

I will preface this submission by saying I was a rural student who left home to gain a tertiary education at age 17, and am now the mother of two teenagers, one who has already made the move away to attend university, and another who is currently taking a gap year post year 12 and working for independent status Youth Allowance based on workforce participation criteria. We currently reside in Port Augusta SA which is approximately 300km north of Adelaide.

a. the financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE

I was able to obtain a full Youth Allowance (the equivalent at that time was the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme) when I entered university in the late 1970s due to a very low parental income, which also dictated that I received no parental financial assistance at all during my time at university. Youth unemployment at that time was extremely high and there were no fast food chains to provide any extra income. When I attended university the norm for part-time work to supplement income payments was bar work and as a very recently turned 17 year old that was unavailable to me. I was constantly wondering where my next dollar would come from and ended up with a strings of failures on my academic record due to the stress of just trying to cope with everyday life realising the unwieldy level of debt I was building up in the process. The financial impact of the debt I accrued throughout both my degree and my incomplete Graduate Diploma were to be felt for a further 9 years. As a result I am determined to see that my children don't have to suffer in a similar way.

We chose to send both of our children to the local public school rather than the alternative Catholic College due to the College's virtual insistence that students not take a full high end science curriculum because of the impact those subjects have on reducing TER scores. As both children have been classified Gifted Children since a young age, we wanted them to have the opportunity to make the most of their Maths/Science interests and skills and to have the opportunity to study their dream engineering courses at The University of Adelaide. The local Catholic College tends to direct their potential engineers to Uni SA because they have less prerequisite subjects for their courses and greater bonus points available. Unfortunately this decision did mean they would have to study Open Access College courses as well as subjects taught via a less than satisfactory (in our opinion) Cluster School arrangement. For each child during their Yr 12 we did spend in the vicinity of \$5000 each on holiday tutoring at the Adelaide Tutorial Centre to give them exposure to teaching at a level of experience above what they would be able to receive locally. We found the local school taught to a level of the majority of the class who were unmotivated and well below the level our children were capable of, and this was proven we believe by a drastic reduction of school study marks during the moderation process. As examples our oldest child had his physics study score dropped by over 25% by the moderation process, and our younger child's Yr 12 English Communications score was dropped from 16/20 to 14/20 before scaling, likely the result of the low standard expected by the teacher illustrated by the fact she chose a text

which was a 96 page picture book worthy of a much lower year level as her major text. School staff told us this downgrading of curriculum expectations was necessary to allow the majority of the class the possibility of passing grades. Even given these obstacles both children qualified for entry (and received CSP offers) to engineering degrees at The University of Adelaide.

My oldest son completed Yr 12 in 2007 and commenced university in 2008. With the benefit of hindsight it was definitely a mistake on our part for him not to take a gap year and qualify for Youth Allowance as an independent student because he definitely was not going to qualify for any allowance due to joint parental income. He was informed by one of his teachers in Yr 12 that he would be awarded the Principal's Scholarship for the school, only to find out after he started university that the Principal had not nominated him because he claimed to not know about the scholarship. We were also informed by the university that the course he was to study saw the previous year's first year students all awarded either industry or university scholarships. Our expectation at the time of him accepting his offer was that he would at least qualify for some kind of scholarship, but that was not to be. With the Principal's Scholarship not possible and equity scholarships out of the question because he was not in receipt of Youth Allowance, we were hoping for either an industry or academic scholarship. Unfortunately he could not qualify for these either. While the university acknowledges the inequity for rural students by offering bonus entry points for admission, when it comes to merit scholarships those bonus points are removed. All this meant was we were going to have to pay the full price of his away from home education.

We chose to send our son to a Residential College for a number of reasons. He had no family support network in the city and no school mates heading off to the city for study. He was too immature at the time to be considering flatting on his own or with strangers. We also believed that he would need the academic support offered by a Residential College. This proved to be a correct as he found his Maths and Physics background knowledge to fall well short of his city educated counterparts. While passing all of his first year subjects his GPA is low compared to other students who started out with a knowledge base that was far more suitable to the course. This also makes it unlikely that he will be awarded merit scholarships as his course progresses despite now being in an equal playing field with his peers and achieving much higher grades than he did initially. He has so far been unable to assist us with his own costs due to an inability to gain employment in Adelaide as he is unavailable during holiday periods because it is too expensive to stay in the city, and there is little to no seasonal work available in our local area.

