

August 4<sup>th</sup> 2009



To whom it may concern,

I am writing in regards to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities. I am writing as I am very concerned at the level of disadvantage faced by country students in accessing tertiary education. In addition, I am concerned that proposed changes by the Rudd Government in regards to access to Youth Allowance will further disadvantage students who need to relocate in order to undertake tertiary studies.

My daughter has taken a 'Gap' year from university this year, on the advice of Centerlink employees who came to her school, in order to be eligible for the Independent Youth Allowance. Currently students who earn \$18,800 in eighteen months are eligible. As a result a large number of students in East Gippsland defer their studies for twelve months due to the large cost involved in living away from home at university. The on-track data suggests that our students are some of the most disadvantaged in the state and confirms the high rate of deferment, largely due to financial burden. The nearest university is 160km away in Churchill but does not offer any Physical Education teaching courses, therefore my daughter applied to the University of Ballarat, some five hours drive away.

The Budget changes will mean that students have to defer for two years and work a minimum of 30 hours per week. My daughter is a casual employee and rarely gets 30 hours per week work. I worry about the employment opportunities for young people in East Gippsland when Coles, one of our largest employers, is unable to offer ongoing full time employment. In addition, universities will not allow students to defer for more than 12 months. I think it is really unfair to make such changes when students are half way through their gap year, especially when they have acted on advice from government agencies. If these changes take place, university may not be an option for students in rural areas and they will be left to fight for jobs in a labour market that is not offering much for school leavers at present. It also seems contradictory to the Government's objective of increasing university participation by 40%.

As a school teacher who has returned to East Gippsland after tertiary education, I worry about the ability of this area to fill professional positions in the future. Many students who move away from the area return to fill positions as pharmacists, teachers, lawyers, doctors

and accountants. We should be encouraging our children to enter tertiary studies that will fill areas of need in the future not dissuading them.

I urge the Senate Inquiry to consider the needs of students in country areas and their access to tertiary education. I believe that any changes made should focus on increasing accessibility for country students not further disadvantaging them. I also consider the Budget changes that impact on students who have already made career decisions unfair.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Kate Kerr', followed by a period.

Kate Kerr