

3rd August, 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Submission into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

I write in relation to the senate inquiry into rural and regional access to secondary and tertiary education opportunities.

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) 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
- (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 \$20000 is an appropriate estimate of the cost of living away from home for the duration of the university year for each student. See attached cost of living table taken from the website of the University of Melbourne.

The cost of on-campus accommodation and the metropolitan rental markets across Australia are only ever going to increase and it is 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.

Many of these students are currently competing a “gap” year to assist in shouldering the financial burden involved in moving away from home to complete tertiary studies. The Education Minister has not guaranteed that these students will not be affected, which has effectively meant that the rules they were told to follow by their teacher and careers officers have become virtually useless. How can they possibly move the goal posts at half-time?

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 fact, many universities courses do not allow a two year deferment.

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 future.

I believe the government must be doing more to protect and nurture the regional young people who are the face of the future of Australia.

As parents of a “gap” year student we were shocked to learn that from January 1 our daughter would have to work full-time for at least 30 hours a week for two years to qualify for the government’s change to youth allowance. Coming from a rural area it would be extremely difficult to find a 30-hour-a-week job in a rural community for unskilled young people. The global financial crisis has made this even worse.

With the belief, and advice from government bodies, that they were filling the criteria to be recognised as “independent” students many young school leavers from the class of 2009 decided to defer their courses and are currently holding down jobs in shops, schools and offices across the region this year. They are trying to work 15 hours per week or earning \$19,500 in an 18 month period, in order to be recognised as “independent” by May next year. The new system means that this year’s gap students will not have completed their required 18-month earning period before the January 1 deadline. They have in fact been told they have wasted the year.

Rural and regional students have to face the hurdle of moving away from home and the cost of moving out of home and supporting themselves while studying - and that country students are more than twice as likely to defer their courses than city kids, and that for many country people, once you defer your course you never come back to university.

Whilst the government will deliberate the findings of this inquiry, what is going to happen to the class of 2009?

Yours faithfully

Susan Slattery

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Wellbeing Services Student Financial Aid

Cost of Living - Summary Table

The information in this section outlines the estimated cost of living for a student at the Parkville campus of the University of Melbourne, according to the type of accommodation chosen.

The costs for students studying at other campuses of the University will be similar, though rental or residential college costs are likely to be lower. However, annual transport costs will generally be higher.

Please note: if you are paying your **Commonwealth Supported Place (CSP)** charge on an **upfront basis**, or you are a **course fee paying** student (International or Australian), you will need to **add** the appropriate annual fee amount to the our Cost of Living Estimates. For further information about CSP and Course Fees go to the [Admissions website](#).

Type of Accommodation		No. of Weeks	Weekly Rent / Board Range (\$)	Estimated Total (\$) Rent or Board and other expenses
Sharing Rented Premises (with 2 others)	Close to Parkville campus	52	170 - 205	20 100 - 26 900
	Within 6 kilometres of Uni	52	155 -185	19 500 - 25 800
	Rural area	52	65 - 100	14 400 - 20 100
Student Apartments	Two bedroom, shared	52	220 - 270	23 200 - 30 500
	One bedroom not shared	52	300 - 350	27 700 - 35 000
Hostel	One bedroom - shared bathroom/kitchen	52	165 - 205	20 200 - 26 900
Residential Colleges (near or on campus)	32 week stay	32	450 - 547*	18 300 - 23 700
	40 week stay	40	450 - 547*	23 200 - 29 500

Homestay	Living with a local family	40	240 - 275*	14 800 - 19 200
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The above total annual living cost estimates include the following expenses:

Items	Amount
Weekly Cost (other than Rent)	
Food and Groceries Contribution	\$80-100
Bills (Electricity, Gas etc)**	\$25-35
Telephone (not Mobile)	\$10-15
Public Transport fares ***	\$30
Spending Money	\$40-80
Annual Cost	
General Course Costs	\$500-750 ****
Establishment Costs	
Bond (usually 1 month's rent)	4.333 x weekly rent
Telephone / utilities connection	\$150-200
General furniture items (Not including whitegoods)	\$450-800

* Usually includes most meals. Some colleges also charge additional fees.

**Households using electricity for hot water, cooking and heating will often have much higher bills than households using gas facilities

*** Public transport estimates assume residence in [Zone 1](#) of the transport system. Please note that the transport concession card makes public transport considerably cheaper. International students are not eligible for the public transport concession card.

**** Course costs vary dramatically between courses. In some courses, such as dentistry, equipment can cost over \$3000. We strongly advise students to contact their prospective faculties for full details of potential course costs.

Important Notes:

Please note that the above estimates are a general guide only.

The following cost estimates should be added to **weekly** expenses, if necessary –

- Computer Costs (\$5-10)
- Takeaway meals (\$6-10 per meal)
- Car Expenses – fuel / insurance / registration (\$40-50)
- Mobile telephone (\$10-15)

Rental property prices vary from suburb to suburb. Check realestate.com.au or The Age

newspaper for the current cost of renting in Melbourne.

Tuition fees and upfronts HECS payments are not included in estimates.

Estimates for College Costs and Homestay assume that the student returns home during vacations.