My son lives at one of the cheaper residential colleges in Adelaide with a 2009 yearly fee of \$12014.60 for the 36 weeks they deem the academic year. Any stay outside of these periods attracts an additional fee of \$44.25 per day. We found that we needed to pay for an extra 2 weeks accommodation over the course of last year to cover academic supplementary exams as well as laboratories and practical assessments held outside of the normal academic year. Other expenses like course notes, laundry, toiletries, fuel,

clothing, field trips, industry association or college activities, internet, phone calls home, a weekly meal out (because being realistic for a minute College food sucks), stationery, medical expenses etc cost us in the order of \$100 per week in addition to the college charges. Even so we still found that often we had to provide additional money over and above that \$100 per week. Initial start up costs were also high. We found we needed to purchase a laptop capable of running the programs needed for an engineering course which cost us \$2500 plus an extra \$300 approximately for academic software licenses. While the colleges all have computer labs most seem to be running very outdated systems and they don't run the required software, and labs at the university are heavily utilized at all times other than very unsociable hours. College internet charges are 4c/MB or \$40/GB and students are charged for both upload and download data. My son's college also requires residents to have formal wear so another \$500 was spent to purchase a suit. Additionally around \$1500 was spend on a TV, bar fridge, laser printer and ink cartridges (printing charges are a rip-off at the college), and additional shelving. So far the textbook bills have been in the vicinity of \$500 each semester.

b. the education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas

The only relatively local alternative for my oldest son was to undertake a 4 year part-time Associate Degree in Engineering course offered at the Whyalla Campus of University of SA. This is still 80kms from home and is a course usually undertaken by students who have been offered cadetships with One Steel in Whyalla. After 4 years of part-time study students can then enter the second year of a University of SA engineering course. In the time my son would have finished that course and be ready to enter a fulltime university course at second year level, he will have actually completed his entire degree at the University of Adelaide and be ready for graduate employment. He would have still had to leave home yet would have extended his time as a student significantly. The only way he would have even contemplated this option was if he had received a cadetship with One Steel. He was not prepared to even apply for one of these because they didn't offer them in the field of Mining Engineering or Chemical Engineering, and the return of service guarantee would have meant he was virtually locked into that company for at least 10 years just to obtain a four year degree. That is simply too high a price to contemplate when you are 17 years old and eligible for entry into the degree without having to take a 4 year pathway course to the degree of choice.

c. the implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas

The proposed changes to Workforce Participation criteria in determining eligibility for Youth Allowance severely impact my younger child who is currently taking a gap year having completed Yr 12 in 2008. Having watched his parents go through the process of re-mortgaging our house simply to pay the costs associated with sending his older brother to university, and knowing the hours his father has to work to meet the ongoing extra costs, he was not prepared to put us through this again for him when a gap year could make all the difference. He was lucky to have eventually found full time work

locally, although it took him until mid-February to do so. He knew that if he didn't qualify for Independent Rate Youth Allowance he would be forced to share accommodation with his brother who he really doesn't get along with at all and who stifles him as an individual, in order to mitigate costs. Whether or not both children would qualify under the new income limits for dependent rate youth allowance is an unknown to us at this stage because we have no idea really about his father's income, and know it would be dependent upon a Family Actual Means Test as his father is self-employed. As his gap year employment is with Centrelink he is aware of all the problems associated with the FAMT and realises that keeping a steady income could be very problematic under the rules that apply. Even if he were to be eligible for a dependent rate payment he knows that would only be the case as long as his brother still attends university. He is basically working to save for his first years residential college fees knowing that by second semester he would have been eligible for independent rate youth allowance. He could survive on that allowance but only with further substantial income assistance from his parents.

So far he has managed to earn approx \$17,000 of the required \$19,532 he was told by both his school and Centrelink advisors that he would need to earn in the 18 months post school. As he didn't commence full-time work until mid February, under the proposed changes he would be required to continue working until mid August 2010 to meet the new work force eligibility criteria. That would mean he was unable to commence his course until 2011 because while it might have been possible to start a fortnight into semester two of 2010, his course offers no pathway for mid year entry for those without additional qualifications that he does not have. He would also lose his Residential College place for 2010 or be required to pay for a minimum 30 weeks of accommodation even though he would only be there for 15 weeks at most during the academic year.

