

Lyn

Hosking

The Committee Secretary, Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport.

I am writing to you regarding the changes pertaining to being 'Independent' for the purposes of Youth Allowance, by requiring prospective students to work for a minimum of 30 hours per week for at least 18 months over a two year period.

This will have major repercussions in the short and long term for rural and regional students. Some terms of reference are discussed:

Students from rural areas who wish to further their education will need to move away from their family residence to find accommodation in the city. A cost of at least \$15,000 per year per child.

Families with more than one child attending metropolitan Universities could face costs in excess of \$30,000 per year of study. Our family, for example will have two children hopefully attending university in the future, but finding \$30,000 after tax will be prohibitive. We are middle income earners and financially this is impossible. Inevitably we are left with some hard decisions: Although both children have aspirations and the ability to continue further education we may have to make a decision between our children on who goes to University. Alternatively do we need to move to Adelaide and find new jobs so both our children can fulfill their educational potential?

Rural/Regional students will therefore have to work (significant hours) to pay for accommodation and living costs that their city based colleagues take for granted living in the family home. Combine this with the emotional stress of being separated from the support of their families and a large number of country students will inevitably decide that they cannot cope with the demands of study and work.

Many middle income earners and their children will be adversely affected by this new legislation.

Existing legislation means that rural/ regional students can gain independence if they earn more than \$19, 532 in an 18 month period after leaving school. For country students this has enabled them to access youth allowance and provided them with the financial means to move away from home and commence further education. Although this allowance helps immensely, it does not cover all boarding costs for the student. It does allow them to concentrate more on their studies and balance this with part-time work.

Proposed new legislation will impact dramatically on the numbers of rural students accessing further education.

In the present economic climate many young people will be unable to find regular work

totaling at least 30 hours per week if they decide to take a gap period to gain 'Independent' status as per the new legislation. A lot of work in regional areas may be seasonal and so continuity of work for a period of 18 months – 2 years is somewhat unrealistic. Many more experienced workers are finding it difficult to find and maintain a 30 hour per week job.

Other implications for rural/regional students include:

Students applying for University or TAFE placements will not be able to defer for an 18 month or 2 year period under present university entrance rules.

Presently less regional students pursue further education. Regional students will be further disadvantaged with the proposed new legislation which will inevitably lead to an even lower percentage of regional students pursuing University & TAFE opportunities. Already there is a shortage of professional people in rural and regional areas. The new legislation will mean fewer country students accessing further education and often it is these students who return to regional areas in a professional capacity once they have finished their degrees. The educational divide between city and country in the long term will become even larger. A university education for regional students from middle income families will become inaccessible under the new legislation.

E. The new legislation does not provide for regional students unless they already receive youth allowance. Many of the scholarships available are only available to those students on youth allowance. Regional students who are required to leave home to access post secondary education need to be able to apply for these scholarships to help with the costs involved with moving and finding alternative accommodation.

As a society we are encouraged to value education and instill its importance in our children, yet I feel that country students have not been properly considered with this proposed new legislation. As a country resident I don't want my children to be disadvantaged because of distance to educational resources, so is my only option to relocate our family to the city??

Lyn Hosking