



To whom it may concern,

I am currently studying towards a Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) at Curtin University of Technology. I have been informed by Centrelink that I am not eligible for Austudy because my course has been titled a "Masters", and I am not eligible for NewStart because I am not actively seeking employment. I am also not eligible for Rent Assistance because it is only a supplement in addition to another allowance. So, I am not eligible for any assistance whatsoever, even though I am a full-time student and have previously satisfied Centrelink's requirements for Independence and also qualify as a Low Income Earner.

My fellow students and I believe that our situation warrants special consideration for financial assistance for several reasons:

1. This course is not a traditional Masters based on research, it is completed by coursework. This course is merely the equivalent of the Occupational Therapy undergraduate degree, condensed into two years instead of four. We graduate with the same knowledge and eligibility to practice that the undergraduates do, however this course enables us to fast track our career as we all have undertaken previous related degrees.
2. There are no scholarships available for Masters degrees completed by coursework. The only scholarships available are for Masters degrees completed by research.
3. This course is more intensive, with a greater number of contact hours than the undergraduate degree. We are also required to complete the same amount of practical fieldwork experience as the undergraduate students, but in two years. This requirement of 1000 hours of unpaid work experience also takes up a lot of time that could be otherwise used for paid employment. There is more opportunity in the undergraduate course for undertaking paid employment and these students are eligible for financial support, however the Masters students have less opportunity to work, yet receive no financial assistance from the government at all.
4. Although the course is full fee paying, majority of students have deferred their tuition fees under the PELS scheme. This means that in addition to having a large debt to pay back at the completion of our degree, we do not receive financial assistance during our degree, resulting in substantial financial hardship.

We simply cannot understand the logic behind not supporting us through this degree when we are working towards entering a profession which is currently understaffed and in need. We are mature-aged students who are dedicated, committed and fully focussed on our course. However, the lack of financial assistance from the government is making our pursuance of this course very difficult. We are not being encouraged to further our careers and obtain qualifications in a respected and much-needed discipline. We are being forced to reconsider our studying options as we are faced with an increasing demand on our limited finances. As full-time students undertaking a degree via coursework, we should be entitled to the same benefits as our undergraduate counterparts.

Students in our course have taken this matter to the guild and their local member of parliament but have been informed that last year students already attempted to enact change, but without success. My understanding from this is that the law would have to change and despite wanting to take it further, I simply do not have the time between university, fieldwork, work, study and home duties.

If I had of known about this forum earlier, I would have forwarded the details to all the MOT students and the Master of Physiotherapy students who suffer the same fate. I am happy for you to use this email for appropriate purposes concerning this matter and would appreciate contact to inform me if it has been received and if you are going to use it.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Kevill
