

The proposed changes to the Youth Allowance eligibility are hitting those students and their families most who are dependent on some Government assistance to undertake tertiary education – those living in rural and remote areas.

Our daughter, who currently attends Year 12 at Australind SHS, had planned for a few years to take a gap year to earn enough money to qualify for Youth Allowance when moving to Perth for further education in 2011.

1. She has no choice but to move to Perth as her degree in physiotherapy is not offered in Bunbury. This means that without Youth Allowance, we will have to finance accommodation, living costs, university fees and books from our assets.

We are already fully supporting our oldest son, who is studying overseas because, in his very specialized field of jazz trombone, this will give him the best possible education and provides the competition he needs to later make a living as musician.

2. We have planned for our superannuation for a very long time and intended to be self-funded retirees without claiming Government pensions.
3. The proposed changes will mean for us that we will have to sell assets to finance our daughter's education, which we value very highly and are not prepared to compromise. In the long term, we then will have to apply for Government pension later on as we have to use our assets to pay for her education.
4. We are concerned that rural people, who pay their taxes just like metropolitan people, are second-rate citizens. The proposed changes clearly disadvantage those students, who have no choice but to move to the city for further education.

Many people will not be able to afford paying for their children's university education in Perth – the Government should encourage education within the long-term planning for the future workforce.

5. The proposed changes that require prospective students to work at least 30 hours per week for at least 18 months within two years, are absolutely unrealistic.

Firstly, only very few young people manage to get full-time work in the current economic situation and most work several jobs to earn enough money to qualify under the current legislation.

Secondly, most universities allow only one year deferral after being accepted into a course and that means that they might not be able to study the course of their choice.

6. If the proposed changes came into power, families with children will have to make the difficult decision whether they can afford living in the country. Without Youth Allowance, they may only be able to put them through university if they do not have to pay their accommodation and living allowance.
7. Rural students attending university in Perth are more likely to return to the country – does the Government really want to limit the tertiary qualified workforce to the metropolitan area?

We request that rural and remote students have the same opportunities as those living in Perth and ask that the disadvantages the proposed changes would have for those families will be taken into consideration.

Michael and Hannelore Hepburn