

SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO REGIONAL ACCESS TO SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Deferring a university place in an attempt to qualify for Youth Allowance as an independent is never an easy decision; it means you have to put your life and education on hold and be left behind by friends. However without Youth Allowance thousands of students wouldn't be able to attend university. So they defer. In Bendigo alone 188 students deferred their university studies this year according to On Track Data (108 from BSSC, 50 from CCB and 30 from Girton Grammar).

I myself was one of these deferred students. My parents, a teacher and a lab tech, barely scrapped together enough to cover my school fees so to double these fees for university accommodation (an estimated \$20,000) was simply beyond them. Thus I sought advice from Centrelink who informed me that I could gain Youth Allowance by deferring my university place and earning 75% of the maximum rate of pay under wage level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale. In qualifying I would have been able to access funding which would have allowed me to relocate to attend university. Half way through my year, half way through the year of the other 187 Bendigo students and the 50,770 students across Australia we've been told our year has been wasted.

While we've been told many of us may still qualify for some funds, thousands of these students won't qualify for anything. I myself fall under the second category. Under the current criteria, as an independent, I would have received the full allowance yet under the proposed scheme I won't receive anything. My parents combined income is just over the cut off for a single dependant, my severely disabled sister (where the majority of my parents income is directed) doesn't exist. It is not only families with entirely dependant children that are unable to study full time which are over looked. Families with large age differences between dependant children also miss out; those with one child attending university and the rest all under 16 will be counted as single dependant families despite the costs they face. These families are over looked in the proposed system, and will be forced to choose to either deny their children a university education or support their child at university and neglect their other children financially.

In calculation for the eligibility for 'dependants' under the proposed system consideration needs to be given to families supporting children under the age of 16 as well as children over the age of 22 whom, through disability, are dependant on their parents. Without this change many deserving people will 'fall through the gaps' due to narrow 'dependant' eligibility criteria.