

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.

We consider the proposed Higher Education Support Amendment to be an absolute disgrace given that it will discriminate against country students whose parents are not in a financial position to be able to support them living away from home. On campus University accommodation can cost up to \$18,000/year. Many rural students use the gap year to work and save money for the costs of living away from home and in doing so have become eligible for the independent allowance. The universities only allow them to defer for one gap year. With the proposed system they will have to reapply if they take two years off and hope they offered a position the following year, or we run the risk of them not reapplying at all. Apart from this, where are they going to find 30 hours of work/week in rural areas? We do not have the option of having our children living with us during their university years as do urban or regional families as we are 200kms from the closest regional University and 350kms from Melbourne. This is yet another discriminatory hurdle placed in the way of the rural community, and if it goes ahead unamended be prepared for a rapid decline in rural university students – they will all be unemployed and claiming Centrelink benefits.

We remain the underprivileged in the country, enduring inferior health services, limited communication systems, limited employment opportunities, limited choice of schooling, limited retail, inferior roads, increased costs for travel ie: fuel and other services and now this proposed change to a benefit our children should be entitled to.

What would you prefer?

1. Supporting rural students living away from home while they study at University secure in the knowledge that these students will be among the next generation of scientists/lawyers/politicians/doctors/teachers/nurses/engineers.....**OR**
2. Supporting a greater number of disenchanting and unemployed rural youth on unemployment benefits because the government didn't recognise the need or have the foresight to provide these students with the opportunity to become Australia's future leaders. **OR**
3. Perhaps those of us who continue to work as nurses/teachers in rural communities stop working and hence become eligible for all the allowances we have never been eligible for in the past.

In anticipation of a positive response,

Andrew and Sally McConnell