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Committee Secretary
 Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: ewer.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary

Re: Inquiry into the Social Security Amendment (Income Support for Regional Students) Bill 2010

The University of New England is a regional university with its primary campus in Armidale and eight UNE Regional Study Centres based in Inner and Outer Regional areas. Of our total student intake more than 78% of students are classified as being from a regional or remote location. This includes those students who are classified on the ASGC Remoteness Map as being "Inner Regional".

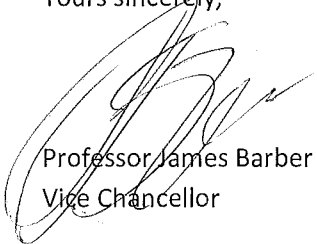
Coming from an Inner Regional area does not necessarily mean that financial constraints to accessing higher education under the current Independent Youth Allowance criteria are less than if coming from an Outer Regional or Remote area. In fact, students at regional universities such as UNE may find it more difficult to gain part-time employment to support their studies, have limited access to affordable public transport and may therefore upkeep a motor vehicle to attend lectures etc. Unless they join the UNE Residential Colleges System, students may find it difficult to find affordable housing. Access to financial assistance helps any student who wishes to attend a regional university but lives outside the direct regional catchment area for such universities.

Concerns have been raised over the threat to regional universities' local enrolments where the local intake of students would become eligible for Independent Youth Allowance, making it more financially feasible for them to attend a university outside their local catchment. UNE considers this as a matter for individual universities to address and is not a valid reason for maintaining a disadvantage for Inner Regional students. It is suggested that it should not be the responsibility of the government to "guarantee" a level of local supply through Independent Youth Allowance provisions. Universities are responsible for marketing the advantages for students to choose to attend a particular place to study. By allowing more students access to financial incentives that support their relocation to any university, whether metropolitan or regional, increases overall equity and access to higher education and is in line with current Government policy of 'deregulation' of the sector post-2012.

It is for this reason that UNE supports the inclusion of students from Inner Regional areas to access Independent Youth Allowance as it would further increase the chances for more future students, outside metropolitan areas, to be able to afford to relocate to attend university.

UNE does have concerns with the proposal to fund the Amendment to the Independent Youth Allowance eligibility criteria from the existing Education Investment Fund (EIF) pool of funding. It is our view that the potential impact on EIF funding available for capital works and investment within the sector is undesirable, if the costs of the proposed Amendment were funded from this source. UNE requests that the Standing Committee explore other funding models and proposals for the Amendment outside the use of EIF.

Yours sincerely,



Professor James Barber
Vice Chancellor