantage. Often senior school classes are vertically grouped (up to 3 different year levels in the same class and even different courses within the year levels of these), have limited access to teachers with the required expertise or have to study by distance mode. Classes tend to be small and while this gains them more individual attention, it deprives them of the peer support and encouragement to do well. Schools across Eyre Peninsula have set up local delivery options where we deliver courses to students in nearby schools via video conferencing and

visits to each others' schools by teachers and students. This comes at a direct cost to the parents and the schools involved.

In small towns like ours, there is no access to university courses or trade schools through RTOs or TAFE for young people to access.

c) The implications of existing and proposed Government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas.

Many students from rural areas opt for the 'gap' year to work so they can amass enough money to qualify for Independent Youth Allowance. Often their parents are involved in agriculture; either as farmers or related businesses. These people are asset rich and cash poor. Their taxation returns would suggest that they are capable of supporting their children through university or TAFE but in reality their ongoing costs for their businesses make this impossible, especially when you consider the additional costs involved in a regional student having to relocate to capital cities to study.

Most universities will allow students to defer their course for 12 months, not 24. Even at 12 months students have to get enough money together to survive until May of their first year of study before they qualify for the allowance. If the new legislation comes in it will mean that these young people will not be able to commence their studies for 2 years and therefore miss out on their courses or be so entrenched or disillusioned with the system that they will not go on with their education at all.

d) The short and long term impact of current and proposed Government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments

It will be just too difficult for students to engage with further education even in the limited opportunities offered in regional universities and TAFE colleges. With declining enrolments the viability of regional educational institutions will be very much put in jeopardy.

e) The adequacy of Government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study.

If the changes to the Youth Independent Allowance are brought in there will be no recognition or provision for rural students. The only current measures are tied to the qualification for Youth Allowance and this is through a very small rent assistance allowance.

f) The education needs of rural and regional students.

Traditionally the greater proportion of young people from rural areas has had to leave their home communities to gain employment. Even if they return to rural communities it is after they have gained the necessary tertiary qualifications in a metropolitan area. With the decline in rural industries this is becoming more pronounced and therefore the need is greater for young people to access such education. The proposed changes will further disadvantage young rural people and act as a form of discrimination locking them out of employment and educational opportunities taken for granted by urban youth. It locks young people from rural communities into ignorance, poverty and associated physical and mental well being difficulties.

h) The impact of the Government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities.

Research will tell us that 75% of young rural people who go to larger metropolitan areas for education or employment return to rural areas, usually in their early 30s of thereabouts return to country Australia. In the interests of maintaining a vibrant, productive rural sector in Australia, it seems to me, that it is in the Government's best interests to support such young people in their endeavours to become qualified so they can provide much needed services to rural and regional

areas. This country still relies heavily on the wealth of the agricultural and mining industries of rural and regional Australia.

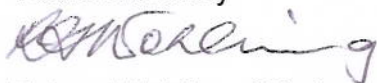
As an educational leader with many years experience in rural schools I believe that there is a depth of talent, intellect and commitment to rural areas in our young people that this country will miss out on if they are further disadvantaged in their efforts to gain tertiary qualifications. I am a member of our local County Education Foundation that raises funds to provide some support to young people accessing tertiary education and training – again a volunteer organisation that meets a need unique to young rural people.

As a rural parent, who has supported three sons to all gain a university degree, I know personally the huge cost and financial sacrifices we had to make to ensure that this was possible. Like many rural families we bought units and houses, vehicles, subsidised living costs and paid for educational materials to make sure our boys had the same opportunities of their city cousins. This was due in part, because I had a professional salary – if we were farmers like many of our friends this just would not have been possible. Each of the boys now has considerable HECS debt – we just couldn't help them with their university fees. Two of the three qualified for the Independent Allowance. Had this not been the case, university just would have been out of the question or we would have had to relocate to Adelaide for the duration of their courses so they could live at home. This would have meant a loss of two more people from our local communities who have been responsible for supporting those communities.

Two of our boys now live and work in rural South Australia providing positive role models for other young people and contributing as professionally qualified people to the health and well being of their communities.

In the interests of young people in rural and regional areas, the rural communities themselves, the nation as a whole I beg this committee to recommend to the Government in the strongest terms to not implement this proposed legislation. Conversely I believe that there ought to be greater incentives and support mechanisms put in place to support young rural people to access further education and training. To do anything less is simply discriminatory and draconian.

Yours sincerely



Robyn Wohling (Mrs)