

Secretary
Senate Committee of Inquiry
Higher Education Support Amendment Act
(Budget Papers) 2009

The proposed changes to definition of “independence” qualification for students entering University from regional areas such as Kalgoorlie based on the Bradley Report do little to assist students required to relocate to Perth to pursue their studies.

Not everyone in remote Australia is paid exorbitant wages by mining companies; indeed many people do not work for mining companies but provide essential services to the entire community in which they live. Most of these people are what is best described as “middle class Australians” who work for an employer for less than “top dollar”, pay all their accounts and dues on time whilst pursuing the fast fading Australian dream – a house of their own before they retire. These people are generally law abiding, try to instil in their children basic Christian and Australian ideals of respect for others, lawful behaviour and a fair go. Middle class in the environment of Kalgoorlie with 2 people employed full time (beyond the mining industry) disqualifies the family for any assistance yet precludes any of life’s luxuries such as a second car, overseas (cheap to Asia) holidays, dining at restaurants except birthdays, LCD TV’s etc – all things now accepted as an Australian right!

Most of the families I know with children away in Perth studying at University will move heaven and earth within their household budgets to support their children on a daily basis as far as food etc is concerned. The increasing difficulty is with meeting accommodation costs in an ever cost increasing market. (Even allowing for the short and temporary respite in prices and rents which are already again heading upward.)

What is required is more stringent assessment of those self employed or business owning people who are able to inflate the wages/records of employment of their children and thereby qualify for the full support package and realistic accommodation expense assistance. Rooms close to Perth Universities are now in the \$150 a week vicinity.

In Kalgoorlie, employment for “gap year” students is limited to casual employment mainly in the retail trade unless one is lucky enough to know someone who can pull a few strings – these people are not on everybody’s Christmas List unfortunately.

The difficulty is that the major employers where most casual work is available in places like Kalgoorlie juggle their rosters of casuals to limit the hours to eliminate paid work breaks, overtime, etc so as to make it almost impossible to average 30 hours per week, let alone earn \$18,000 or \$19,500 year to enable the prospective student commence at the start of the next academic year.. It appears, once again, that Mr and Mrs Average get it in the neck and must struggle to pursue full participation in Australia's opportunities for their families whilst "artful dodgers" and social cost incurring members of society benefit.

For the considerable immediate future casual employment, even in cities where our youth have to go to pursue their studies, will continue to be difficult if not impossible to obtain as, naturally, preference by employers will be directed to those adults supporting families.

Once again policy appears to be drawn up focused on the coastal fringes.

Yours respectfully,

Joseph A. Baker

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