

Submission for Inquiry into rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

In response to the Terms of Reference

a. The financial impact of Alice Springs students attending metropolitan universities or TAFE is significant. Students must pay reallocation costs and also living costs. A typical boarding college in Adelaide will cost a student \$10 300 per room for 30 weeks of the year plus a \$500 bond. Extra days incur a \$50 per day fee. Other costs may include \$125 Club Fee for Orientation Week, Administrative Fee \$60 per annum, Library Fees \$65, Internet Fee \$450, Electricity \$250 and if they have a car \$145 parking. University tuition is approximately \$5500 per annum depending on the course and TAFE tuition average \$5 000 per year also depending on the course of study. Therefore, for a student to leave a regional area such as Alice Springs to attend further study they will incur costs around \$11 730 for room and board for 30 weeks plus tuition costs. Currently, students receiving Youth Allowance can offset some of these costs by \$371.40 a fortnight plus a Rent Allowance of \$111.20. Over 30 weeks of university study that comes out to \$7 249.

b. Educational alternatives for Alice Springs students are limited. Charles Darwin University has an Alice Springs Campus which offers courses in Accounting, Commerce and Teaching and Learning (Preservice) only. There are more options on the TAFE side but due to the small size of the town these change year to year depending on available instructing staff. Many universities are now offering online courses and some students are taking up this opportunity but most students look forward to completing their studies in classroom situations with other like-minded individuals.

c. By changing the Youth Allowance requirements from a monetary amount of \$19 500 to 18 months of 30 hour weeks further restricts and delays student's educational goals. Many students are able to achieve the threshold in a year or less and are then able to pursue other interests including travel and volunteering before beginning their university studies. The change will limit student's opportunities of other learning experiences and delay their entry into university courses by at least six months and possibly even more. Some students may never complete their studies.

d. Short term impact is immense on students currently undertaking a "gap year" with the intention to qualify for the Youth Allowance and then continue their studies in 2010. They are very uncertain of their plans and many are unsure if the universities will save their places for a further six months. What about the students currently receiving and depending on Youth Allowance? Will it be cut off and will these students have to abandon their studies in the middle of their course? Changing a system that has been clearly understood by students and their families is causing a lot of stress, anxiety and uncertainty. What happened to the Education Revolution?

Long term impact might include students from regional areas never continuing their studies beyond secondary school. The importance of a skilled labour force is obvious in today's market economy but if students are denied a Youth Allowance it will

make it impossible for many to fund their living costs while completing further study away from home.

e. The previous Youth Allowance scheme was an excellent government measure for students who are forced to leave home to complete their education. It gave students the opportunity to earn their place in the scheme by demonstrating their financial independence from their parents. Many students in Alice Springs have greatly benefitted in past years from the Youth Allowance and a large proportion of former students have returned to the red centre as qualified professionals which have greatly benefitted our community.

f. The educational needs of Alice Springs students are as varied as any group of students from an urban area. Some students are looking for professional qualifications, others are looking for apprenticeships and traineeships and a lot of students at the end of Year 12 really don't know what they want to do. They do, however, deserve the opportunity to further explore their educational capabilities either at home or in another state or territory.

g. A lot of students can't wait to escape Alice Springs and greatly look forward to further studies in a city atmosphere. Many students, however, return to their roots and begin their professional lives back in their home town. Currently, on staff at this school we have 10 former students employed – 8 as teachers and 1 as the school nurse and 1 as a lab assistant. Statistics will show you that rural and regional students are much more likely to work in rural and regional areas once they have completed their studies. Youth Allowance gives students the opportunity to gain qualifications that they can not gain here and then to bring their education and training back to their home town.

These are my submissions,

Leslie Tilbrook
Career Adviser
St Philips College