



THE HON DAVID HAWKER MP

FEDERAL MEMBER FOR WANNON



16 July 2009

Senator Fiona Nash

Chair

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Senator

Fiona

Re: Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Inquiry

I write on behalf of many of my constituents who have expressed their concern to me regarding the Rudd Government's proposed changes to the Independent Youth Allowance and the disadvantage this will cause to students from regional and remote areas.

The main issue is the proposed qualification criteria, i.e. to qualify a student must work 30 hours per week for at least 18 months over a two year period, and that the changes occur from January 2010. Students deferred their studies in 2009 and embarked upon a gap year and worked so that they would qualify for the Independent Youth Allowance and commence university in 2010. It is anticipated that more than 30,000 students will be affected by the changes to the work criteria. Rural and regional students simply do not have the opportunity to remain at home whilst they study at university.

The 2008 Review of Australian Higher Education Report recognised the lower uptake of higher education in regional areas and believed that there should be an ongoing effort to provide higher education in regional and rural areas. The proposed changes to youth allowance are in total opposition to those recommendations.

The consequences of these changes will mean that there will be a much lower entry of tertiary studies by rural students. The employment opportunities for students in regional areas are difficult to find even for a 12 month period, let alone for a two year period. These students have much higher living costs due to living away from home. The courses available in rural areas are limited and there is no other option but to move to the city away from family and friends, find cheap rental accommodation, and meet other living costs that metropolitan students are not burdened with due to being able to remain in the family home.

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LISTENING to you, DELIVERING for you.

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The Rudd Government does not appear to understand or care about the difficulties faced by families of students in regional and rural areas. This flies in the face of the Government's statements that they want an increase in the number of disadvantaged students attending university.

Parents in rural areas are asking for a fair go, and an equal opportunity for their children to be able to attend their university of choice to enable them to follow the career path that they have been working towards during their secondary education.

I strongly support parents who now find that it is not financially viable for their children to attend university, and seek your consideration and understanding of the plight of rural Australians.

Yours sincerely



THE HON. DAVID HAWKER, MP
Federal Member for Wannon

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