

The Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport,

P.O. Box 6100, Parliament House,

CANBERRA ACT. 2600



Dear Committee Members,

My submission to your Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education opportunities is;

1. The effect of the new criteria for Independent Youth Allowance(IYA) is retrospective and disadvantages young people who have taken a gap year to qualify but are now not able to do so. As with the increase in Pension age some years notice of changes should be given.
2. The 18 month proposal means that young people cannot qualify for IYA as Universities generally do not allow deferral for 2 years. Even if they did so it is very difficult after 2 years in the workforce to go back to study regimes.
3. The proposal that to qualify you have to work for a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months is not realistic. The Government itself is predicting 8+% unemployment. How can it expect young people just out of school with few or no work skills to meet this requirement. Last night youth unemployment was announced at 26%. Even if they are able to get two or more part time jobs they cannot meet the requirement, particularly over 18 months.
4. The proposals discriminate against country students. Even where some regional centres have University/TAFE campuses, young people from the great majority of country towns still have to move to the regional centres to attend University/TAFE. However these regional Universities do not cover many courses so country students have to move to capital cities to attend courses held only there. Living in capital cities is expensive.
5. The Government has announced that it will increase University places by 50,000 in the next few years. Yet this proposed change in IYA criteria could see up to a reported 30,000 students unable to qualify for IYA and so not able to attend University courses.
6. I instance a particular case where I am aware of the full details:  
The student is currently in Year 12 and wishes to study Optometry if she can meet the extremely high UAI requirement, or Orthoptics with a lower UAI. These courses are only available in capital cities. She lives in Orange NSW, 250kms from the nearest capital city. She comes from a single parent home(income under \$50,000) and would only be able to attend University, involving as it does living away from home in a capital city, if she can qualify for IYA. While she could qualify under the old rules taking a gap year she could not qualify under the proposed criteria because:
  - (i) She can only defer for 12 months
  - (ii) She is unlikely to be able to obtain employment for 30hours per week for 18 months and even if she did she may not be able to earn the required level of earnings.
  - (iii) Without IYA she would not be able to afford to live in a capital city and so attend University even though she has proved to be a very capable student over her entire schooling.

To keep its place in the modern world Australia needs to help its capable young people be trained at tertiary level without disadvantage because of where they live or because of financial constraints. We cannot allow a proposal which does not take account of the realities to deny large numbers of our young people a tertiary education  
The solution is clear - retain the present system and criteria.

Yours faithfully,



Alan Dunstan      and      Barbara Dunstan