

I am writing this letter of submission in relation to changes to Centrelink payments for students studying at University.

Firstly to change the criteria with only months of notice of this change is at most discriminatory to country students and at the least arrogant. These students, mostly country students, who have worked hard for 12 years of schooling, to achieve goals they have set for themselves. These young people are the future leaders of tomorrow. It is a known fact that country students have less opportunity, less quality education, less subject choices and greater hurdles to actually gain admission to university. They then have to work and save in order to face the costs of moving to Perth, find suitable accommodation. Leaving friends and family, adjusting to city life, making new friends, budgeting their money. The monetary costs are enormous without the consideration of emotionally. These students can either face all these hurdles, with family and friends often 4 or more hours away, juggling study, making new friends without support. Or if there is reduced financial support, either from parents or government assistance, these students will have to settle for lower income jobs in their local areas and lose their dreams and ambitions.

Personally our situation is I am working and earning _____ annually. We are buying our home. My husband was employed earning _____ annually. However in April he was made redundant and received a lump sum. He then got another job (casual) for 30hrs per week at _____. He has been given notice from this job because the business has been sold. The new owners will not require his services. We have no idea when he will find work. Our son, was promised a full time job in his gap year, 3 months later he was put off. The reason was the economic downturn. He then found work with his Father; they were both put off together owing to vines being pulled out and downturn of wine sales. He then got a job on an orchard, usually 40hrs per week for an unknown time period, however that is dependent on the weather. On raining days, he often has no work or else limited time. You may say that we will be under the income threshold for our son to claim Centrelink. There has been no information as to determine if our income is based on the current financial year or the previous financial year (when we received the redundancy payment) possibly having our income over the threshold. Our son attained a TER of 87, what a waste of potential if he cannot attend university.

As you can see if our son is not eligible for Centrelink we cannot afford to live or _____ per year and help our son with the costs associated in living in Perth and travelling home to visit. The students that will be impacted next year are half way through their gap year now. They are now in limbo as to whether or not they can still realise their dream. This is totally unreasonable. These students plan their pathway to university for the previous 3 years, choosing their subjects, giving themselves the most advantage to attaining graduation and a good TER, planning if they have a gap year, planning what their accommodation costs will be.

As far as their city counterparts go, they continue to live at home, catch public transport to university and are not overly impacted by changes to Centrelink payment. Country students have the upfront costs associated with setting themselves up in Perth, this includes finding suitable accommodation, day-to-day responsibilities of living independently, prepare their own meals, deal with any emergencies, adjusting to university life, adjusting to life hours away from family, studying and sometimes working part time. This includes having the finances to support themselves for the first 4-5 months before receiving centrelink payments.

If the government decide to change the criteria, I believe it should be phased in over 2-3 years to give students and parents time to adjust to these changes. They will also impact on university numbers, and possibly university intakes. If it is 2 years some university courses need to be changed because some courses do not allow for 2 year deferment.

However it must be recognised that most country students find seasonal work in agricultural areas. There are not many agricultural, unskilled jobs that accommodate 30hrs per week for eighteen months. It does not allow for seasonal fluctuations and gaps in employment. What it will achieve is young people giving up their dream, taking unskilled jobs, bypassing university studies after a larger gap of 2 years. Is this the future we want for our young people. Please reconsider this decision.

The government of the day need to provide more assistant to country students, not less. It is unfair that parents who have worked hard, educated their children and then have to sacrifice more to give their children future opportunities that if they lived in the urban area would cause little stress on the family. More assistance for accommodation, more assistance for travelling home to family, more assistance to equalise the gap these students have already worked hard to overcome.