

Youth Allowance Submission – the REAL world from a parent - 2 December 2010

The Federal Government earlier this year made changes to eligibility criteria for claiming “Independent Status” to be eligible to claim the Independent Youth Allowance.

These changes basically divided Australia into Outer Regional, Inner Regional and City areas with eligibility criteria for Outer regional different to Inner regional.

It is this difference that I wish to address.

Firstly I wish to draw your attention to a document from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission March 2000-

“Emerging Themes” National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education, in particular these parts:

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‘Accessibility’ has three dimensions. It must be available to all without discrimination, in law and in fact, physically accessible and economically accessible.

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Every child has the right to education. Geography, remoteness, distance, language, culture, religion, disability and sex cannot be used as excuses when a child’s right to education is denied. Children are entitled to enjoy their rights without discrimination of any kind. This requires Australia to ‘ensure’ that no discrimination occurs, either in law or in actual practice.

This submission is to highlight points relating to country students having to move to the city to study.

We have two children, one who is attending University in Perth and the other intending to attend University in Canberra, and we live in Bunbury WA – an Inner regional area, two hours drive south of Perth.

In the case of our eldest daughter she has just completed her second year at the University of Western Australia studying Medicine.

She became eligible for Youth Allowance in 2009 following a gap year in 2008 when she earned the required minimum income to be classified as Independent.

This helps considerably in financing her move to Perth (2 hour drive from home) to attend University. However it does not cover all costs and unexpected expenses so my wife and I still have to provide additional financial support (car repairs, computer faults, etc).

Under the new scheme students who live in Outer regional areas still come under the old eligibility criteria my eldest daughter met, but not so for inner regional areas. WHY?

Students from both regions need to leave home if they wish to attend University in Perth.

My youngest daughter will still have to move away from home the same as a student in an Outer regional area but is treated differently – this is unfair.

Under the new rules it states that if the combined family income is less than \$150,000 then my daughter could get Youth Allowance – this is incorrect.

All allowances cut out at \$94,000 for us, as we have no other children at home and the other daughter is classed as independent under the old system.

My youngest daughter could work for 18 months and be eligible but with the course she wants to do there is not a mid year intake so she would need to have a 2 year gap – this is unfair.

Note that some courses do not allow more than a one year gap year/deferment. The other issue directly related to female students, particularly those doing long courses such as Medicine and Law, is that a two year gap means another year added to when they finish which can be significant in relation to further delaying being in a position to start a family.

I ask that if a student has to leave home and move to another location to study that they can receive the FULL amount of Youth Allowance, up to the combined family income of \$150,000, not tapered. Whether they live in an outer or inner regional area.

I would like to take this opportunity to explain what it means to have a child relocate from a regional area to the city:

1. Real costs to start the year.
2. Accommodation options
3. Part time work
4. Health
5. Security
6. Transport.

Our eldest daughter (Emma) is living at Trinity College at UWA, why?

Emma was very nervous about living in the city, the workload for Medicine is immense, and there is no car parking for 1st years at UWA

So we looked at all the options such as renting privately, staying with an aunt, and college accommodation

We chose College accommodation for the following reasons:

1. Close to UWA ie walk to uni so transport not an issue.
2. Meals provided so she did not have to cook and shop
3. Security provided by peers and staff at Trinity

But what is the cost. I have copied Trinity's schedule of fees below, see page 4.

So total annual fees of \$13896 plus, orientation week for 1st years of approximately \$400..

If they want to park a car at Trinity after 1st year then it is \$120 pa.

(some friends estimated that for their son to rent privately and attend university it costs them around \$19,000pa)

Virtually all of the lectures rely to some degree or totally rely on ready access to the internet. PCs are available in the Trinity resource centre but limited number. Also your pc needs to be mobile for use at University, for return home for weekend breaks or study week breaks at home or working with peers at tutorials. So a quality laptop is needed at around \$1300.

So what are the other issues.

Relying on public transport is one. Buses and trains usually suffice but at other times due to location of destination or hour of day a taxi is required for access or just safe travel for a young girl in the city by herself. So this is an additional expense.

Health – your child rings you unsure if she has swine flu (had multiple recent contacts) you then have to comfort her from a remote location and advise what to do but then she has to deal with it by herself. If necessary travel to Perth to check on her.

The final point regarding moving to the city is part time work to support yourself. For higher level courses it is difficult to work during the Academic year due to the huge workload they have.

So then a student can try and find part time work in the holiday periods – when every other YOUNGER (thus cheaper) person is also looking for work. Also in regional areas there are very limited opportunities for such employment.

If you compare the above with that of a city based student able to live at home – well there is no comparison.

Not only is the financial burden for country students vastly greater but they are also dealing with the huge emotional burden of leaving their family and everything they have known.

The new criteria to have inner regional gap year students work 18 months is outrageous. Already these students have put on hold their career and future for one year to enable them to finance their move to the city. For many courses there is not a mid year intake so that delay would be two years.

The rural and regional areas are crying out for professional people and yet it seems the Federal government is intent on making it as hard as possible for country students to go to University by not providing adequate support and recognition of what it takes to move from the country to the city.

Why should inner regional country students have less opportunity than city students? It is important that the Federal Government recognize that the issue of opportunity to attend tertiary education should be equal whether you live in the city or the country.

If that means more funding for rural based students than their city counterparts then so be it.

At a time when the Government is trying to encourage professional people to work in rural and regional areas, this current disadvantage for inner regional students may well result in parents either not moving to the country or even moving back to the city so their children can live at home whilst obtaining a tertiary education.

The final point I wish to make is that if a student works an extra year prior to starting study then they pay tax on somewhere between \$19,000 and \$30,000 gross pay. However this extra year means it delays by a year that a university graduate would be paying tax on \$60,000+. Does not make economic sense.

Yours sincerely

2011 Schedule of Fees
All charges include GST

Compulsory College Fees

Fee Type/comments		Full Year	One Semester Only
Application Fee	A non-refundable fee common to all colleges: Local Applicants Overseas and Interstate	\$50 \$60	\$50 \$60
Contingency Fee	Payable by all new residents. Fee is refundable after completion of Contract, subject to there being no outstanding debts	\$350	\$350
Building Improvements Levy		\$260	\$130
Full Weekly Board – Standard Room	Includes 21 meals per week \$5916 per 17-week semester	\$12716	\$6358
Computer Network Support and Internet Access		\$272	\$ 136
College Year Book		\$ 40	\$ 40
College Club Fee	Collected on behalf of the Trinity Residents' Club	\$148	\$95
TOTAL FEES		\$13896 pa	

Other Fees and Charges

Parking Fee	Parking spaces in the College grounds are limited and permits are allocated at the discretion of the Head of College. Charges are \$60 per semester (Motor Vehicle) and \$26 per semester (Motor Bike/Scooter). Any vehicle parked without a permit will be fined.
Rekeying charge	A lost key will incur a re-keying charge of \$155 and a lost access fob will incur a replacement cost of \$40 .

NOTE: Fees include GST where applicable.