

To the Committee Secretary of the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations,

We wish to make two points in our submission.

1. Firstly, our son Miles Sharples completed his VCE studies at Apollo Bay P 12 College in 2010. He has attended this small rural school for 13 years, prep to year 12.

Because we are a small isolated rural community, Miles had to complete one of his subjects via correspondence in order to complete the prerequisites for the course of study he is planning to complete in Melbourne in 2011.

Universities recognise that rural students from isolated communities are disadvantaged and offer significant reductions in ATAR scores for course entry. They acknowledge there has been a significant drop in numbers of rural students because of the expenses involved in tertiary education.

We anticipate that it will cost us \$20,000 just to cover his accommodation and living expenses in Melbourne next year.

The \$20,000 does not include

- Transport costs
- Personal expenses
- HECS

This is a huge financial burden even for two working parents as we have other dependent children one of whom is disabled.

When students like Miles move from small isolated rural communities to Melbourne they need shared accommodation as they seek to establish themselves emotionally and socially in this unfamiliar environment. He would be unable to complete 30 hours of work over 18 months as he wants to start university in 2011. It is unrealistic to expect a student trying to cope with living away from the support of home for the first time to find 30 hours of this "hard to get seasonal" work in an unfamiliar city. Their main focus should be doing well in their first year of tertiary study. At present the dropout rates of rural students is shameful.

The university that he gets into will not guarantee his place over two years if he stays at home for that time and tries to reach the earnings that current guidelines suggest that he will need to qualify for youth allowance. He should not be forced into doing this anyway. He should have the opportunity to start building his future career on with the same immediate opportunity that students who come from capital cities have.

2. Secondly, Apollo Bay is a small and isolated rural community being 1.6 hours from Geelong which is our nearest larger centre that can provide a range of University and further training.

Students who live slightly to the west of Apollo Bay qualify as coming from an outer regional area.

Those in town or living slightly to the east are regarded as 'inner regional'.

They all went to the same school and all experienced the same degree of disadvantage due to their isolation.

I know boundaries have to be drawn somewhere but to arbitrarily divide students from the one educational community when it comes to benefits offered to support them when they move on to further education seems ludicrous.

That is certainly how the students who attend the school see it.

In summary, all rural and regional young people (whether inner or outer regional) should qualify for Youth Allowance under the 'old' rules for Independent Youth Allowance as attending university costs them significantly more because they have to live away from home.

We think you should immediately reinstate the original and fairer eligibility criteria, making it fairer for all regional students.

They should have the certainty needed to be able to plan their tertiary education instead of having to wait months for an inquiry to take place.