

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Madam or Sir,

I wish to make a submission to the Senate committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations with particular respect to the exclusion of Mount Gambier from the eligibility for assessment of independence for the purposes of receiving an independent living allowance.

It is I believe acknowledged by all sides of the Chamber that there is a very significant cost for students who have to move away from home to study at a tertiary (or any other educational) institution. My own experience from talking to neighbours with two students studying in Adelaide is that it is around \$20,000 per annum per child.

While it was not optimal, the ability for a student to achieve a full independent living allowance by undertaking a gap year and earning \$19,000 was a way around the problem of having to fund one's living expenses while studying away from home.

The revision by the Government this year to re-include outer regional and remote students (as classified by the Australian Standard Geographic Classification (ASGC)) was a recognition in part by the Government of the problems that had been created by the implementation of the Bradley Review the previous year. However, the use of this classification for the purposes of determining eligibility for receiving a living allowance to assist regional students to study is inappropriate, as is evidenced by the exclusion of Mount Gambier and several other towns classified as "inner regional".

Even the briefest look at the maps which describe the delineation between the "inner" and "outer" regional area identifies Mount Gambier as an area classified as "inner regional" totally surrounded by "outer regional" areas. Houses across the street from each other are classified differently.

In Mount Gambier we are four and a half hours away to either Melbourne or Adelaide where the majority of tertiary institutions are represented.

Even with the additional allowances, grants and scholarships generally available to regional students to assist their study away from home, a student will still be some \$10,000 worse off from not receiving an independent study allowance.

Tertiary education is not equitably available to all Australian citizens. Those students who must relocate to study are significantly disadvantaged. To date the "gap year" has provided a mechanism for these students to fund living away from home. With the introduction of new independence criteria in the 2009-10 Budget based on recommendations in the Bradley Review, the availability of tertiary education for remote and regional students is reduced even further.

I believe the Bradley Review and the Government's propose changes fail to recognize the plight of regional and rural students who have *no choice* other than to leave home to undertake tertiary studies. The proposed new criteria fail to recognize the earning capacity of post secondary graduates and the inability of students to defer their enrollment for two years. The exclusion of "inner regional" towns from the criteria for undertaking a "gap year" adds further insult to the injury that the Government is inflicting on rural students forced to study away from home.

With the tightening of eligibility criteria for independent allowance, there will be a further *disincentive* for professional people with children to move to a regional area to work and live.

There is not a level playing field for the availability of tertiary education in Australia. The current changes make it even more unfair for those in "inner regional" areas, such as Mount Gambier.

Rod Sparks