

August 4, 2009
Chris Riley

To Whom it May Concern,

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 TAFE colleges.

In this submission I wish to focus on the blatant injustice the proposed changes to the definition of Independence, and in turn, the changes in the provision of youth allowance will cause to students who are currently in their 'gap' year and hoping to attend tertiary education next year.

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 education; and (g) the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities.

I am currently working full time completing my 'gap' year in a regional town after also completing my secondary education in the same town. It was my intention to relocate to Melbourne as of next year to complete a commerce degree at the University of Melbourne. I planned to help fund my living expenses in Melbourne with youth allowance and have made my decision to defer my university place and qualify for independent status based on this assumption. This was not an easy decision to make as I would have preferred to go directly to university rather than deferring for a year. The Government's decision to change the criteria for gaining youth allowance now effectively renders my 'gap' year futile as I will no longer qualify for any youth allowance at all. It seems as though the Government has shifted the goal posts halfway through the game, after thousands of 2008 school leavers have committed to deferring in the hope of qualifying for youth allowance. Not qualifying for youth allowance leaves me having to decide whether to not pursue my dream of a tertiary education or place my parents under considerable financial hardship in order to send me to university and cover my relocation expenses.

A catch cry of the Government in defending the proposed youth allowance changes has

been that 'no student will be worse off', this however is misleading. Under the old Youth Allowance criteria, having earned the appropriate amount of money to be classed as independent, upon completion of my 'gap' year I would have qualified for the full allowance, however, if the proposed changes are enforced I will not qualify for any, not even the relocation allowance. In this way the Federal Government is denying me \$371.40 a fortnight next year, after I've already made the decision to spend a year in the workforce before attending university.

Another way the Government has tried to defend the proposed changes is to say that they are acting in the best interests of country students. How can this be true if the Government is withdrawing funding for regional students when the average cost of relocating to major cities from regional areas is \$20,000? Under this new proposed legislation most country students would have to defer their university course for at least two years in order to qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance. This will only serve to diminish the percentage of country students attending university. It seems as though the Government, in proposing these youth allowance changes, is discouraging country students from pursuing a tertiary education.

In closing, I ask the Education Minister to reconsider the proposed changes, or at the very least guarantee that students who have already commented to defer their university place in order to qualify for the independent rate of youth allowance will not be affected. It just doesn't seem reasonable to deny students in their 'gap' year youth allowance when these students have already dedicated a whole year to work towards funding their own tertiary education.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Riley