Having spoken to him in depth on this subject I know that his decision is to forgo university for at least the next 18 months if these changes come into effect. He already feels that the loss of knowledge from school studies has put him at a disadvantage, so there is a distinct likelihood that he may forgo university altogether if he faces another year of delay.

e. the adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study

Youth Allowance on its own has never been enough to fully support a student away from home in a manner that would be acceptable for the majority of people. As a parent I fully expect that I will have to contribute to my children's needs if they are unable to work part time while studying full time. I was very pleased to see the allowable income limit increased to \$400/fortnight though as I do think that is a far more realistic level than the previous \$236/fortnight. I hope this will also be carried through to increasing the parameters of the income bank system used by Centrelink.

The proposed Relocation Scholarships are a good concept in my opinion even if they are a reduced level of support than the previous scholarships simply because many more rural income support students will receive them. My major concern with these is that according to senate estimates harsard, students receiving youth allowance at the independent rate because of workforce participation will NOT be eligible for these scholarships. This is completely inequitable and fails to take into account that where students have stayed at home to gain the requisite work participation, they will encounter the same costs to move away to attend university as all the other remote and rural students do. How these students qualify for independent status should not determine their eligibility for relocation scholarships. It simply doesn't make any sense.

f. the educational needs of rural and regional students

From personal experience only, I believe that rural students benefit from moving into an academic community when first leaving home to attend university. Due to the reduced size of schools in many rural communities and the lack of highly academic streams in their local school communities, they often find themselves distracted from studies by friendship groups that might move with them to the city but have vastly different focuses. If friends and/or housemates work rather than study there is a lot of peer pressure to socialise at times when they need to be focusing on studies, and little understanding from peers that non-university contact times are not free time. Often there are few school mates that move onto further study. Certainly in my oldest son's case he was the only one from his graduating class to attend Adelaide University, and the only student to undertake a full engineering degree. His best friends from school apply a lot of pressure to him to socialise with them during term time. This is the very reason that as parents we made the decision to accommodate him in a University Residential College. There he has a community with similar pressures, needs and a level of academic and emotional support that I believe rural students need to most successfully make the transition from rural school to university. I hope that via this enquiry professional organisations will provide the input you require to address this part of the enquiry.

One the major issues that my children have so far encountered in both their regional education and their university studies when at home is the virtually non-existent access to resources. Local libraries have old and out-dated resources and the school library we believe tended to focus on books etc that would be used by the majority in non high end academic subjects. While our local school librarian offered to obtain resources for our children if they needed them, we found it easier and timelier to take matters into our own hands and purchase any needed resources as and when we found they were needed. There was very limited access to help for distance education courses, and usually no access to people who could help with the high end Maths and Science subjects taught at university when help was needed. We have found that for the majority of issues the only way to get academic support was to access it in the city. We consider ourselves fortunate that we are only 300 kms from the nearest capital city, because had we been further away or where public transport was not available on a daily basis then our children's needs would have been virtually impossible to meet.

g. the impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities; and

The decision to reside in a regional or rural community involves weighing up many factors for the majority of people. One of the factors that many of us take into account is the educational cost to our children. Does the area have local schools able to provide an education that will meet our children's future needs, or will they need to be schooled away from home. In my experience many parents are happy to send their adolescent children to boarding schools in the city, and many professional or trade employees are able to access major private schooling incentives as a part of their employment packages to move to rural areas. The "gap year" provisions enabled the children of these regional workers to gain similar income support to leave home to attend university albeit this time the support went direct to the student rather than the parent. Without this income support I have already heard many stories of professionals and tradespersons considering leaving their communities to return to the city so they can manage the higher education of their children along with taking the opportunity to advance their own careers. The compromises that most were able to justify making to enable them to move to a regional area in the first place, become far less attractive when they consider the extra \$20,000 (of disposable income) per annum per child to live away from home to attend university. When you consider the real costs of that \$20,000 post tax, it is just far too high a price for most people to consider. In our personal situation my children's father has already stated that he would be far better off both financially and from a health point of view to close his small business, take a much lesser paid and less stressful job and it would allow both of our children to access the full rate of away from home Youth Allowance should we decide to remain in our rural community, or give us the incentive to return to the city ourselves so our children could live with us while studying. Fortunately he has trade skills that make him employable nation-wide.

