

Inquiry into Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities

While I understand the situation of country students (I was brought up in a town of less than 1000 people and had to move to the city and work several years before I could afford to attend university) the government seems to have forgotten entirely the city students they have betrayed by changing the rules for those already undertaking a gap year.

My son is working hard full-time so that he can move next year to attend university. While we only live an hour and a half from the University, this would still mean three hours travel a day if my son was to stay at home (more likely four hours, as the public transport never runs on time). Furthermore, it seems to have escaped most people that city accommodation is very expensive and we do not all live in big houses. My children share bedrooms (which they also use to study). This was difficult enough when studying for the HSC but would be even more difficult when studying at University. My son took a legitimate option to turn down a scholarship and work for 12 months to qualify for youth allowance, allowing him to live close to the University (saving three hours travel time a day) and also to have his own room in which he could study. The fact that the government could make the changes effectively retrospective is unreasonable. There is no guarantee that my son will be offered another scholarship next year and he has already paid a non-refundable deposit for on-campus accommodation. Thus in effect, he is out of pocket several thousand dollars after making a decision based on Centrelink advice. Doesn't Centrelink represent the Government, hence in effect the government was providing misleading advice to current gap year students.

Furthermore, the cost of on-campus accommodation is \$250 a week to share a room in a four-bedroom apartment. This does not include food or the Internet etc. Even with working a couple of days a week, with the additional costs of attending university (books etc) this is unaffordable without the assistance of youth allowance. In addition, if you are studying a course such as engineering that requires you to attend university five days a week, it is difficult for students to find time to work more than two shifts a week to support their study.

The government has expressed concern about students from wealthy families claiming youth allowance while living at home. While I do not support any retrospective change to the current legislation, if the government insists on making changes for the current gap year students, why not extend their exemption to all students who are moving away from home to attend university irrespective of where they live.

I have also read that the government is concerned that many students who take a gap year do not go onto university. However, making them take a two year gap is likely to increase this percentage, as they may find it more difficult to give up a well-established job to invest in their education.

As I said, while I understand the country students' situation, it should not be assumed that city students are not affected. I strongly support country students having better support to attend university, however, the rules should never have been changed in a retrospective manner.