

29 May 2009

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

I am 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 daughter who is in her 3rd year at University 2 hours from our home in Shepparton. Our daughter 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.

We still have to assist our 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.

Our second daughter has taken the same path. My husband and I work full time jobs, have another son in secondary school, a mortgage and of course bills to pay. We do not have luxuries; we are struggling to pay our current bills – we cannot afford to fund her rent, living and University expenses.

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

Our 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?

I realise there are many students living in the city "rorting" the system – and these are the students who live at home. Why not "weed" them out and leave alone 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,

Peter Meates

Linda Meates