

To the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities,

I propose that the Senate oppose the Rudd Government's changes to the eligibility criteria suggested in the 2009 Federal Budget, specifically the removal of the criteria allowing students who defer their tertiary place to become eligible by earning approximately \$19,000 in 18 months, thus proving their independence. The proposed new criteria, that students become eligible after 18 months full time work over a two year period, are beyond the reach of most rural students, given the scarcity of jobs for even skilled workers in small country towns, and the fact that most universities only allow deferment for 12 months.

While the intention of the proposed changes is undoubtedly admirable - making tertiary education more accessible to those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and preventing those whose families have high incomes from receiving support they do not need - the removal of the independence eligibility criteria may prevent many students, particularly those who live in rural areas and from middle-class families (whose combined income is between approximately \$45,000 and \$100,000 per year) from accessing tertiary education.

Under the proposed changes, the only child of a single primary school teacher, aged 18 and living away from home, may be eligible for as little as \$55 a week, requiring the family to find a further \$15,000 - \$20,000 a year in order for the child to move away from home to attend university. Since many courses are not available in rural areas, and students from those areas are forced to move away from home in order to attend university, this legislation will make further education beyond the reach of most rural students. Metropolitan students, on the other hand, have a wide variety of courses available to them while still living at home, and so have a significant advantage over rural students when considering a university education.

To allow a fair and balanced access to Youth Allowance, the eligibility criteria should be amended to include consideration of the need to move away from home to continue study, so that any student, rural or metropolitan, will be eligible for the full allowance if they are required to move more than a certain distance (say 100 kilometers) from their family home to complete tertiary education. Consideration should also be given to delaying the changes, particularly the removal of the independence eligibility criteria, until after any students from the 2008 year 12 cohort who undertook a gap year (and are currently half way through) have completed this year and are able to qualify under the old criteria.

Yours Truly,

Tom Tavener