

## **Submission for the Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities**

I am forwarding a submission for the above inquiry for two reasons:

1. I am a parent of young adults who live in rural Australia and wish to undertake tertiary education at either regional or metropolitan universities
2. I am the Coordinator of Student Selection of a Veterinary Science Degree at a regional university

With respect to Youth Allowance, most rural and regional students need to qualify for Independent status as a vast majority are forced to live away from home in order to attend university. The costs of living away from home are considerable, amounting to a minimum of \$10,000pa for those attending a regional campus, and approximately \$20,000 for those attending metropolitan campuses. Students from the country attending a metropolitan university face enormous expenses in rental accommodation as well as travel to and from university for holidays. In fact many cannot travel home for holidays as they need to stay “in town” to work, saving money to see them through the next semester. Students attending regional universities have a similar situation. Whilst the rents may not be as high, public transport is almost non-existent requiring the possession of a car and the costs associated with its running. Suffice to say, parents earning approximately \$40,000pa or less, with dependent children, will simply not have the means to pay for a child, or children, to live away from home and attend university. If they earn more than approximately \$60,000 their children will not qualify for Youth Allowance, and the prospective students will either not be able to attend university or attend and be severely compromised by the amount of paid work they will have to undertake in order to afford to attend university.

It is obvious that expecting Youth Allowance applicants, wishing to qualify for Independent status, to undertake work for 30 hours per week over an 18month period is illogical and impractical. It would mean that for the first semester (if students had undertaken a working “gap” year), or first 3 semesters (if students had come straight to university from school) students would be in an extremely difficult, if not impossible, situation. In a professional degree, such as Veterinary Science, students have scheduled classes totalling approximately 30 hours per week. We encourage and expect students to spend a further 30 hours per week in researching and revising information in order to successfully complete the subjects undertaken. If you add 8 hours sleep per day and 3 hours for meals a day there is simply not enough hours in the week to complete the 30 hours work that they need to undertake to qualify, and shop, travel to campus, house keep, cook etc, let alone participate in sporting activities. We encourage students to have a work / life balance and the scenario the government is proposing is impossible and in fact extremely dangerous for any attempting to achieve this. First year students are already stressed with leaving home, perhaps having to undertake some paid work, keeping up with their studies, making new friends and then having to deal with exams. We, as academics, are having to deal with these stressed students on a daily basis, and a student committing suicide during exams is a horrible and devastating event, and one which needs all measures taken to avoid. What the government is proposing I would argue will perpetuate this student stress.

As it is now, students are only just managing to survive with the assistance of Youth Allowance. All need further income, either from parental support or from paid work, to supplement Youth

Allowance. The figures don't add up for students to survive on Youth Allowance alone. The cost of administering the "Reporting Income" requirement of Youth Allowance must be enormous. Why not simply let those who are eligible for Youth Allowance earn what they can, when they can, and not penalise them for earning supplementary income necessary for them to simply survive? I am sure a huge saving could be made in administrative costs, perhaps allowing an increase in Youth Allowance payments to occur so students are not required to work such long hours just to keep ahead. The youth of today have a need for a greater disposable income than my generation needed when we attended university. We had no mobile phones, computers, limited photocopying or printing, cars and maintenance. Our expectations were different, and whilst we may blame Generation Y for much of this, it is really the parents of Gen Y, society in general and those that went before them, that are really to blame for Gen Y's high expectations.

The Government's proposed changes to qualifying for Independence for Youth Allowance will mean essentially, that prospective students will need to take a two year instead of a one year a "Gap" year in order to qualify for Independent status before attending university. For those lucky enough to be able to enter university mid-year, this is only a one semester delay. For professional degrees mid-year entry is not possible. Of course taking a two year Gap year negates any university deferment policy, meaning any university place a student gained upon leaving school is lost, and they will have the disadvantage of having to go through a UAC application and chance gaining or not gaining a place in the course of their choice. I do not discourage a one year Gap Year, as not only does it currently allow students to qualify by May of their first semester as an Independent student, but it allows them to see the world, gain new skills and a certain maturity and knowledge of the world beyond school.

I would strongly implore the Federal Government to reconsider applying this new criterion (30 hours paid work for an 18 month period) to Independence and Youth Allowance. Personally it will limit my children's opportunities to attend the University of their choice, but secondly, as an academic, I do not wish to see first and potentially second year students completely buried under the stress of attending university. We run the risk of very good students being unable to attend university, or attending and becoming so disillusioned with the requirements to work and keep up with study that they leave before completion. Both are poor scenarios from anyone's point of view.

Best wishes,



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