

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

Our family live in the south west of Western Australia approximately 260km south of Perth and 80km south of Bunbury our closest regional centre. Our eldest child finished secondary school in 2008 and is currently taking a 'gap year'. Like the majority of students in our area, our daughter decided to take a gap year so that she could work and earn sufficient income over an 18 month period to satisfy the current criteria to be classed as an independent student giving her access to Youth Allowance during her tertiary studies. These students do not take a gap year to travel the world. They take a gap year to help ease the financial burden that their family will otherwise face in supporting their child when they move away from home to pursue their studies.

The proposed changes to Youth Allowance will mean that my daughter will no longer meet the criteria to be classed as an independent student. She will not qualify for any assistance as our combined parental income is above the threshold.

The tables below summarise the expected financial impact on our family due to our children attending tertiary institutions in Perth. I believe I have been conservative with my figures but this is new territory for us.

Item	Total / Year
Rent at \$140 per week	\$7280
Utilities estimate (power, water etc)	\$500
Internet at \$20 per month	\$240
Travel to and from home 4 times/year	\$240
Total	\$8260

The following table shows the expected financial outlay with our second child attending university in 2012. Our first child plans to study Dentistry which is a 5 year course. I expect our second child to pursue a 4 year Engineering degree.

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
No children at university	1	1	2	2	2	1	
Cost to family	\$8260	\$8260	\$16520	\$16520	\$8260*	\$8260	\$66080

* Our eldest child is still at university but is now 22 years old and will qualify as an independent student under the new rules.

These are the additional costs that we expect to incur because we live in regional Australia. The costs do not include food, clothing and fuel as I am trying to show the extra cost that we face compared to our city counterparts whose children can still live at home. (Rural parents with children already studying in Perth say that it costs \$15000 to \$20000 per year to support their child).

This inequity in the financial impact of our children undertaking tertiary studies is the reason why so many rural and regional students undertake a gap year so they can qualify for Youth Allowance.

If the proposed changes are implemented, we will choose to support our children for the years that they will be at university. This will obviously have a significant impact on our finances as shown above which will be reflected in our retirement assets. Our only other options are to either

- Make the children work for 2 years after finishing secondary schooling to qualify as independent students. Commencing tertiary study after this 2 year break may be difficult if prerequisite knowledge from school is required for their course and study habits have been broken for a long time, or
- Choose not to support our children attending university.

I do not believe these are viable or fair options for rural and regional students who must relocate to Perth to pursue their chosen courses. The courses that our children have chosen are only available at Perth universities.

Some further points are outlined below.

- Students who must relocate to study are removed from their primary support network and must rebuild their support networks in their new environment. This can place considerable emotional stress on young people which would be adding to the extra financial stress imposed by the proposed changes to Youth Allowance.
- Country students are more likely to return to the country to practise their chosen profession. These proposed changes are actively discouraging country students from undertaking further studies and I believe this will make it even harder to attract professionals to regional and rural areas in the future. This will be to the detriment of all who live in rural and regional Australia.

I urge the Committee to recommend that all country students are given appropriate financial assistance if they must relocate to pursue tertiary studies.

Thank you for your time.

15 July 2009