

6th August, 2009

The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Senate Inquiry – Re changes to Youth Allowance

As a parent of a full funded university student from a rural area I am writing to support the said changes that are outlined for the Youth Allowance. We have supported our daughter for 3 years and have not received a cent from the government in support. She had to move 400 klms from home to attend university. She felt that she wanted to go straight to university from school as she enjoyed studying. As a family we decided to support her decision as we feel that it is unfair that rural students feel compelled to take a gap year to qualify for youth allowance so that the financial burden of moving away to study is lessened. We of course did not qualify for youth allowance as I worked part time and my husband was in fulltime employment.

Our second daughter is currently in year 12 and hoping to attend university next year. Under the new scheme we are eligible by having 2 daughters enrolled in university and with our income coming under the new qualifying amount. We may only qualify for a two year period as our eldest daughter will complete her studies in 2011. We however feel that what we can receive during that period is certainly better than anything we have received to date which has been nothing.

Having read the proposed changes I can see both good and bad points with the proposal. The financial assistance will benefit a large number of families previously not eligible. The point that has impressed me is that for many rural families a gap year will become a matter of choice rather than necessity. Unfortunately for those students who do choose to have a gap year the conditions are not so favourable.

Perhaps the only recommendation that would make the proposal even more appealing to rural families across the board would be if the relocation allowance was available to all students from rural areas that have to relocate to attend university. Perhaps the metropolitan students may feel they have the need to relocate to attend a university however they are privileged to have adequate transport systems that make all universities accessible.

With the prospect of finding enough funds to pay for a second daughter to attend university we would appreciate any financial assistance for their living expenses. Certainly if there was a university close by that offered their preferred courses then they would be able to live at home at considerable less expense.

The prospect of having some financial assistance made available has filled us with hope and lessened the guilt that our youngest daughter feels about the cost of her attending university. Unfortunately for rural students the cost of attending university is an aspect which sometimes determines their destiny. Even with a large number of rural scholarships available the majority of the conditions are for low income families. The average family is not eligible and struggles to find the finance needed to support their children to achieve their potential. Under the new recommendations more scholarships will be made available which hopefully will support a broader range of students from rural areas.

We fully support the proposed changes and can see the benefits that support all students regardless of their locality. I was fortunate enough to study at university in 1975 and lived in the city with my family but still received an allowance to attend university and of course under that scheme the education was free. Thirty – fives years on and not only do students pay for their education but they also do not receive any allowances. Further to that rural students must leave home to attend university and pay for furniture, rent, food, utilities and other expenses. It does only seem fair that some financial assistance is allocated to rural students.

Regards

Heather Cormie