



Submission to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee

Terms of Reference

On 16 June 2009, the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee for inquiry and report by 29 October 2009:

An assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, with particular reference to:

a. the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;

The financial impact on rural and regional students who are studying at a metropolitan tertiary provider is huge. They have the costs of accommodation – on campus for un-catered it starts at approximately \$9000 and can go to \$11,000. On top of this students have to feed themselves and also provide for living expenses. They also have to buy books which depending on the course can be up to \$1000 a year. Catered accommodation, providing most of the meals starts at 15,000 and can go up to 19,500 for approx 35 weeks. Students living in catered accommodation also have other living expenses and university expenses. Students leaving home also have cost of moving expenses. Most will need to buy a laptop computer and printer as home access will not be available. Many will need to buy a small fridge for their room (if living on campus). Renting accommodation varies greatly from city to city. Students would have to pay at least \$160 per week for off-campus accommodation. However for this students need to enter leasing arrangements and also have to pay for utilities, food, internet and everyday living expenses.

If they want to visit home, public transport or the cost of running a vehicle needs to be slotted in. **It is quite feasible for this to cost students/parents in excess of \$30,000 per year. Some families can have 2 or even 3 students at university at the same time!** Students who satisfied the independent status for Youth Allowance in the past have at least been helped and the cost to family or themselves would be reduced by approx. \$12,000. It still leaves a large expense for families to pay.

b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;

There are alternative for students to study in regional areas. Many larger regional areas have university campuses. However, depending on the course the students want to do will affect where they choose to study. Not all regional universities have all courses, so even if a student lives in a larger regional area that does have a university campus it may not offer the course the student wants. Students who live in smaller rural areas have to leave home no matter what, to pursue a tertiary education.

c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;

The proposed changes will have a huge impact on prospective students. Some will simply decide not to go to university as their parents who may be just over the income limit or even a lot over may simply not be able to afford the \$30,000+ that it will cost them to tertiary educate their children – especially when they have to relocate to do so. With the opportunity for students to earn the required money over an 18 month period it meant nearly all students regardless of their parent's income could consider a university education. With the proposed changes it will be simply too hard for many families to go down the university pathway. We must remember as mentioned before some families may have two or more students of university age.

d. the short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;

In the short term it is going to make many students re-think the university option. The fact that this legislation is going to be retrospective has gutted many students who are working towards the goal of gaining independence before going to uni. next year. They made a decision on their futures and the government has "moved the goal posts" mid game. They are currently up in the air, not sure what to do. Many have gained employment for 12 months only i.e. traineeships etc.

The long term impact I think is far more insidious; the cost of tertiary education will make it very difficult for many rural and regional families to afford for their children to leave home and go to university. What will these kids do? Jobs are not that available for rural kids, the labour market has been drying up over a large period of time. The gap between city kids and rural kids going to university will simply get larger. I thought one of the goals of our government was to get more people tertiary educated, this legislation goes against all of those principles.

e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;

The current requirements for students to gain independents so they can help fund their post secondary study was very good. It gave all students the chance to pursue tertiary education and allowed country students who for the most part have to move away from home to go to university the option. If anything Independent Youth Allowance should apply automatically to rural and regional students so that they can make the transition to university instead of working 12 months to qualify.

f. the educational needs of rural and regional students;

- Proximity and access to tertiary education

A survey completed in 2006 found that 33% of country students compared with 52% of metropolitan students commenced tertiary education. The Government should be looking at ways to redress this difference not introducing changes that are going to further reduce rural and regional student's chance of attending university. Socio Economic circumstances of family, Occupation of parent, Motivation, feelings about school, Pathway choice, Employment market, and tertiary entry score are all things that affect students' willingness to complete tertiary education. It is much easier for city kids to make this choice. Most do

not have to leave home and all the benefits and support this provides. Rural students needed added incentives to enable tertiary education to be available to all.

g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities; and

The proposed changes are diabolical and will far greater effect rural and regional students than city students. It is going to change the whole outlook of these kids about tertiary education. To make it retrospective is little short of criminal. There are thousands of kids out there who are now so disillusioned regarding their tertiary futures. Parents are financially stressed as to how they can now afford to help their child achieve their dream of moving to the city to complete their tertiary studies. How can the government make these changes without even a hint that they were going to do this?

h. other related matters.

It is mind boggling how the government came to the conclusion that this was the way to go. I understand that they believe there was certain percentage of families' rorting the system. Why then wouldn't you look at plugging those gaps instead of making wholesale changes that are going to impact mainly on rural and regional students who are already disadvantaged as far as tertiary education goes.

It is also grossly unfair to make this legislation retrospective. These students who have made decisions should still be able to apply for independence under the old rules; at least current students are aware of the changes that are going to be made and families can budget or plan for the tertiary education of their children.

James Westland