

Dear Committee Members,

My son, 19 this month, completed Year 12 last year at Warwick State High School and gained admission to his tertiary course of choice at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). This specialised course in Fine Arts (Drama) is conducted at the Kelvin Grove campus of QUT and is not available at any other Brisbane university. QUT does not have on campus accommodation. We live over 170 km west of Brisbane and there are not public transport links between Warwick and Brisbane.

My son deferred his course for one year to gain employment to save for the high cost of living away from home to attend university, and to establish eligibility for Independent Youth Allowance. My son changed employers in February to maximise his working hours and his earning potential. In spite of this his weekly work hours remain varied and are often below 30 hours per week. His hours with a national retailer are entirely dependent on departmental budgeting and the prevailing sales results.

While I am a public senior teacher, my full-time income is significantly less than 50% of the 'average family income' often cited by our Prime Minister. I cannot afford to fully fund my son's tertiary study living away from home for a minimum of three years.

My son commenced his 'gap' year with the aim of working and saving for university. He commenced the year working toward meeting the existing eligibility criteria for Independent Youth Allowance. Now the rules are being changed and the new rules will mean disaster for my son and thousands of other 'gap' year students who will be significantly and substantially financially disadvantaged. Rural students will be particularly disadvantaged by changes to Independent Youth Allowance. They have less access to employment opportunities initially. They cannot live at home and study. Even if they can secure employment that has a minimum of 30 hours per week, most universities only allow deferral for one year and not two. Further, after delaying tertiary study for two years, many gap year students may not proceed to university at all.

Rural tertiary students are already disadvantaged by not being able to live at home. The decision to remove access to the very limited, but vital, financial support available through Independent Youth Allowance, after the commencement of a gap year, is unfathomable!

Gail Little