

To Whom It May Concern.

My name is Prudence Campbell and I am currently studying a Law/Arts degree at the University of Western Australia. Prior to my studies I lived in a small town called Kendenup in rural WA, an hour inland from Albany.

I, like many others, was very fortunate to grow up in regional Australia. However I was alarmed to hear of the proposed initiatives which would change the Youth Allowance criterion, and effectively force regional students to work full time for two year before being declared financially independent.

Upon finishing my TEE, I went straight to university. I was offered a scholarship, which ensured my place in the course of my choice regardless of my final score. Because I was competing against metropolitan students who are taught to the TEE, I accepted, although it would mean that I would have forgo the gap year I had intended to have before commencing university. Instead I was required to take a leave of absence from my studies for a year and work, in order to demonstrate my financial independence. Ideally I would not have taken any time from my degree; in order to catch up for the year I was required to take off, I have 'overloaded' and taken more than the recommended number of course units. I was particularly fortunate in that my parents, and my extended family living in the city have been able to support me in my effort to complete my degree. However not everyone is as fortunate.

Beginning tertiary study already involves a considerable degree of transition. This transition is noticeably harder for country students. More often than not, commencing tertiary education means moving out of home, and living independently, in addition to preparing for a new stage in their academic careers. Positions with residential colleges are prized and highly sought after as a means of making the change to tertiary study easier, but many students and their families find the fees prohibitive and the positions limited. Furthermore the scholarships offered to regional students are predominantly single cash grants, which while appreciated, don't provide students with the means to support themselves or make a shift to tertiary education financially viable.

University campuses in regional areas provide access to some courses, but the realities of limited resources and small class numbers means that many courses, particularly ones with higher academic entrance requirements such as Law, Medicine and Engineering, are only offered at metropolitan campuses.

By changing the requirements for Youth Allowance, regional students must now delay their university studies for at least 18 months. Once they are eligible for Youth Allowance, they are still required to compete in a very tight rental market and work to support themselves. This is in comparison to metropolitan students, who have the option to remain at home for longer, and have a family unit closer to support them.

Many students graduating in the 2008 class were taking gap years when the changes were announced. These students must now prepare for a further year of work before attending university or TAFE is even remotely financially viable. Many of these students will simply elect not to begin tertiary education. With the current skills shortage, the proposed changes are making it harder for regional students to 'upskill' and arm themselves with the qualifications that they require in today's international

job market. Many of these students have strong family and sentimental attachments to their local communities, and intend to return upon finishing their studies. Changing the Youth Allowance requirements effectively deprives these communities of skilled, tertiary educated citizens, as local children find the shift to tertiary education a prohibitive financial burden.

I appreciate your having the time to consider my views, and I urge you to extend the same consideration to the rural and regional students of Australia in making your deliberations.

Yours sincerely
Prudence Campbell