

Date 24<sup>th</sup> July 2009

**RE: Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities**

We are writing to voice our concern regarding the changes to Youth Allowance eligibility the Government are planning to impose on students who have taken a gap year based on the rules which applied at the end of their VCE year, to obtain the Youth Allowance.

We have a grand-daughter who is in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year at University 2 hours from her home in Shepparton. Our granddaughter took her gap year also, at which time she worked two jobs to earn the required funds. This was so she didn't have to rely solely on her parents to fund her.

They still have to assist their daughter financially, as although we appreciate the Government assistance it doesn't cover all her rent, university and living costs, and this is also with some part time work she undertakes.

They have a second daughter at university who they support. They both work full time jobs, have another son in secondary school, a mortgage and of course bills to pay. They do not have luxuries and are struggling to pay their current bills – They cannot afford to fund her rent, living and University expenses.

Our grand-daughter worked hard to complete her VCE and spent a lot of time deciding on a career and course. The family spent many Sundays (and petrol) attending Uni Open Days to make sure she made the right decision. The course she must attend is 4 hours from her home. So what now?

Our grand-daughter will not be able to meet the 30 hour per week over 18 month criteria, as you can only defer a University course for 1 year.

**How can the Government move the goal posts mid way through the year? The "gap year" students have been disregarded and are now in limbo. Are country students not entitled to become educated and valued members of society?**

We realise there are many students living in the city "rotting" the system – and these are the students who live at home. Why not "weed" them out and help the rural students who genuinely need assistance.

**We ask that the Government reconsider these proposed changes at least for the 2008 VCE students. Their decisions were based on the rules currently in place; they cannot turn back the clock.**

Please also consider the students coming through secondary school now – the proposed criteria will still be almost impossible to meet.

Yours sincerely,  
Ken & Cath Birkett