

Jan Bott

5 December 2010

Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee

Dear Committee

I write to you to outline my family perspective on the Income Support for Regional Students Bill.

I have a 20 year old son who is currently attending UWA in his second year of a Political Science degree. He took a gap year when he left school and was fortunate enough to get a job in hospitality for the year (when mining was sucking all the states labour force away from the regional areas and jobs were reasonable easy to find for someone with some incentive). He managed to save enough money to support himself for the first semester of his degree and then applied for youth allowance when 18 months had passed. Fortunately he was successful and was able to continue on at uni for the rest of the year due the financial assistance youth allowance provided. To qualify for YA he had to show that he was independent and had earned 75% of a full salary during those 18 months. Where he lived was not relevant.

As we live three hours drive from Perth it would not be possible for my son to have remained living at home to study at UWA.

Now three years later we had hoped that our 17 year old daughter who has just completed year 12 would be able to qualify in the same way as her brother. Unfortunately the goal posts have been moved and regional areas have been implemented. It would appear that we are about 5 Km short of being considered outer regional.

How can it be fair for a neighbours children who live 5 Km further down our road to be eligible to apply for assistance when my daughter is not? Their opportunities for Tertiary education should not differ from my daughters. Our physical circumstances are no different.

How can you consider the regional boundaries that have been implemented could possibly treat all Australian rural children equally and fairly? Even children who live in a rural town and not on a farming property as we do still cannot travel to Perth on a daily basis to study. The distances are just too great. Unless the Uni is 45- 60 minutes away, it is not possible for rural children to study and remain living in the family home.

Also, I would like to comment on the decision to make the qualifying period 18 months and not 12 months.

For some students, to earn the required amount would mean taking two years gap from study rather than one year. This time is too long as universities do not guarantee a place for two years and many young people never end up getting to uni at all. In a climate where Australia is crying out for more skilled workers it is a criminal shame that we are hindering our future workforce in this way.

With regard to future students working for 30 hours a week and within set time frames I also have questions.

Where are all these jobs going to come from during this current economic down turn?

Even if a student was able to get seasonal work for 6 months and work 60 hours a week this would not be acceptable according to the current requirements.

It would seem to me that there will be very few Australian rural students who are going to be able to study a university degree unless their parents are able to completely support them. How does this make Australia a fair country?

I would implore every committee member to put themselves in the shoes of rural families and consider how they would feel if their children were to be educationally disadvantaged in this way.

Access to education should not be a privilege of the urban population but a right of every Australian, regardless of where we live.

Yours Faithfully

Jan Bott