

Family Information

Anne and I are parents of three children located in rural Australia we welcome the opportunity to point out the discrimination and unequitable nature of the new criteria regarding the regional youth of Australia who seek an opportunity to undertake tertiary studies. We as a family and in particular my second son Lachlan is discriminated against by these new rules and criteria. Instead of the goal posts getting closer under the "education revolution" they have moved the posts to behind the grandstand. This is discrimination based on location of where we live.

The new rules are designed to restrict, hinder and prevent regional Australian youth the chance to improve themselves and become a valuable resource to their community and to Australia. These are students that are more likely be the doctors, engineers, teachers and nurses once graduated to eventually return to where they are most needed rural and regional Australia.

In the following I will point out the retrograde rules that are directly designed to deter and make tertiary education out of reach of many regional based families. These new rules hit families where it hits them most, the children and their goals and aspirations in life. I urge this committee to, for once forget about point scoring and political grandstanding and take notice of the facts of how these rules affect us as a family. I am sure that other families may have other issues on this subject. They certainly face the same difficulties that I will identify in the following.

I have one son Cameron who has completed two years engineering and survey degree at Newcastle and another son Lachlan who has just completed his HSC and hopes to go university to undertake an engineering degree. He has applied to Sydney, NSW and Newcastle Universities. Next year I will have the older son who will be eligible for assistance and the younger one in a similar course not eligible and is unlikely to get any assistance throughout his 4 to 5 years of study.

Location and The inner Regional Area Criteria:-

We live in Scone the upper end of the Hunter Valley an area that provides approximately 12 billion dollars per year in export dollars of coal exports. The public transport is next to non existent. One passenger return train per day crammed in between coal trains.

We found it amazing that we are now in an inner regional area a zoning that prevents legibility under the youth allowance and prevents the recognition that students need to leave home to attend tertiary education.

In our situation we live 150km away from the nearest University at Newcastle. The only passenger train leaves at 5.50 am on weekdays and a return train to Scone arrives after 6.20pm. A journey of approximately two and half hours to the university and a total travel time of five hours for a return trip. Please remember that a number of lectures are scheduled at night often finishing at 8 or 9 pm.

Study requirement for engineering courses is approximately 25 hours face to face lectures and at least the same again in individual study.

There is no way a student can live at home and complete such a tertiary course, it is impossible.

The inner regional map circles a number of rural towns and appears to be deliberately designed to ensure students do not meet the criteria. It does appear the maps are designed on a very poor criteria that there is public transport to and from university. We live too far away and there is no suitable public transport.

The ridiculous issue at Scone is the inner regional boundary goes through the township of Scone itself. We live in 16 Koala Street Scone, 50 metres within the inner regional boundary. Across the road at Barton Street to the east, still within the township of Scone, the new Figtree Estate is in the outer region. So the new Figtree Estates 50 metres away in the \$550,000 to \$700,000 priced houses, families meet the criteria while the \$250,000 fibro houses 50 metres away to the west the area we live in, in the same town are in the inner area. Though we all live 150km away from the nearest university and have the same limited transport facilities.

I suggest you Google into the criteria location map 16 Koala Street Scone and check with say 15 Redbank Drive a house in the new estate in Scone for verification.

It is interesting to note that Lachlan my son who has just completed the HSC is eligible to apply for rural scholarships at university while The Federal Government says the same student is not in a rural area and is located in an inner regional area. The universities recognise the problem and they try to assist the criteria prevents and deters.

As a family we meet a number of the other criteria for assistance but the inner regional boundary with Centre Link prevents us looking into it eligibility any further.

Unfair 18 month Minimum Working Length Criteria Forfeit of University Place

The new criteria require a student to show their independence by working on average for 30 hours a week for 18 months. Please remember once these students, who have worked hard for the chance to go to university, will now have to forfeit their accredited place. A university only leaves your position of entry open for 12 months. The deferring for 12 months is often called a gap year. If a student completes HSC studies by the end of November 2010 they would meet the requirement by end of May 2012.

This means they have to miss two years as the first point for eligibility falls half way through the 2012 first semester and forfeit their original position at university. A position they worked hard to obtain and take the risk they will still meet the criteria when they reapply. Two years after first being accepted.

Cameron my eldest son completed his HSC, decided on a gap year. He worked hard in various labouring jobs in and outside NSW away from home for 15 months earned funds over the then criteria level; he still had his university place available. He left home as he had to do to go university at Newcastle. The \$407 a fortnight provided by the allowance helped support him but this was only about 50% of the cost per fortnight in expenditure.

It is interesting to note that approximately 55% of students are from the cities and 32% and falling are from the country and rural areas. Students in the city have a wide variety of choice and maybe the biggest challenge to them studying is where they are going to park the bike or car that day. Families like us have far greater challenges. The percentage of students that go to university after two years is very small. It unlikely that students at that age will put two years of their life on hold take the lottery in third year they will be accepted. They will just not go to university maybe this is the idea behind these changes.

HECS

The committee should also take into account that these students are not leaving university without a debt. These degrees will cost them and or their family over \$30,000. It is unlikely with a weekly cost to live away from home of \$400 per student that either the student or the family will be paying the HECS bill while they are studying.

In these economic times the number of scholarships limited and the competition of these limited scholarships are high and often limited to the elite students who receive above 96% in the HSC.

What will Help

Recognition that the inner boundary is grossly unfair to students who have to relocate to attend university. I suggest the committee look at the Maps of areas such as Scone, Muswellbrook, Dungog, Gulgong, Cowra, Dubbo and Tamworth to name just a few of the areas. In our case the Scone boundary is ridiculous it passes through the middle of the next street. Most of these boundaries are design to prevent and deter rural students from tertiary education the inner regional boundary include clusters of regional population this makes up a considerable number of youths in regional Australia they are located too far away to commute to University.

The boundary should be what is practical for daily commuting to a centre that has a wide range of alternatives to study not just for a particular stream. (Hypothetical example could be nursing is available at Dubbo) not all students wish to do nursing; an Inner Regional Area Map should not be built on availability of limited courses. I would think any further than 90 minutes travel to the university is too far.

Reinstatement of the gap year to allow students to keep their place. A placement they worked hard for at a university. The financial criteria figure to be realistic, remembering these kids are unskilled and the first job they get is often the hardest to obtain and the pay rate is relative low. Abolishment of the 18 months criteria with an average of 30 hours per week that removes students for two years from the education system is essential.

I invite anyone to talk to us and even visit Scone so I can explain in detail how ridiculous these new rules are and the affect they have had on my son and my family. I must point out the results for the HSC are out on 15th December 2010. I believe we will have to make our decision prior to any favourable deliberations of this committee these changes have already effected my son and what we can do to assist him for the next few years. Please remember this during your determination process. We are remote, we live in a rural area, just because we just do not live on a farm does not mean that we don't have the same location and access problems to study as people who live in the outer Regional areas. In our case just 50 metres from our house.

Vote for change to give kids who want to have ago a chance.

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