

Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

To The Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

From *Christine Beyer*

Thank you for the opportunity to communicate with the members of the Inquiry.
Attached please find my comments, where I provide 3 points of view:

1. Parent
2. Teacher
3. Tertiary Educated Regional Resident.

Please develop some form of financial assistance for our young people, as they leave home to pursue a tertiary education that develops their future contribution towards members of an educated nation in all geographic areas.

I have written this submission for your consideration, based on three perspectives I have gained through my life.

1. **As a mother**, I am shocked that the Government has made a decision that will adversely affect my daughter and our family. I have been very proud of her achievement of a place at Newcastle University; her wisdom in deferring until she has a little more life experience, and her commitment to a process of working towards financial independence. Yet now she finds that the rules have been changed midway through the process, and that her access to youth Allowance no longer exists.

Her decisions were not taken lightly and involved, as you would expect of a potential university student, much research. We as a family became educated about the system she would need to work with. She chose and found work in hospitality locally that gave her the correct documentation in the form of payslips for her work, rather than maximum pay or maximum job satisfaction. She had previously tried jobs that wanted to pay cash in hand, but rejected these positions. We visited our accountant for advice, and my daughter applied for her ABN and began a second job teaching music, and also began a small catering business. She trained for making coffee, entered into a contract for domestic cleaning, and basically set her goals and her mind on earning the required amount as defined by Centrelink, working in areas with no relevance to her chosen career, but which together were steadily allowing her to earn in order to learn.

I am shocked that through this process my daughter has learnt that deferring her university placement and choosing to earn, has been an unfruitful decision. Her work effort will provide no result in the achievement of her independent financial status. Government decisions have been made which have completely altered her purpose. There has been such lack of consideration as to the fact that this earning process is a process over time as was defined by government agencies (Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office). The phasing in of this new decision may have been a far wiser government plan (with respect to this young group of potential students and hence future professional people). Even setting the date for commencement to 1st July 2010 would give the Government more authenticity. On an individual level my daughter also experienced shock, disbelief, distrust of leaders and government processes, and for a while gave up on her pursuit. I am sure however that she has learnt something, and she will think and research before she votes for the 1st time.

It is the existence of this Senate Inquiry that has renewed her purpose. It is with great hope that I write and request your reconsideration of the rules affecting the group who are currently in the process of earning in order to keep learning.

2. As a **teacher**, I am continually amazed when I start teaching a senior class, how few students express a desire to go on to tertiary study. By the end of the course I, and fellow teachers, are rewarded to find that many students gain access to University, as their aspirations and hopes have been raised. Being a teacher of students in a regional centre in NSW, I am pleased to see that many of these students could go on to tertiary study, and then be in a position to return to these centres as professional people. Many of these students would not go on to tertiary study without Youth Allowance. Ex students from my school were currently working in their gap year to also achieve independence, which for them facilitates a way to move away from a country town and re-establish in a city location to study, without creating a financial burden on their families.

I know that many of these young people would not consider going away to study without access to a form of financial support. While the new system offers some money for some students, few of these fall into the category of access to the new Youth Allowance.

I know of no jobs locally at the moment into which a student straight from school can go, that offers 30 hours paid employment, with pay slips at the completion. More likely, the work available here is casual, often not paid Award wages, often cash in hand, or in the form of traineeships or short-term positions with Greencorps, which do not qualify for Youth Allowance. In other words, the new criteria of a 30 hour week job is more likely to be someone else's job, eg, a mother who needs that work to support her own family. As here recently, 200 applicants applied for a position, and even experienced applicants with a related degree were refused that job. In short, such work here is simply not available for the HSC graduate. Hence 17/18year olds move to the city with no qualifications to look for work? This is not what I had planned for my daughter, nor do I recommend this path for my students.

Similarly, as a teacher it is disheartening to encourage students into a career path, which is simply impossible for their families to subsidise. The previous system of Youth Allowance did at least fill that gap, while offering a chance for the student to test their commitment, as the required amount was earned.

While the Labor Government says "Earn OR Learn", the previous system of EARNING in order to keep LEARNING certainly had it's merits for our Regional Students. I urge you to reconsider the effects on regional students, and the fact that it will be these same students who are the ones who will return a highly educated population to regional centres. For example, teachers, nurses, doctors, planners, vets, environmental scientists, rural managers, geologists, journalists, accountants...

3. I was a **student**, and I grew up in a Regional Centre, one of a family of four children, all of whom are tertiary educated. All have lived and worked in regional NSW and Tasmania. One of these students was educated at the expense of our parents. All relocated to a city university; one was funded through university with a Teacher's Scholarship and two took on BHP Engineering Training. All continued to move back to regional centres and continue working in their professional careers.

We would not have four University graduates working in professional fields, if not for financial assistance from BHP and Dept of Education Scholarships. New criteria for eligibility for Youth Allowance would not have helped my family. Rural & Regional Families must be helped to educate their young. I wonder if our Government is truly committed to raising the standard of education in own Australian Youth?

Most Regional students must relocate for a tertiary on site experience, but few will be supported to do so. Those who have chosen the path: "earn in order to learn", are rejected by the Government in their endeavours, with the changes to Y.A.

Those who earned, proved independence, were granted Youth Allowance but remained living at home, must live near universities. This is the group who have motivated the change of rules; insulted and punished other genuine students who have been denied access to the process of proving independence. Those from Regional Centres who relocate should not be financially ignored because of this 49% who stayed living at home. Clearly this is not independence as the regional student experiences independence. Such token independence is offensive to those who travel away from home, enter rental arrangements, set up house, cook, clean, earn and learn as independent students.

Now the Government must reconsider its role in supporting regional students who do not qualify for Youth Allowance but relocate for a Tertiary Education. This role has the potential to change and educate many; those who have the ability to continue to enrich and develop the regional centres with informed processes in many fields for many years to come, improving our future with knowledge and qualifications.

Please direct your Inquiry to make recommendations, which best support this group of young Australians who understand Regional Australia and give back to Regional Australia. Please value their efforts and future contributions. To dismiss the significance of this act in abandoning this large group of students ignores the depth of this issue - families and generations pass on values towards education over time. These students are members of families who have passed on the value of education to their children, for bettering individuals and our society.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Beyer