

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY

As a result of the proposed changes to eligibility for the Independent Youth allowance, many rural students will be unfairly discriminated against. As our country strives for a better educated workforce through increased tertiary qualifications, students from rural locations will be left behind.

This submission asks the inquiry to consider the impact of two aspects of these proposed changes:

- (1) Students who completed Year 12 in 2008 and followed current Government instructions on the income required to achieve independent status are caught in an unfair position. These students (I have a son in this situation) are working hard, often working 2-3 jobs 7 days a week to ensure eligibility. These students are demonstrating the qualities our country wants from current and future workforces- dedication, responsibility, independence, a strong work ethic. What a great way to show our bright rural youth that their government doesn't really care about what they can contribute to Australia's development.

For many of these students, who plan to move away from home in 2010, they will not be able to afford the ongoing living costs. For parents this financial burden will be too large and will reluctantly have to explain that their child's dream, which this time last year looked so positive, can not be achieved.

I have this week met a number of parents who are not aware of the proposed changes and are expecting their child to move away to university in 2010. Once I explained the proposed changes, each one has said, "Well it looks like my child won't be going to university. Do you know of any apprenticeships for bright hard working kids?" **Rural families cannot afford to support two households!**

RECOMMENDATION 1. Reinstate Youth allowance requirements for 2008 students by moving cut off date from 1 January 2010 to 30 June 2010. This will allow the students who are currently taking a "GAP" year to meet the existing Youth Allowance guidelines.

- (2) Most students in rural areas cannot afford to go directly to university in another city. This has become a well travelled pathway to allow students to achieve their tertiary goals. Even the Defence Force "GAP YEAR" program recognised the need for many students to put studies on hold to establish independent status.

Students in rural areas experience disadvantages, not experienced by their city counterparts. Schools in rural areas already struggle to encourage students to reach their potential, as they see limited opportunities or wrongly believe they are not as good as "city kids". These proposed changes will further strengthen this belief. Support is required to ensure rural students are not disempowered from accessing a quality tertiary institution. I am not asking for a "free-ride" but a level playing field would be appreciated.

Living costs (rent, electricity, food) in our cities are skyrocketing. This has

impacted on the ability of students to find affordable accommodation. This further impacts on rural students opportunities to successfully complete tertiary studies. For some families there are two or more students wanting to study. This makes it even more difficult for families!

RECOMMENDATION 2 Students who are required to move away from home to complete tertiary studies are given adequate support. This may be in the form of accommodation scholarships and payments to assist with daily living expenses. Students who live in a location with an existing tertiary institution offering a required course may not be supported, unless personal hardship existed.

Thank you for investigating this important issue.

Alan Bowmaker