

I preface my submission by stating that the current Youth Allowance/Tertiary Scholarship uncertainty and injustice does not impact directly upon me or my immediate family. I live just on the Outer side of the boundary between Inner and Outer Regional, and my 5 kids have already gone through this mill, being in their early to mid-Twenties. But I work with young people, and others whose kids are devastatingly affected by living a few minutes away, in essentially identical circumstances, on the other side of the boundary.

I am at a loss to understand why it is taking so long to resolve the blindingly obvious. Cruel disadvantage and injustice for Inner Regional youth has been created in the matter of eligibility for Youth Allowance and the (now) tied Tertiary Scholarships, and thus access to University education, and it needs to be fixed without further delay.

Most of the problems revolve around qualification criteria for Independent Youth Allowance and the interaction with geography. If you are one of the many more people who qualify, under the new arrangements, for Dependent Youth Allowance then you are automatically entitled to a Startup Scholarship and, if you have to relocate, to a Relocation Scholarship. You need only receive \$0.01 Youth Allowance per fortnight and you get all of the scholarship funding of \$17,512 over 4 years at 2011 rates. In the new mathematics of Youth Allowance $\$1.04 = \$17,510.96$.

But, parental income can be as little as \$46,654.50 each *per annum* in a two income household (according to the DEEWR online calculator) and you may not qualify for Dependant Youth Allowance – this is not the stuff of privilege. Without Youth Allowance you do not get Startup and Relocation Scholarships.

This brings us to those (including many of modest means) who do not qualify for Dependant Youth Allowance.

If you come from Outer Regional, Remote or Very Remote Australia the system recognises that you need financial assistance to cope with the inevitable relocation to a Major City to attend University. Qualification for Independent Youth Allowance is on the same workable basis as in years past, and as soon as you qualify for any Youth Allowance you also get Startup and Relocation Scholarships (worth, as already stated, \$17512 over 4 years at 2011 rates). If you come from the Major City then it is recognised that (generally speaking) you can continue to live at home, availing yourself at little cost to anyone, of the shelter, sustenance and support provided by your parents. So your Independent Youth Allowance qualification criteria are quite properly tougher.

It would seem that policy makers imagine that in the context of University attendance living in Inner Regional Australia has little in common with living in Outer Regional Australia, and is in fact essentially the same as living in a Major City. Driving for 3 hours from Dunsborough to Crawley (home of UWA) has more in common with a 5 minute bus ride from Claremont to Crawley than with Driving for 3 hours from Cowaramup to Crawley. Cowaramup Youth continue to avail themselves of workable Youth Allowance qualification criteria, Dunsborough Youth and Claremont Youth cannot.

Our Claremont youth continues to live at home while commuting to University the year after finishing High School, or after a much applauded year volunteering in the 3rd World, or whatever. He doesn't need assistance.

Our Cowaramup youth works diligently to earn the ~\$19,000 needed to qualify for Independent Status. They do this in 15 – 16 months between High School graduation in November and the commencement of University 1st Semester around the end of February the year after next, in a series of unreliable, seasonal, agricultural or tourist/service jobs. Then they support themselves (probably with a fair amount of parental assistance) for 2 – 3 months until Youth Allowance and the attached Scholarships kick in. They then work through every holiday for the rest of their University attendance to fill the funding shortfall – I don't think anyone would pretend that \$5000 in the first year and \$2000 pa thereafter will cover the cost of living away from home. (They are fortunate to live in a tourist area where their availability to work coincides broadly with demand.) If they are motivated and disciplined they survive, and emerge strong, disciplined and qualified.

Our Dunsborough youth ...?

Well, our Dunsborough youth still has to relocate (unless by good fortune he/she is motivated to study Viticulture/Oenology or Fine Art in Margaret River, or Business, Nursing, Teaching, Computing or Creative Industries in Bunbury. Or is he supposed to drive 3 hours each way (at a trivial cost of about \$300 per day by the ATO's reckoning) every day to attend classes? There are of course other options: his parents can put up about 20% of their Gross Income to support him; he can run the gauntlet of uncertainty about University admission into the course of his choice while working for, effectively, a Two Year Gap and hoping he can keep in continuous work in an uncertain seasonal labour market at the required 30 hr/wk for at least 18 months; or he can prostitute himself or move into drug running (still plenty of demand on the Bali run it would seem); or he can forget the whole ridiculous business and, putting the same value on his higher education that society appears to assign to it, get a job and move on.

What are we doing to these kids?

There may be nothing wrong with using the ARIA+ to set a demarcation line. Just use the right line. Common sense demands that, if we are using the instrument in the context of University assistance, the chosen line must be that between Major City and Inner Regional classifications, between those who can commute from home to University and those who cannot. It is simply idiotic to pretend that driving up to 3 hours a day in each direction to attend Uni is a viable option. Using the right line will not create the vaunted level playing field of opportunity, but at least it will be a navigable slope up towards the plateau of urban advantage rather than a sheer cliff.