

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

We are writing this submission as parents of three children planning to continue their education at university level. We live in the small community of Hay, 725 kilometres southwest of Sydney where the nearest regional university is 300 kilometres away. We are extremely concerned about the budget announcement that the conditions for accessing Independent Youth Allowance (IYA) has changed. We feel that the needs of rural and regional students such as those living in and around small towns such as Hay have been ignored. These students must live away from home in order to access university education.

We would like to submit the following to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities in relation to the Terms of Reference:

a. The financial impact

Families that earn incomes and pay tax are often not eligible for the federal scholarships that are available to students who already qualify for Centrelink payments. The costs per year for a student to attend university and live independently are so high that without IYA this career option becomes out of the question. Families in areas such as Hay have already been struggling with the ongoing drought and the financial strain of sending their children to university becomes too much.

b. The educational alternative for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas

Students living in small communities such as Hay who want to study at regional universities must relocate. There is no alternative.

c. The implication of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas

Although it has always been a challenge for school leavers to find sufficient work to earn approximately \$19 000 in the twelve months before starting a deferred university course or in eighteen months while studying at university, many achieve this which enables them to access the IYA and therefore be able to afford to study at a tertiary level. The implications of the proposed changes are that

- Students will have difficulty securing 30 hours a week work while studying away from home **and** 30 hours a week at home in vacation time.
- Students will find a course load plus study time plus 30 hours of paid work very hard going, if at all possible.
- The current economic climate means that many parents and families in rural areas cannot offer financial support for their children to relocate to study.

- Students may not accept a deferred place at university as it is only offered for one year.
- Students from rural families will not be able to support themselves financially in order to study at university.

d. The short and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE enrolments

It would seem that students who must relocate to a bigger centre in order to study at a tertiary level will be financially unable to do so, therefore regional enrolments would be reduced.

e. The adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study

Government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for post-secondary study is inadequate. For students from areas such as Hay, moving away from home is necessary in order to study at university. Unless students already qualify for Centrelink payments, there is no financial help available for living away from home expenses. The inadequacy of the support offered under the new criteria for IYA has been addressed above.

f. The educational needs of rural and regional students

The educational needs of rural and regional students are as diverse as in metropolitan areas. These needs should be met as equitably as possible. As the universities and other tertiary institutions cannot come to the students from rural families, the students must go to them. This requires these students to move away from home. This cost money. These students need financial support to relocate in order to pursue their studies.

g. The impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities

The impact on rural communities such as Hay is immense. Communities such as this are already struggling to survive. We need to maintain services and businesses. We need to ensure that families are not disadvantaged by living here. Schemes such as IYA are essential and must offer support to **all** families with children wishing to further their education away from home. These children will become the professionals who will be most likely to work in rural areas of Australia.

Fiona and Geoffrey Harrison
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