

To whom it may concern,

I am a student currently attending year 12 at a country high school, and the notion of this bill has distressed me quite immensely. If it were only me that was concerned with this bill I could understand the lack of regard in relation to pushing it through. However, I am not the only person who is put into a state of such unease. In fact, all my peers are now, instead of having to worry solely about our upcoming HSC exam, having to look beyond that into our uncertain future. After the HSC we now receive an ATAR, and if we are fortunate our studies will have paid a dividend and it will be an high rank, ensuring a scholarship at a university. But for those of us, particularly we country public school students, who are not afforded the luxury that students attending exclusive private schools are (such as James Ruse), we sit in classes of high student to teacher ratios, we sit in classes lacking resources that certain “other” schools do, and we sit exams with the knowledge that we lack personal tutors to help us prepare for such events. Not only does it take a mental toll on some of us – the knowledge that we live in a country that promotes equality on every level, yet does not extend an equal arm to aid those of us living in poverty, of lower intelligence or living outside a major city – but it all subtracts from the rankings we have the potential to receive. These rankings can offer a place at a university for us, and as obvious as it may be, the higher the ATAR the more exclusive university course position offered or available. As expected, these rather exclusive universities follow a trend, similar to that of secondary schools: they are in major cities, or within a short commute of a major city.

People like myself, living in a rural or country area, dream of getting into these universities for the quality of education and the prospective vocations they offer, however as already stated, country students statistically aren't as “bright” as those in the cities. Universities are aware of this, in fact many (like University of Wollongong, Macquarie University and University of NSW) have previously offered up to 5 UAI points to country students to aid them in getting into their desired courses. The introduction of this bill to make post-HSC students work almost full-time (30 hours per week) for 18 months will be detrimental to the availability the tertiary studies of prospective university students.

Not only will it mean that students are forced to find a permanent job, rather than earn a minimum sum of \$19,532 within 18 months. Country students will be forced to either support themselves hundreds of kilometres from their parental security, whilst they work 30 hours per week and attending the first few months at university to enter into tertiary study one year after the completion of their HSC, giving up the meaning behind the “gap year” (such as the opportunity to travel aboard and enjoy oneself); or forfeit the acceptance they received on completion of the HSC course, and thus, the bonus ATAR points (formerly UAI points) received for being a country student (on which many country students do rely) and also risk the chance that they may not actually receive another offer for the same course at the same university.

If students take the first option they will be required to support themselves without any financial aid, this is simply not all that viable, as they must pay for accommodation, food, clothes and other necessities for living in today's environment. With particular emphasis on accommodation: The price to own or rent a house within a city is of astronomical proportions when in comparison of that of the cost in the country.

Whilst city-bred students can remain at home and neglect the cost of living whilst they remain at home to “sponge” from their parents. This is, if nothing else, discrimination.

Perhaps it is possible to ignore these facts but even then if students do concede to the idealistic views forced upon them they are still required to work. This poses a problem in itself. There simply aren't enough jobs out here in the country for people to support themselves. Some small towns can be more than 100km from a semi-prominent commercial hub, which simply means they aren't going to get a job, or if they do, they'll spend half their wages going to and from work each day. Knowing some past students as friends, I still see many of them struggling to find a job as there just aren't that many out there.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this, I do hope that it hasn't inconvenienced you in any way, and more so that it has indeed given you some form of empathy on the cultural difference within our country even.

Sincerely, Hayden Shaw.