

9th July 2009

Submission to Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

I am writing in opposition to the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance Scheme, which will drastically increase the inequality between rural and metropolitan students in terms of access to higher education if put into play.

The new proposed requirement for a student wanting to claim independence involves working a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months over a two-year period. This is completely unwarranted for any student wanting to attend university within two years of finishing school. In difficult financial times, where youth unemployment has reached its highest point in eleven years, coupled with the ongoing drought in many parts of NSW, a student from rural and regional areas wishing to attend university will find it more difficult to do so than ever before. In many rural communities, it is difficult to find work of such nature.

The scheme is also inconsistent with most Australian universities which allow students to defer their university offer, which is usually for a period of six months to one year. If a student wishing to attend university had to defer their place twice, there is very high risk of the offer being relapsed after reapplying.

Changes to the current Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarships Scheme, whose recipients that those students disadvantaged by distance and low socio-economic backgrounds additionally disadvantages students who would otherwise find it difficult to finance their university studies.

I am currently in my second year studying Veterinary Science at Charles Sturt University, and fund my university education solely from my dependent youth allowance status, which was achieved due to my parents' qualification for Exceptional Circumstances due to the severity of the drought. I also receive an Accommodation Scholarship provided by the university which values at \$4,300. Without this funding, I would not be attending university.

If my parents' financial situation was to improve, I would not qualify for independent status and would consequently lose my Accommodation Scholarship. My study load constitutes almost 40 hours per week and an even greater after-hours study load thus casual or part time job is impossible if I am to meet the pass requirements for the course. Consequently, my only option would be to defer my studies. My course is six years long, and so my completion of studies would be extended by two years, to eight years long. It should clear to the senate inquiry that this is an entirely unjust proposal by the Government. It is neglecting the needs of rural and regional communities and is providing adequate opportunities to access higher education to metropolitan students only who do not have to travel away from their home to attend university.

I would strongly encourage the senate inquiry to consider equal access or "a fair go" to education for all students across Australia regardless of their location. The proposed changes to the Youth Allowance Scheme do not deliver this promise.

Sincerely,
Jessica Dalton