

There is a real need to fix the eligibility for Youth Allowance for students from inner regional areas. Under the current criteria, it is virtually impossible for a student from these areas to qualify for Youth Allowance if the family income is above the threshold. With financial pressures from mortgage stress and general cost of living, families are struggling to make ends meet. Students can only defer for 12 months however, they have to work an average of 30 hours per week for 18 months to be able to qualify for Youth Allowance. If a student defers for 12 months, they would have to commence virtual full time employment as soon as they finish school at the end of September, fitting in their HSC exams as best they can so that their 18 months are completed by the time they start university 18 months later. This is lunacy and impossible. Another ill thought out policy by the current Government. It is unfair to expect a student to have to postpone their university studies for 2 years so that they can try and qualify for Youth Allowance to have some sort of financial support during their studies. How many students that find full time work, will give up work to attend university? I dare say that the numbers would be low, very low.

Not all inner regional students have the luxury of being able to stay at home and be able to attend university to complete their chosen course. In Bathurst we are lucky to have Charles Sturt University. But what happens when you child wants to study a course that is not offered there? Answer: they have to leave home as the nearest university offering the course of choice will not be within commuting distance. This means that on top of normal university fees families now have major accommodation and living expenses to somehow cover with no financial help. What happened to all students wanting to attend university being able to do so? Isn't there a major skills shortage in this country? Didn't the current government say that ALL regional students should have the opportunity to attend university? Obviously this only applies to some parts of Australia. Inner regional areas do NOT have the luxury of their city counterparts. They don't have several universities within commuting distance and there is virtually no public transport.

My daughter completed her HSC in 2009 and opted to defer her university course. Her chosen course is Bachelor Medical Radiation Science. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst Campus, does not offer this course. Her options included Newcastle, Sydney, or Wagga Wagga. The nearest university is a minimum of 3 ½ hour drive away making daily commuting impossible. Our family income puts us just over the threshold and therefore she is not eligible to receive Youth Allowance. As she decided her studies were more important than working while at school, she found it hard to find employment but managed to secure employment in May 2010 and then it was only a guaranteed 11 hours per week. Most weeks she works more than that but there is no way she will be able to meet the current criteria for Youth Allowance. She was accepted at CSU Wagga Wagga with this university being her first choice. The financial strain of having to find a minimum of \$5600 for accommodation for 2011 university year alone coupled with having to find money for food and clothing is huge. It will not become any easier either. The simple fact is that my daughter will have to find work to help cover the living/accommodation costs. We simply are not in a position afford it otherwise. We can only consider ourselves lucky that she is a country girl and did not want to attend university in Sydney. The accommodation costs would have been totally prohibitive.

Instead of having this idiotic policy of splitting Australia into 4 different regions and having students work 18 months at minimum average of 30 hours per week to qualify for Youth Allowance, how about looking at how far they have to move to attend the university course they wish to complete. Any student having to move away from their home town to a university, say over 100km away, should automatically be eligible to receive Youth Allowance. It would certainly be a fairer way of ensuring students that need the allowance receive the allowance.