

Dear PV office

I wish to make some comments for you to forward to the Senates Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee.

Even with the recently released federal gov't Youth Allowance changes, regional students are still disadvantaged. There is no universal support for students attending a university or TAFE away from home, they have to apply and hope they are fortunate enough to receive a Commonwealth subsidy scholarship. My daughter was fortunate enough to receive this and has had \$4000 per year to enable her to live in Melbourne. Although I am on a reasonable salary, my husband is a full time student and my other children were also dependent upon me. This meant my daughter was ineligible for Youth Allowance. She has had to survive by working weekends and evenings to pay the rent and bills.

I was absolutely stunned to hear her telling me of her uni friends who survive by getting food from restaurant bins in Melbourne. They work to pay the rent so they have a roof over their head, that is the priority but these friends do not have enough for food so they go looking for it.

Her two closest friends have also left home to pursue further study, one to a major regional centre and the other to Melbourne. The one in Melbourne had no money at all during his first year of study and his parents struggled enormously to cover his rent and food, as he could not find work due to the huge study demands. He got a summer job and that helped him this year to get the year started. This lack of financial support has had a huge impact on my daughter 's study. Having to work long hours in casual jobs means she is often very tired or still doing her university course work till the wee hours of the morning. Where is the equity here for all Australians? Those with financial support from wealthy families have all the time in the world to apply themselves to their studies whilst those with limited or no financial support are compromising the standard of their academic opportunities due to having to commit substantial time just to pay basic costs of living, and in the example of her friends, compromise their health looking for food when the income support is just not available.

The second of her friends who moved to a regional centre to study at the university also asked me to help him fill out a Commonwealth scholarship for living away from home. He too was successful in getting the \$4000 per year. He needs two part-time jobs to help him cover his accommodation, food, course costs and transport. He has recently moved back home because he could not afford to keep 2 jobs, pay for the expenses of his course and keep up with his course work. He now commutes each day spending over 2 hours in travel.

It seems to me that if you are living in regional or rural Victoria and need to move away from home to study, there should be an automatic scholarship that is calculated at a rate of what it costs to pay accommodation, basic bills, food and coursework costs (not the course, but things like internet access, printing, library and booklists). Have this means tested that if any family earns over \$150,000 then it reduces in amount. The means test should only be applied when the student has a family that is able and willing to pay. Some students have no support from parents and still are receiving nothing because they are deemed as being able to receive support.

Waiting times for the Commonwealth scholarship are long. April is when you get your first payment!!! What are these country students living on until then - air!! Then the next payment is August. What happened to fortnightly payments?

Thankyou for this opportunity to let our people in Canberra know that our young people from rural and regional Victoria are being severely disadvantaged by the current scholarship system - it needs to be universally provided to all applicants with extra allowance for the costs of undertaking study. The measure of a country is surely by how we treat our most vulnerable citizens.

Jacqueline Van Velsen