

The Chairman
Senate Committee
Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education
Opportunities

Dear Sir

We wish to protest vehemently about the proposed changes to the independent Youth Allowance announced in the recent federal budget.

Our daughter completed her education at the remote central school of Ashford through a Distance Education Program. Her remarkable UAI of 95.9% shows her academic ability, diligence and huge potential.

We decided to fully support Julia in her first 18 months of university study while she worked hard, probably as a farm labourer, during university holidays to meet the income requirement of \$18,000 plus. We did not and could not foresee that the existing policy would change so radically and retrospectively.

It would be naïve to think that students from rural areas would be able to find employment to meet the income and time requirements of this new legislation. Our nearest centre is Inverell with a population of 11,000 which is a round trip of 100km. There is no way that this small centre can begin to support its own young people in their quest for 18 months' employment of 30 hours per week, let alone those young people from outlying villages, such as our daughter.

How can we offer our country kids a tertiary education? How do we tell an intelligent, conscientious student, like Julia, that we cannot afford the \$20,000 cost per year, including \$10,000 accommodation plus textbooks, clothing, transport etc incurred? She knows that there is no 30 hours work available locally. She cannot hold down a 30 hour per week job at university while studying a full time, serious Science/Pharmacy degree.

Those of us in isolated, rural areas have to lose our children at 18 years of age for them to attain tertiary education. It would be our pleasure to have had our children live at home for longer to support them through their tertiary studies.

We do not have a university nearby which Julia can access by subsidised public transport while living at home.

How do we tell Julia that, even with such a great UAI and such dedicated effort, she can't continue her university education because we live in the country?

With continued support, these country students will go on to professional careers. They will become tax payers and voters. Many of them will return to regional areas to practise their professions. Please support them and their families as we try to achieve for our children what is so much more achievable for students in the cities and regional areas with tertiary facilities.

Our daughter has begun her degree with our financial support on the understanding that, if she works hard during her holidays, she will receive some assistance for the completion of her degree. She is not travelling overseas, she could not find employment locally, she is not living at home while employed, enjoying the financial, emotional and social benefits this brings.

The new legislation will conservatively cost us \$80,000 plus and this does not include the HECs fee. We have been nearly financially crippled by 7 years of drought and do not know how we can find this huge amount to give our daughter her deserved educational opportunity.

Please consider the plight of country people in your inquiry into this legislation in view of the obstacles faced by those of us who cannot access tertiary education locally. Our children deserve their chance like their city counterparts and we cannot afford the \$20,000 a year expense of educating them away from home.

Yours truly
Grant and Carel Ballam