

**SUBMISSION TO
THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO RURAL AND REGIONAL
ACCESS TO SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITIES
BY
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BACKGROUND TO SUBMISSION

My wife and I are residents of Busselton Western Australia, (approx 240ks south of Perth) and are the parents of 3 children.

Our comments in this submission relate to tertiary education opportunities with particular regard to rural students who have no option but to relocate to receive a tertiary education.

Our two older children have been required to relocate to Perth to acquire university qualifications. Our youngest daughter had planned to attend university in Perth in 2012 after having a gap year in 2011. This will now be extremely difficult as the costs of living away from home without any form of subsidy would be beyond our means.

We believe that there is inequity in the educational opportunities between city and country, and that where students are required to leave home for post-secondary study, this fact should be considered as an alternative criterion to the “Independence” test for Youth Allowance.

RESPONSE TO TERMS OF REFERENCE

With regard to the terms of reference of the enquiry, I make the following comments:

Item b)

The education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;

The alternatives to relocating to the metropolitan area are particularly limited. While there is one university in the south west of W.A (Bunbury 60ks away) the courses offered for tertiary studies at that institution are extremely narrow. To achieve the qualifications in their chosen course most students are required to relocate to Perth.

Item e)

The adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;

The current subsidy is not adequate to cover living away from home costs. Most rural students require a part time job and assistance from their parents as well as the Youth Allowance to maintain their studies.

Item f)

The educational needs of rural and regional students;

People today are mobile during their working life. The location in which a person resides during their education often has no bearing on where they may be employed over their working lives.

Rural & Regional students need (and should have) equal access to the quality & diversity of educational opportunities that city students have.

Item f)

Other related matters.

With regard to the changes in the youth allowance and in particular changes to the “Independence” test I make the following comments:

- § **It is extremely difficult for regional students who must move away to attend their chosen course to pay all costs of living away from home.**
- § **The focus on the “independence” test to obtain the Youth Allowance has always been contentious with rural families.**
- § **Many rural students have no option but to relocate to attend university. This should be a major consideration in the test for eligibility for Youth Allowance.**
- § **In the past the impact of this incorrect focus was mitigated by the fact that most rural students take a gap year to give them an additional time before leaving home and to earn money to help set them up for their time away. Most rural students were able to meet the current criteria of the “independence” test in their gap year.**
- § **The new independence test will be extremely difficult to meet. There will be difficulty in finding (near) full time jobs for these potential students and most universities do not let students defer for two years.**
- § **One of the stated reasons for the proposed changes is that the Bradley Review found that 36 per cent of students who were living at home and receiving Youth Allowance assistance were from families with incomes more than \$100,000, However none of the students who will be most severely affected by the proposed changes would have been in this group (ie rural students who are required to leave home for post-secondary study).**

IMPACT ON RURAL FAMILIES

There is no doubt that the criteria of the new independence test will be extremely difficult to meet. There will be difficulty in finding (near) full time employment and most universities will not allow students defer for two years.

Without the assistance of Youth Allowance, a large number of rural students will be unable to attend university. THIS WILL FURTHER EXACERBATE THE DISPARITY OF UNIVERSITY ATTENDANCE BETWEEN METROPOLITAN AND RURAL STUDENTS.

ACTION NEEDED TO HELP RESTORE EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR REGIONAL STUDENTS

THE NECESSITY TO RELOCATE TO ATTEND UNIVERSITY MUST BE MADE AN ALTERNATIVE CRITERION TO RECEIVE YOUTH ALLOWANCE.

It is extremely difficult for regional students who must move away to attend their chosen course, to pay all of the relocation, living and transport costs associated with establishing a second residence.

The proposed changes to Youth Allowance will mean that the small amount of assistance rural students currently receive will, for many be no longer available.

Currently the Youth Allowance is available to an eligible student if:

- § There students parents are on a low income or
- § The student is independent of his parents

A third criterion should cover eligible students for whom the Government has not provided educational opportunities within a reasonable distance of their home