

7th August 2009

The Secretariat
Senate Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Committee Members,

Re: **□ Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities**

We wish to make a number of comments and observations which affect us as a family, as a result of the announcement made in the last budget to changes to the Youth Allowance Scheme.

The financial impact on us will be significant and as a result feel totally disadvantaged as a resident in regional Western Australia. Our two sons (year 12 & year 10) both have ambitions to study engineering. Due to the limited size of ECU Bunbury campus, the option of living at home and studying at a local university is not available. The cost of accommodating a child in Perth over the duration of their studies is \$20,000 minimum. We therefore feel extremely prejudiced by reason of where we chose to live.

The option created by the proposed amendments for our school leavers to work full time for 30 hours per week for a minimum of 18 months will also cause disadvantage. Aside from the real difficulty of these young people to find permanent employment to satisfy the criteria imposed, they now lose a further 6 – 12 months study time. Most will not go to university until they are nearly 20 years of age. Their city cousins will have up to 2 years head start towards the completion of their degree.

The family income levels proposed (PIT) to allow our children to qualify for Youth Allowance by the alternative means are completely unrealistic. As both parents in this family are university qualified professionals (Accountant and Teacher) our best alternative is to move the family to the city (Perth) to enable our children to have a fair go. Not only does the region suffer as a result of this, our young people once qualified will be less inclined to seek employment back in the regional areas due to the thought that in the long term they will continue to be disadvantaged.

The supplementary grants such as Start-up Scholarship and Relocation Scholarship will also be denied to us as under the new rules, with no Youth Allowance these other benefits are also removed from our access.

If we as parents were to find a way to pay the premium to send our children to Perth for a university education, the money would ultimately come from our future superannuation contributions. The thought of making additional contributions to our retirement funds will be out of the question.

The change in Government policy on Youth Allowance also appears to be contrary to its policies on supporting the regions & regional employment. It will more than likely be detrimental the statement the 40% of 25 – 35 year olds will hold tertiary qualifications by 2020.

The Government needs to seriously reconsider its policy on Youth Allowance and the effect it is having on communities and families living in Australia's regional areas. This is just another kick in the teeth for rural and regional communities.

Yours faithfully,

Neill & Christine Rowlandson