

Submission to Senate Enquiry in Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities – David Crouch

I make the following submission to the enquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education opportunities.

In particular, I would like to focus on the on the proposed changes to eligibility for classification as “independent” for the purpose of the Youth Allowance

Context:

We am the parents of two children, one who is on their “gap year” the other is in year 10 at a regional high school.

Both have the intention of attending University in Adelaide, approximately 280 kilometres away.

I am a teacher with a net income of about \$110 000.

The estimated additional cost of supporting both our children in Adelaide is in the region of \$25 – 30 000. The substantial component is \$12,500 each per year for residential accommodation cost plus additional costs for travel. T

The following points are relevant to this discussion:

Country students do not have a choice about having to relocate to the city for further education and training.

This cost for our family of \$12500 per child per annum, multiplied for the 4 years of any tertiary qualification total approximately 25% of family income, additional to the existing costs of running the family. This will place undue burden on my family. The cost multiplied across the 4 years totals \$120 000.

My salary makes us ineligible to receive ANY support through Youth Allowance. This further precludes our sons from applying for scholarships that have this Youth Allowance eligibility as a prerequisite.

These changes preferentially target country families. The costs outlined are above those incurred by city based students. The costs are additional to the social and emotional upheaval that is faced by country students as they relocate. In addition the proposed changes put additional pressure on country students to gain part time employment – pressure that is not faced by city students.

The Youth Allowance has, up until now, been used by country students for the basic necessities of life – food, accommodation, university costs. The Youth Allowance has always been insufficient to cover these costs and parents have been required to supplement the Allowance to make tertiary study possible.

There is the potential for families to be forced to make choice between siblings, about who will be able to attend further education and who won't –based entirely on financial considerations – very tough decisions for any family.

All of my teaching has been in rural and remote areas. I am now in a senior management position. For the first time we are contemplating relocating to the city to offset the additional cost of running two, or three, households. This exacerbates the shortage of teachers in the country. The proposed changes are also counter to the research that indicates that the professionals most likely to return to the country post training are those from the country, again making worse the shortage of professionals in the country.

Further this thinking applies in the thinking of all mobile professionals – in areas already experiencing skill shortage throughout rural Australia – doctors, nurses, police, allied

health, IT etc.

The proposed changes put the country based professional at a salary disadvantage compared to their city counterparts. For example, my salary is the same as my city colleagues, but I must suffer the cost impost of supporting our children in Adelaide. Put colloquially, I can shift a lot of furniture for \$120000 AND our family would stay together. For this reason, any solution must NOT be means tested – it is not a matter of rich versus poor but of comparison between equal professionals, country compared to city.

Our first son has “followed” all of the rules in existence at the time these decision have been made. He now finds himself unable to get the Youth Allowance. This is simply unfair. In addition, the proposed changes fly in the face of the programs run by university to address the under-representation of country students in university populations.

### Solutions

We believe that the solution is for the Government to introduce a new funding arrangement that recognises:

The lower per capita earning of rural Australians

The under-representation of students from rural and remote locations in tertiary programs

The absolute necessity for country students to relocate to cities for tertiary study

The social and emotional barriers already faced by country students as a result of having to leave the family home

The difficulty in attracting professionals in many fields to the country, and the greater likelihood that those doing so will be country students returning to the country post training.

The additional costs faced by country students to access tertiary study.

The difficulty in retaining experienced professionals in country locations and the pressure put on those people to follow their children to avoid the additional costs.

This funding model should be available to ALL country students, based upon a clear definition of rurality, to overcome all additional costs incurred by these students.