

The Secretary
The Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education
Opportunities

Student Allowances

It has come to my attention that the Government's planned changes to the eligibility criteria for the Living Away from Home Allowances (Youth Allowance, Rent Assistance) are working against their stated aim of providing places for rural students at university. I went to Shepparton last Monday night for an evening about accommodation for University students and there were only 80 people present, whereas two years ago the same presentation attracted some 240. The Careers Adviser at the Catholic School, Notre Dame, said she thought it was a reflection of the proposed change in government policy.

Our students from rural Victoria are mainly from farming communities who are asset rich but cash poor. The proposed changes strike at these people in an almost targeted fashion. The farming people are proud and will not accept help to which they are not entitled and will not commit to bills they cannot pay. The overall effect of the proposed government policy looks set to decimate our student population and to seriously compromise the capacity of rural students to take their place alongside metropolitan students.

A study of the figures of the origin of students at Colleges of the University of Melbourne reveals that about 42% of students are from rural Victoria and in some Colleges as many as 70%. Given that there are some 2000 students in all the proposed changes could affect students and Colleges alike.

We try to keep our fees down and students are required to do two hours per week voluntary work to minimize fees but they are still considerable being in the vicinity of \$17,000 per annum. The capacity of students to defer their studies and earn the required amount makes a big difference to their parents' ability to meet these fees. It is a sizeable investment in the future of not just their offspring but in the future of Australia.

Yours faithfully

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