

Senate Submission regarding Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

As a father of 5 children, who live in Cowra in regional New South Wales, I would like to point out some problems in access to tertiary education. If one of my children wanted to go to University, he/she would have to move to Bathurst, Canberra or Sydney or another metropolitan area. This is certainly a stress on family life, but one which is worth it over a period of time.

Three of these young adults have already attended University in Sydney, Canberra and Bathurst and are now employed in their various chosen professions. Each of these had access to Austudy/Youth Allowance to allow them to become contributing members of society. Two of them received Austudy based on parental income and one commenced study two years after leaving school, after working for those two years. She applied for and was granted independent Youth Allowance.

Under the proposed changes, she would not have received independent Youth Allowance or completed her studies. Her mother and I could not have supported her whilst she studied, as she lived and supported herself with part-time employment in Bathurst for 3 years. Despite the fact she had lived and worked in Canberra for 2 years, SHE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN DEEMED INDEPENDENT UNDER THE PROPOSED CHANGES.

My other 2 sons left school in 2005 and 2006 respectively. The first son moved to Sydney and successfully completed a TAFE course, which was not available in the country. He then moved back to Cowra and undertook casual work until he joined the Army at Duntroon in 2008. A damaged knee saw him discharged after 6 months and he returned to Cowra and has worked at a local gymnasium for the past 13 months. He is being married in November and wanted to move to Canberra next year, so he and his spouse could commence University as a PE teacher and secondary teacher. This was a pipedream as the cost of accommodation in Canberra would have required them to both work full-time to just pay rent. Instead, they have chosen to go to Bathurst to study instead. He may be eligible for independent Youth Allowance, but not with the proposed changes. HE IS 22 YEARS OF AGE AND VERY INDEPENDENT of his parents – but not according to the proposed new rules.

The second son left school in 2006 and worked for 14 months to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. He attended Wollongong University in 2008, but struggled to survive. He chose to have another year off university to save enough money to go back to university and was lucky enough to find a good job in the current economic climate. He has now applied to return to university at Bathurst, but if the proposed changes go ahead, he won't comply with the new rules.

As you can see, I believe my children have been brought up to realise that they are expected to contribute to society and how important it is to achieve a good education.

I BELIEVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES WILL DESTROY OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANY RURAL FAMILIES LIKE MINE! IS THE INTENTION TO DESTROY THESE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL YOUTH?

Yours faithfully

Robert Sligar