

Submission into the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Tertiary and Secondary Education Opportunities.

August 5, 2009

Sarah Ryan

To Whom It May Concern,

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

I specifically write in relation to the terms of reference (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.

As a regional student commencing tertiary studies in Melbourne this year, I have experienced first hand the financial strain placed on middle class rural and regional families in sending their children to study in metropolitan locations.

Middle class families of regional and rural Australia have become reliant on the youth allowance payment system to somewhat offset the huge cost of sending their children to the city to attend university. This is evident in the establishment that regional students are twice as likely to defer their university studies and estimates that 30,700 current GAP year students will be affected by the proposed changes. For many rural students, taking a GAP year to receive the independence payments is critical in relieving some of the financial burden placed on their families by their accessing of tertiary education. For families attempting to support more than one child living away from home such as my own, the cost of providing tertiary education for their children is astronomical.

The major component of this financial strain is accommodation costs. Melbourne University estimates on-campus single living for domestic students at their Parkville campus to be \$23 200 - \$29 500 for the 40 week academic year. Monash University estimates correlate with this figure. Other living arrangements such as renting share houses or living in student apartments bare similar costs. These estimates may be found at:

http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/finaid/planning/cost_of_living/summary.html
<http://www.monash.edu.au/study/international/prepare/cost-of-living.html>

This is a major inequity between regional and metropolitan students in accessing the tertiary education system as these substantial renting and residence costs are generally

unique to rural students. Unlike many suburban students, regional and rural students must often relocate to an urban or regional centre in order to access tertiary study or particular courses only available in metropolitan universities such as medicine, law, dentistry or veterinary science. It has already been determined that rural and regional students are under represented at a tertiary level.

I find it hard to believe that the Federal Government has made these decisions in the best interest of rural students. Abolishing Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships in addition to the harsher eligibility criteria will only increase the barriers faced by the majority of rural students in accessing tertiary education. This will only further increase the gap between metropolitan and rural students in accessing further education.

In order to alleviate some of the heavy financial burden faced by rural students and their families, I propose that the definition of 'independence' eligibility be applied to all regional and rural students who must 'live away from home' in order to pursue their chosen course.

My second recommendation is that the proposed changes to the youth allowance system be deferred until at least July 2010.

That the government has retrospectively changed the criteria for current GAP year students has been one of the major motivating factors for the protests against the proposed amendments. It is the firm belief of both myself and my peers that this 'changing the goal posts mid-game' for these students is a breach of the fundamental Australian principle of a fair go.

In closing, I believe that the government should be providing more and not less to rural and regional students aspiring to access further education.

Yours Sincerely,

Sarah Ryan