

SUBMISSION RE: EQUITABLE ACCESS TO TERTIARY EDUCATION FOR RURAL STUDENTS

Having lived in Kingaroy for some 18 years and our children undertaking all their schooling here, it has always been fairly commonplace for us to expect to have to travel to everything we are involved in, always at a cost. I don't think students from larger regional and capital cities realise how lucky they are to have everything at their fingertips and not have to relocate for future studies. They are able to remain living at home, keeping their part-time jobs etc. whilst continuing with their studies. For our children, it is not only a strain financially but also emotionally.

Our oldest son commenced an Associate Degree in Electrical Engineering at the University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba Campus) in 2008 and was fortunate to receive one of the Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships based on his rural status.

Our youngest son is now in Year 12 and it was very disappointing and frustrating to learn that the Federal Government has abolished these scholarships and put in place a new range of scholarships, for which eligibility is purely based on Centrelink status.

I believe this new policy is inequitable and discriminatory for students from regional areas as they have no choice but to relocate for tertiary study. There should be some recognition given that it is a huge financial strain for average families to accommodate and educate a student away from home. Families with a similar income in Brisbane, for instance, do not have the expense of accommodation for students etc. which places their children at a distinct advantage. Families in capital cities do not have to worry to the same extent about their Centrelink eligibility as they do not have the added financial burden of trying to fulfill their children's dreams. A lot of these parents can actually manage to pay their children's HECS fees as they do not have the burden of accommodation and other expenses (in Brisbane at least \$15,000+ per annum).

The opportunity for tertiary education should be equal for all Australians but it is becoming increasingly obvious that students from regional areas are being treated as second-class citizens. Opportunity should not be solely based on how much their parents do or do not earn.

Perhaps when calculating a student's eligibility for Centrelink benefits, some sort of formula should be used which reduces the parent's income based on location in the State etc. There certainly needs to be some means of making it fairer for everyone.

It would be appreciated if you would take these views into account to ensure that access to tertiary study is available on an equitable basis to all Australian students without placing undue financial and emotional strain on families.

Fiona Ezzy