

Individual Submission to the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

Name: David Ryan

The proposed changes to the youth allowance system will impact heavily on regional students. The cost of relocating to the city and attending university has been estimated at about \$15,000 a year, not including the cost of textbooks or having a car. Without any financial support from the government, some students may not be able to afford to attend university at all.

Under the old criteria for youth allowance, students had the possibility of taking a gap year between high school and university, where they could work hard to earn \$19,500 within 18 months, to be classified as independent. This independence allowed students to receive full youth allowance benefits while studying at university. While even the full allowance of \$380 a fortnight won't cover all the expenses a student faces, it assists a great deal in paying for rent, food, and textbooks, meaning that students don't have to work excessive hours in a part-time job, and can focus on their studies. When completing tertiary education, a student's focus should be on their study, and working extreme hours on top of their course work can be a severe detriment to their university education.

Here in Mount Gambier, the gap year criterion was the only way for most students to afford a university education. I am planning to move to Adelaide next year to attend university and study Mechatronic Engineering, and am very worried about how I'm going to afford it. With the proposed changes, a student must now have worked 15 hours a week for 2 years, or 30 hours a week for 18 months in order to qualify for independent youth allowance. As most university courses can only be deferred for 12 months, this makes it impossible for students to achieve without losing their place in their course. Most alarmingly, these changes are not being phased in. This means that countless students who are undertaking a gap year at the moment will not be able to complete it, and are having the rug pulled out from under them by the government due to retrospective changes to the system. This is absolutely unfair to those students who believed they were making informed decisions about their future.

I am not against all of the proposed changes, and am in favour of the proposed start up scholarship and relocation scholarship. However, these scholarships are only available to recipients of youth allowance, so students who miss out on youth allowance miss out on everything. It also has to be noted that these scholarships are replacing the commonwealth accommodation scholarship of \$17,000 over four years; a much higher level of financial support.

The government has claimed that more students will receive Youth Allowance under the budget changes, and it will better support those who need it most. To me it seems that the 'more students' that will be receiving the allowance under the changes will be high school students who have no need for the extra pocket money. The people that need it most are students that are moving away from home to attend tertiary education, and have to pay for rent, transport, food, and textbooks.

My family is not wealthy, and forcing them to help fund my education will be a huge

financial burden on them. This is the main reason for many students in similar financial circumstances to move to earn independence; to be able to stand on our own two feet and not be a burden on our parents who have already worked so hard to support us.

Students living in metropolitan area close to universities are able to attend tertiary education a lot more easily than rural students from regional areas. Many regional students have no option but to relocate to the city in order to further their education. Accompanying this relocation comes rental payments, utility bills, transport costs, food costs etc.; many expenses that are not relevant to students fortunate enough to still live at home whilst attending university. This presents an equality issue, with rural students being at a great disadvantage. As a human right (Article 26), "higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit".

I strongly urge that the senate amend this legislation to ensure that current gap year students are not adversely affected, and that rural students are supported.

I propose to the senate that the government introduce a new piece of legislation stating that students that are required to move out of home, and relocate a certain distance (say more than 100km) in order to study or attend university should automatically be classified as independent. This, to me, makes logical sense as they will be living independently away from their homes. This solution would also compliment the original reason for bringing in the changes (i.e. wealthy metropolitan students attaining youth allowance while still living at home) and the gap year criteria could still be removed, whilst at the same time ensuring country students are supported and get a fair go.

Thankyou,
David Ryan.