h. other related matters

It is my understanding that the changes slated in Budget 2009 were the result of widespread rorting of Youth Allowance provisions by city based students of wealthy parents, many of whom were also being paid by parents or friends parent companies the requisite \$19,500. What these changes don't do is rectify this problem. Those receiving exceptionally high payments for short periods of time through family companies will still be able to make qualifying conditions. If people are happy to pay well above awards for short periods of time to help qualify their student children, they will still be able to do so for 18 months if they so desire. City based children will still be able to study be it full-time or part-time and draw wages on the family company. Their parents will even be able to significantly reduce their pay rates on the family company as only the hours will matter under the proposed changes. Rural and regional students don't

have the option to study from home while working, other than through an institution offering distance education. Distance education while a valuable tool falls well short on the extras that attendance at a university offers.

I also have concerns regarding the methodology that will be used to determine eligibility under the one remaining criteria. It is my understanding from reading many varied reports in the past few months that the two hours-based criteria are rarely used by Youth Allowance claimants. It is obvious that income over 18 months is easier to prove and allows for inconsistencies in employment. There appears to be no reference material on how these two criteria based on hours per week of employment are actually assessed, and I have far more questions than any answers I have been able to get. While it would seem obvious for casual employees if they have worked the requisite 30 hours for a week to count or not, how are the hours measured for those in permanent employment. For example will paid leave entitlements count as hours worked, will unpaid rostered days off or planned days off (via flexi time arrangements) make a week discounted from inclusion as a week where over 30 hours was worked? For those paid monthly or fortnightly will hours be averaged over pay cycles etc? If students will have to meet a particular work participation criterion then the specifics of that criterion need to be openly available for public scrutiny. Currently they are not.

Also of concern is the time that will be taken to pass or reject this legislation and it's affect on the 2008 year 12 school leavers who are already on a gap year. I read in our local paper that the results of this enquiry will not be presented to Parliament until 29 October 2009 leaving just 8 sitting days for the year, and no more sitting days prior to the date potential students will have to accept or decline offers. While I do believe changes of these proportions require a significant time investment, these 2008 school leavers don't have that time to play with. They have to make their decisions by Jan 2010 at the latest to either take up their deferred places or to let them go. I know that my youngest child is not prepared to make the decision to accept his university offer without the legislation in place to guarantee he will receive Youth Allowance at some point in 2010. The proposed changes alone were enough to leave him completely distrustful of government. Under the current circumstances if he were to take up his position at university next year then he will have to leave his full-time local employment with no guarantee of income support in the future and no job. It is too big a risk for him to take. While he will have saved enough from his employment to support himself for the first year, if the changes pass through both houses of parliament before June 2010 when he would be eligible for Independent status under the existing rules, then he would have to leave university, attempt to find another full time job, and start the 18 months full-time work again. He would also lose his student-only accommodation. It is just too messy and a risk not worth taking to take up deferred places without the legislation locked in for these students before the deadline for decisions. He could still lose out if he chooses to remain in his full-time position and the legislation is later amended to protect the 2008 school leavers as he will have lost not only his offer of a university place but also his accommodation offer. The current gap-year students need a decision on their status before the end of this parliamentary year. They have already suffered enough, and it is unfair on them to continue in this state of limbo.

These students have to organize accommodation in city areas if they are to be able to study next year, and for many that means paying non-refundable accommodation deposits. By the time offers are made most residential colleges have already closed applications. My son had to lock-in his accommodation offer last month with a \$500 non-refundable deposit or risk losing it, despite having no idea whether he would be able to attend university next year or not. If nothing else happens regarding this issue before the end of this parliamentary year then at least guarantee the situation for these already disillusioned 2008 school leavers so they can make a final decision based on fact rather than having to take a guess about what may or may not happen after they make their choices regarding what to do next year. They need the situation for them settled as a matter of urgency and not allowed to drag into the New Year.