

December 3rd 2010

To Whom It May Concern

My family and I live in Dunsborough. Our 2 sons were educated in Busselton, 30 minutes from our home. We live 5 minutes down the road from eagle Bay and 10 minutes from Yallingup. At their school, there were students from Busselton, Nannup, Eagle Bay, Yallingup, Cowaramup and Margaret River.

Our eldest son has just completed his degree at Murdoch University. After finishing his TEE he had the standard "gap" year off, earning the required amount to classify him as independent. He has been living away from home for 4 years in private accommodation and has been receiving the youth allowance, rental assistance and CAS. He has worked part-time as well as studying full time and with occasional assistance from us, has managed reasonably well as a 'poor student'. For us, we were able to support him for the first 6 months whilst he was not receiving youth allowance, because it was short term. The youth allowance has allowed him to manage his finances reasonably well, with a minute amount of assistance from us

Our second son is now finishing his 'gap' year and has worked hard in a full time job all year. He is 19 years old and ready to commence his university education in his chosen career in Occupational therapy. He too will need to find accommodation and learn to adjust to living independently in the city away from his family. The difference between our 2 sons is that the younger one has to defer his study for another whole year. The reason for this is because Dunsborough is classified as 'inner regional' and he needs to work 30 hours for 18 months, unlike his mates 5 minutes down the road in Eagle bay, who are classified as 'outer regional'. And why will he defer for the whole year? Because his 4 year occupational therapy degree does not have a mid year intake. He has no other choice. And even if we were faked our address, which is what some families living in Perth with holiday homes in the glorious south are apparently doing, we would be means tested, and would be marginally over the limit as he is now our only dependant child and he would possibly miss out.

However, if we lived in Perth, he would have already completed his first year at uni, he would be living at home with his family being partly financially supported, and he would not need to receive the youth allowance as he would be working part time. But because of our address, he is made to defer for 2 years, as this is the only way we would be able to manage financially.

I understand there needed to be changes made as there were many students who may have been receiving the youth allowance who were not in need, like the students living at home in the cities. However there are 3 things I don't understand:

Firstly, how can there be one rule for 2 different situations: a student living in the city with their parents in the family home and going to uni possibly only a few kilometres from where they live and the student that has to relocate 3 hours from their family to go to uni, pay for rental accommodation and live independently?

Secondly, how can there now be 2 different classifications for rural students? Can someone please explain to me why the family 5-10 minutes down the road from us are classified as outer regional and we are inner regional? The students all went to the same school, caught the same school bus, and all have to travel 3 hours away from the family home to go to uni. How can that possibly be fair? We now have division between rural and metro and rural and rural.

Thirdly, why are parents in the rural areas being means tested in the same manner as metro families? The cost of living is certainly higher in the country, and this includes the cost of petrol, transport, food etc. It has been estimated that it costs a rural family supporting their child at uni in the city at least \$25,000 a year. If my child was living at home and studying, the cost to support him would be a fraction of this. Then there is the cost of renting a house and relocating the student to the city at an enormous cost

I only hope that my son does not lose interest in furthering his studies. He would make an excellent occupational therapist and would be an asset to any community with these skills. By the time he has started, some of his friends in the city will only have 1 year to go. How can this be fair and equitable??

Regards

Jill Rogers