



August 4, 2009

To Whom It May Concern

I write in relation to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.

I believe that the proposed changes to the current system are discriminatory against regional students who need to study in the capital cities because of limited regional degree choices and they therefore discourage students from progressing to tertiary study.

It is my understanding that this inquiry will act as an assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities attending metropolitan institutions, and metropolitan students attending regional universities or technical and further education (TAFE) colleges.

Whilst acknowledging the difficulties regional students face in completing secondary education I wish to focus on the current and proposed barriers to regional students that can prevent them from undertaking tertiary studies. It is with this in mind that I refer to the terms of reference sections:

- (a) the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;
- (c) the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;
- (e) the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study; and
- (g) the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities.

It is my firm belief that the financial burden placed on regional students attending university cannot be narrowed down to a certain figure as many students' circumstances differ. I believe a figure of around \$20,000 is an appropriate estimate of the cost of living away from home for the duration of the university year for each student. The cost of on-campus accommodation and the metropolitan rental markets across Australia are only ever going to increase and it's quite probable that they will increase at a superior rate to levels of government support.

This has been one of the main motivating factors giving rise to the current protests over recent proposals by the Federal Government to change the eligibility for the Independent rate of Youth Allowance. To many regional students it seems that the government does not understand the increased costs faced by students who are forced to live away from home to pursue their chosen course.

Like many, I find it hard to believe that the Federal Government has made these decisions in the best interest of regional students. Forcing students into two-year deferments so that they can qualify for the Independent rate of Youth Allowance will only serve to reduce the percentage of regional students that currently attend university. In any case many courses have indicated that they will not defer the courses for two years, and neither will the halls of residence will not defer places for two years.

By providing the appropriate levels of support and reducing the financial burdens, more regional students will be encouraged to undertake tertiary studies which will provide benefits back to their local communities. Regional communities are continually crying out for further help in relation to health and education services. With government support for students, regional communities will have the chance to prosper when these students return. The outcomes for these communities would be far greater than if the young people of the area were prevented from attending university and were not afforded the opportunity to provide essential skills and services to their local communities in the future.

In my particular case, my Son completes Year 12 this year and will need to move to Melbourne to study his chosen Degree, Chemical Engineering, which is only available in Capital Cities. He is then likely to return to Sale to work in the local Oil & Gas industry – an area that is desperate for graduates who are willing to move to the country. He had planned on first working for 12 months to qualify for the Independent rate of Youth Allowance to ease the financial burden on himself and us while he undertakes his four years of very expensive living in Melbourne (due to the need to establish his own living arrangements) – a cost that does not have to be carried by suburban students who can continue to live at home.

In closing, I believe the government must be doing more to protect and nurture the regional young people who will provide the platform that will launch the future Australia. They must also strive to create a Level Playing Field that does not create a tertiary education system that is funded in favour of Suburban families and students.

Yours sincerely



Rob Oliver