

As a parent of two who have a home base in a regional area but are currently attending a University in Perth WA , I know on a personal level the financial impact of them having to leave home to continue their education.

The main decision when coming to terms with the fact that accommodation will have to be found to house these students while studying away from home is what type of accommodation will fall within the family financial constraints. Accommodation choice is college campus, private rental, or in our case continue to pay mortgage payments on a residence in Perth, thereby providing an affordable rate of rent as long it is shared with another two people. This decision was not taken lightly but after much consideration as the accommodation was needed when the rental rates being asked for Perth properties were at an all-time high. The added expenses of establishing our two students in this house has been the complete furnishing of the house, providing goods and chattels which would afford an adequate standard of living. My two students both run vehicles, of which they are responsible for all the related expenses this is a choice they have made so as to have a flexibility of transport to attend their University commitments. As we are a two hour drive away from our students there is the added cost of transport either for themselves or us if we decide to visit each other.

Ideally we would have our two University students living in the family home and studying at our local university. The career paths that my children have chosen gave them no alternative but to relocate to Perth to gain their university qualifications, unfortunately the courses were not offered at the local university campus. We have experienced first hand through the years as we continued to educate our children, the shortfall of opportunities available in regional and remote areas compared to the metropolitan areas. On many occasions we have made trips to the city to provide educational and sporting opportunities to enable them to compete on an advanced level or just to provide a chance to reach their full potential.

I believe that the implemented government measures impacts negatively and disadvantages prospective remote and regional students. We as parents have always believed that a tertiary education should be a right rather than a privilege, but it would seem that if you choose to live in regional Western Australia you are disadvantaging your children as far as the affordability of a higher education goes. To create a zone which divides inner and outer regional areas which will decide your eligibility to access youth allowance is discriminatory. I believe that we are dumbing down our students already and discouraging them from aspiring to tertiary education by placing unnecessary financial constraints. Most households now are two income household which does put them over the thresholds for obtaining youth allowance. Because of this fact these people are believed to be in a financial position with the ability to cover all costs. It has been conservatively estimated to cost approx \$20,000 per year to support a student from the country living in Perth. In the regional area in which I live many of the high school graduates have been working towards becoming financially independent and to discover that these plans will be to no avail feel that this will be a burden many families will not be able to bear. With the proposed measures many students trying to prove independence to satisfy criteria to qualify for youth allowance will have to work for up to two years. During these two years I believe that there is every possibility that the student will lose momentum with regards to study and will lose the desire to take up their place at university. For some particular courses there is not the opportunity to enrol at mid year intake thus further delaying starting University. Historically gaining independence and qualifying for youth allowance has enabled regional students the financial ability to cover some costs while they attend universities in metropolitan areas. If a student decides to take the opportunity to qualify for youth allowance I believe that in these uncertain economic times they would be hard placed to find a job that would allow them the earning capacity that is required. These prospective students, fresh from graduating high school and virtually with little or no work experience will be competing for a fulltime position with those already in the workforce with experience. It is a fact that the job opportunities are few and far between especially in small country towns. Much of the work on offer tends to be seasonal. There may be a possibility that we will see a considerable change in the populations of these remote and regional areas as many make a decision to relocate families to metropolitan areas so as to make a secondary or tertiary education affordable and attainable. If a tertiary education becomes out of reach of your average person living in a remote or regional area because of lack of funding these potential professionals who usually try to move back to their home town for employment upon graduation will be lost to the local community.

With the financial support of an academic scholarship, youth allowance, remote/regional scholarship and working between semesters our third year university student is in every way independent of her parents. Because of this financial support this student is able to focus totally on her studies and is working towards a goal of graduating with honours, under the changes she would have been ineligible for all support except the academic scholarship. I write this submission in the hope that changes that need to be made will not prevent the likes of this person from achieving their goals and gaining employment in their chosen field.

Our second student has been able to pursue his University course simply by the financial support from his parents, working between semesters and an academic scholarship. He had been adversely affected by the changes to qualifying for youth allowance, it was only half way through this year he became eligible for youth allowance. He has just finished his second year, but I feel has not settled well into University and has been constantly worrying about the financial burden.

The governments new measures are designed to create equity I don't believe currently there is equity between relocating remote/regional students and metropolitan students regardless of socio/economic status as there are many situations which are unique to remote/regional students moving to the metropolitan area to gain a tertiary education. The fact that a student is leaving all their support network and emotional/physical support of family is an immense handicap which needs to be considered but is very difficult to address as it probably cannot be shown as a statistic or table. The Bradley report has identified that we will have a shortfall of suitably qualified graduates in the near future and that the percentages of socio-economic disadvantaged graduating are low and these proposed measures will correct these issues. It is my belief that funding alone is not the solution but the culture of aspiring to and attaining a higher education must be fostered very early in the young student at primary school.

Carole J McLachlan