

## **Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.**

After completing school at the end of 2008 and deferring my place at university in order to qualify for Youth Allowance in 2010 when I attended university, I believed that financially I was prepared. I am financially independent; I moved away from home and am now completely self-sufficient, I pay for all of my living expenses, work full time in a legal firm and also work part-time time in retail. I was lead to believe that by doing this I could basically guarantee receiving Centrelink's Youth Allowance while I attended university.

I am the eldest of four children and have lived on a property my whole life. The past eight years have been especially tough for my family –my mother has gone back to work and my father, who has worked on the farm his whole life, has also gained off farm employment.

I believe that I am mature enough to understand how difficult it is for my parents to be able to give my siblings and I the best of everything. While my parents are extremely encouraging of my desire to attend university and they will do everything that they can to support me, financially it is not a viable option for them to subsidise my entire university schooling. When I finished school my parents encouraged me to take a GAP year and earn Youth Allowance because they believed that it would relieve some of the financial strain of my pursuit of tertiary education. The most frustrating thing for me is that I am financially independent. I work hard to be independent and it frustrates that the Australian Government does not recognise my independence.

I was a boarder for the last three years of my secondary education and during my time at school I always had a part time job. The idea of my job was to earn pocket money so that I was not constantly relying on my parents for money. I also believe that having a job while I was in high school taught me valuable lessons including the value of money and time management skills. I knew that when I eventually attended university I would have a part time job and I believe that working while at school taught me how to balance my leadership, extra curricular and academic commitments.

While I was at school we were encouraged to take a GAP year, to learn more about who we were and what career path was really suited to us. I feel that after eight months of being away from school I finally have some direction. I think that it is a very uneducated move by the Federal Government to discourage students from taking a break from study. Statistically, it has been proven that students who take a GAP year have more focus and direction in their tertiary education.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Milne, Kennedy, Ward, (2009), *GAP Year Plus: Preparing Professionals, Professionally* [Discussion paper]. <http://www.waceinc.org/papers/vancouver/Australia/Milne,%20Kennedy,%20Ward.pdf> [5 August 2009]

As a student graduating in 2008 I feel as though I am being discouraged from furthering my education. After thirteen years at school, I was ready for a break and as mentioned earlier, I am hungry to begin studying again.

As a student growing up in regional Australia, I can see the importance of gaining a tertiary education. I realise that the agricultural community is not as strong as it has been in the past and that to make a living many farmers are also seeking, or are forced to seek, employment in off farm ventures. However, I also know how important agriculture is for the Australian economy and believe that for rural and regional Australia to survive, further education in these areas needs to be encouraged.

The Australian Government should be nurturing rural and regional students, not making it more difficult for them to attend university. With the current skills shortage I believe it is outrageous that the Australian government should cut back on assistance in these areas. Agriculture is an exceptionally important aspect of the Australian economy and it seems ridiculous that the government remove educational funding from the areas that are in need of the most support.

I don't think that working for over thirty hours per week for eighteen months is a true indicator of independence. To expect rural students to be able to secure over thirty hours per week of regular work is poorly thought out. In my local area there are very few jobs available for young, unskilled workers and very few local business owners would be able to offer young people full time jobs. The only option for me in this situation was to move away from home.

I am independent from my parents and have only been working for eight months. I was independent from the day that I moved into my house in Canberra and began working. I think that there must be a more accurate method of determining independence. Perhaps a true indicator of independence may be moving away from home to study or perhaps a variety of contributing factors.

I urge the Federal Government to rethink the proposed changes because I believe that they are not in the best interests of rural and regional students.

Sincerely,



Mary G Johnson