

Dear Sir / Madam

We would likely to strongly voice our disappointment at the recent changes to eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance, which we think actively discriminates against regional youth wanting to further their tertiary studies.

I understand that the criteria were altered to avoid the rorting of the Youth Allowance system, whereby urban students were accessing full Youth Allowance following a GAP year, but while living at home with parents whilst studying.

To address this, I understand that regional and urban address criteria were used to avoid this "rorting".

However by designating centres as "inner regional" and "outer regional" I'm afraid has thrown the baby out with the bathwater.

In our situation, we live in Armidale. Our son, who matriculated in 2009, has been working overseas for a year to save up enough money to cover start-up costs associated with studying a Bachelors degree in Construction Management at Newcastle University next year. Youth Allowance would have gone some way in helping cover some of his accommodation costs, which we have estimated at about \$12,000 - \$15,000 per year. His degree is only offered at a few universities, all of which are disparate from Armidale. he has no OPTION but to live away from home if he is to pursue that course of study.

Now we understand that for the sake of OUR postcode, our son will get no Youth Allowance because his parents reside in an "Inner Regional" area, ie. Armidale. It is bizarre that a person in exactly the same position living 20kms up or down the road in, say, Guyra or Uralla, would satisfy full Youth Allowance conditions and get 100% of the allowance.

Why a system would discriminate between towns so close together (20kms) when the distance to metropolitan universities is so vast (ie. 4-500kms or greater) is beyond us.

We want the Youth Allowance to be extended to ALL students living in Inner Regional Areas as well as those living in Outer Regional and Remote Areas; if not completely then at least on a basis of road miles to metro areas. We believe the inner regional young people should have the same tests applied to them as rural and remote young people. In the case of Armidale / Tamworth: if one looks at the map of NSW with the Inner v other regional areas marked (attached), it seems ludicrous that one "inner" town in the middle of a sea of "outer regional" areas, (as Armidale, Dubbo and Tamworth are marked), is patently a ludicrous criteria upon which to ascertain whether a tertiary student qualifies for Youth Allowance or not if he/she needs to travel long distances to study.

It is applauded that the Government is trying to target those areas of lower-socioeconomic background as sources of university students, but to basically disenfranchise the middle class in larger rural towns is a policy which will see less Australian students at Universities, not more, and will cost Australia's future significantly.

Regards

Peter and Cathy Sniekers.