

Dear Senate Committee,

Towards the end of last year, I realised that the course I decided to pursue, Architecture, was not available at my local University, La Trobe University Bendigo. I then visited Centrelink for advice on my finances while living away from home. I was told that the best option was to take a 'Gap Year' – to work after school in order to earn \$19,532 within 18 months so as to qualify as 'Independent'.

This expected (an promised) Youth Allowance would have provided some money towards the exorbitant costs of relocation and living away from home; estimated to be around \$20,000 per annum according to the University of Melbourne's website.

I would not have received money as a 'Dependant' as my parents' combined annual income exceeded the threshold. However, this did not take into account that my brother, currently in his third year of Science at Monash University, did not take a Gap Year to qualify for Youth Allowance; hence, they must finance his accommodation. It also doesn't factor in their care of my grandfather who lives at home.

When I heard the changes will mean school-leavers must now defer Tertiary study two years in order to work 30 hours a week for 18 months to qualify as 'Independent, I wondered where all these people would find close to full-time jobs amidst a global recession. I feel these changes will not only adversely affect those hoping to study...but also those hoping to work. This demand for work will surely be of consequence to all job seekers.

I've read that the cost of relocation and living away from home (from Bendigo, Victoria to Melbourne) is approximately two and a half times that of urban students already living in and attending tertiary institutions in metropolitan regions. I believe these changes, which recognise financial situations irrespective of geography, do not adequately address the barrier between regional and metropolitan students in terms of access to tertiary study.

I will now receive a fraction of the allowance previously expected...again, a fraction of the residential fees of on-campus college – one of the cheaper options for inner-city living. I wonder how this is fair given only 33% of rural and regional students go onto tertiary study compared with 55% of metropolitan students.

In these days of equal opportunity – where am I left? I feel as though the rug has pulled out from under me...I feel betrayed. That the choice I made based on the advice of a Government agency will now be reversed without any 'phase in' period...

I cannot see how working close to full time whilst studying full time echoes any education revolution? I thought it were the able who should study, not simply the wealthy...Education should surely be a right – not a privilege.

I am currently a taxpayer. I will be a taxpayer throughout my study. I will continue to pay taxes once I graduate. I am not asking for a hand out, but simply, a leg up along

the way and a commitment to the promise made to myself and over 30,000 school-leavers in 2009.

Please, Please, Please recognise the injustice these changes confer on to rural and regional students and, in particular, me.

Yours gratefully,

Alexander Eastwood