

Youth Allowance

As a teacher in NSW public education for 30 years I have recently become very aware of the disadvantages faced by students in country NSW. I moved to Westport High School on the North Coast at the end of 2007. The reduction in educational opportunities is astounding. No access to HSC revision lectures and courses, reduced access to HSC marking for teachers, minimal access to universities for extension activities such as Siemens Science Experience, Astronomy Lectures, Nyholm Youth Lectures etc and massively increased costs and time required to attend museums, galleries, conferences and courses to name a few. When I compare the efforts a staff member here makes to involve a small group of students in the Rotary MUNA initiative ie a full weekend away from home and driving for about 8 hours, to my one hour drive each way when in Sydney in 2007 I am amazed. Country schools are staffed and financed under the same state funding formulae as city schools but the necessity of travelling distances often compounded by accommodation costs greatly reduces educational opportunities.

This places them at a direct disadvantage when competing for both tertiary education places and career opportunities. Those talented and motivated students who manage to overcome the disadvantage of distance, can in many cases only consider the prospect of attending university by taking a 'gap year' and working so that they can access the necessary increased funds available to attend university one year later.

I urge all to consider the wider implications of this proposed change. I would be happy to further discuss details of the very real disadvantages these students face.

Debbie Irwin