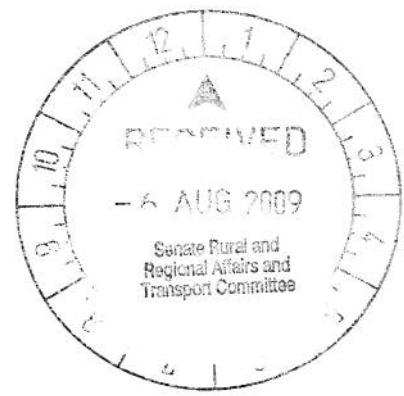


August 4, 2009



To Whom It May Concern,

I write in relation to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities and will be focusing on the current and proposed barriers to regional students that can prevent them from undertaking tertiary studies.

It is with this in mind that I refer to the terms of reference sections (a) the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE; (c) the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas; (e) the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study; and (g) the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities.

Living locally in Traralgon, I completed Year 12 in 2008 and deferred my Bachelor of Science place at the University of Melbourne. Knowing that I would be entitled to Youth Allowance after earning approximately \$20,000 in 18 months was the deciding factor for my gap year. To remove this policy is such a disadvantage to rural students, and is unfair, especially to those that are currently half-way through a gap year. I am lucky enough to be working through my gap year, but even with what I have managed to save, I know I am going to struggle financially. The Independent Youth Allowance would have changed my financial situation for the better, and made my transition to Melbourne extremely less stressful. However now, half-way through my gap year, I am told I'm no longer entitled. Where is the fairness in that?

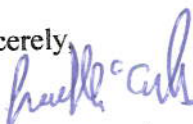
Students that now have to defer for two years, if it is even possible, to work the minimum of 30 hours per week, will simply not return to their studies. The relocation scholarship that is currently being hyped up would be great, if I could get youth allowance, but now I fear I won't be able to, even with the Parental Income Test threshold raised.

The Rudd Government need to realise that it is hard enough for rural students to pack up and move to completely surrounds by themselves, all the while trying to support themselves while studying. And now they expect us to do it without Government financial support. This is not only going to put strain on the students themselves, but their families as well, as they try their hardest to support their children.

I was pleased to see that it was not only students and their families signing the Youth Allowance petition, but that many others disagree with the Rudd Government's decision. Even people that the change did not directly affect were eager to sign, as well as many teachers and even a Highschool Principal offered to sign the petition I had.

The Rudd Government can hype up the positives of 'relocation scholarships' and raised 'parental income test thresholds' all they like, but at the end of the day, the removal of the youth allowance is wrong, and I hope they correct the changes made soon. When more rural families are suffering finically and the number of rural students attending metropolitan universities start to decline, they will realise that their changes have backfired. I hope they change the policy back, before too much damage is done.

Yours sincerely,

  
Sarah McGrath