

To whom it concerns,

Thankyou for allowing concerned parties to make a submission regarding proposed changes to the Youth Allowance.

I have four teenage children and live with my husband in Manjimup ,a beautiful area in the south west of WA. Bunbury is our closest large regional centre, about 125km away, however many students from our area have no choice but to move to Perth, about 320km away, when undertaking tertiary studies, as Bunbury offers a very limited choice, unless students aspire to a career in nursing or teaching. My four children all hope to aquire university degrees when they complete high school studies. My eldest daughter moved to Perth at the start of this year and is studying a Law/Commerce degree.

I have lived in Manjimup for 26 years, I moved to the area for what I had expected to be a two year period to complete my country service as a school dental therapist, but met my husband here, married and stayed. My children have all been educated locally at the state primary and high schools. They have received an excellent education, Manjimup Senior High School is currently the best performing country public school in WA, a wonderful achievement!

I believe part of the reason for this success is our low number of transferring school teachers, many of the school staff have taught at the school for a great number of years, and have much experience. The low turn-over of teachers is surprising given that, with the current lack of financial support for our children when they need to move away to the city for their further studies, many families also make the decision that the best choice for them is to also move to the city with their children. I know of many professional families who have done just this. I believe this situation will only get worse if more is not done to help assist our rural population. My husband and I expect that in the next couple of years that this will be the decision we also make, as we cannot possibly fund our children in Perth and a household here in Manjimup. There are currently only three dental therapists working privately in our region, from outside of Bunbury to Albany, and it is very difficult to attract others to the area.

The Youth Allowance system in its present form absolutely discriminates against rural students. They have no choice but to take a year away from their studies and look for work so that they are able to finance a university degree. The proposed changes will only make a unsatisfactory system even worse. By contrast most students who live in Perth with their families get the best of both worlds, they have ready, affordable access to university with the choice of whether or not they take a "gap" year and the benefit of supportive family around them. When our children finally make it to uni, they have to deal both with isolation from their families and community, and financial worries.

To make things even more difficult for our rural families, it is quite difficult to find employment in many small rural towns, paticularly if the employer knows that the student is only going to take an available position temporarily. This then means that the student is still forced to move away from the area to find work, before they even start to think about uni. So parents still have the financial difficulty of housing their children away from home.

I would also like to comment on the changes in educating our children. The emphasis is now on encouraging our kids to remain at school until the completion of Year 12, which I think is a very positive change. However there is not much point in teaching our kids the benefits of further education and the need to continue with their education if the government support and encouragement does not continue through to tertiary studies.

There is also a lack of many professionals in country areas, particularly doctors and other medical personnel, the government is trying to address this by offering country students various different rural scholarships and schemes to encourage country kids to return to their communities with their university degrees and support rural areas. My children are seeing how they are disadvantaged by living away from the city at the moment, certainly as far as their education is concerned, which doesn't present settling in a rural area as a very attractive proposition for them when they have qualified in their field.

I would certainly like to see changes in the Youth Allowance system in its present form, but not those outlined in the statements I have read. Rural families need immediate financial assistance to assist with the cost of educating their children away from home. They should not have to be forced to go and get a job before they can think about uni, city students don't have to, and our kids should have the same access to tertiary education. The system in its present form is very unfair. Country students should not have to qualify as independants, the fact that they have to live away from their families because they cannot attend university at home should be enough to make an allowance available to them.

I would be happy to clarify any of the points I have made, thankyou for the opportunity to comment on a subject that, for some time, has given me much to consider.

Still happy to be living in the country, but I'm not sure for how much longer!

Regards

Judy Dimitriou