

**The Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600**

Honorable Committee Members,

The Honorable Mr Terry Redman, Member for Blackwood Stirling has been diligent in attempting to inform his electorate of a discriminatory change to Youth Allowance access for rural students. The issues of rural communication, distance and in some cases illiteracy in his electorate underline both the obvious disadvantaged access of students to further studies and the need for equitable access for all rural community members.

Rural students are forced to study in regional centres, and in most cases, cities as the access to their courses of choice are limited, especially in Western Australia. Building an Education Revolution and not 'dumbing down' future generations means ensuring access for disadvantaged students. There are few greater disadvantages and barriers to tertiary and vocational study than being forced to go into the workforce for two years, simply to qualify for the Independent Youth Allowance.

For many rural students, the double barrier of facing relocation costs and living away from home, are compounded by the need to seek part time work. The proposed rule change in the current Federal budget specifically bars students from studying and completing their courses, by requiring 30 hours work per week. This will have significant impacts on enrolment, achievement and value-adding to both Universities and the wider skilled work and human resource qualified pool. Forcing existing students, especially mature age students, to work full time for 18 months will endanger their enrolment and University 'good standing', as well as create conditions that will lead to a rise in incomplete qualifications. Student life is a sacrifice, and an opportunity cost. This proposal will make it a mockery for rural students. It will significantly disadvantage rural communities and students from both middle socio-economic and impoverished backgrounds.

The rural vote in Western Australia formed a critical backlash against the major parties, with the rise of the WA Nationals. Rural families whilst a small proportion nationally, are loath to take things sitting down. An attack on their children and their future access to education is a ticking time-bomb issue for the next election. The proposal rides prosperity not on the 'sheep's back' but instead puts rural students on the same par as mangy dogs, begging for scraps.

I commend the conscientiousness of the Member for Blackwood Stirling. Would but the remaining Members be as committed to equity of access for disadvantaged rural Australians.

Yours truly,



Ron Ng

