

Rural students have overall the same education needs as their metropolitan counterparts, the same desires and the same aspirations. But it is often harder to fulfil these if you live rurally than if you lived closer to the city.

I'm currently in year 12 rurally near Wangaratta, about 3 hours north east of Melbourne, and as I investigate tertiary options I realise what a disadvantage living rurally is. Most universities are located in and around Melbourne. If I choose to attend one of these, I'll need to live away from home which brings with it a lot of costs.

Closer to home, I could choose to study in Albury/Wodonga about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an hour's drive away from home. Aside from the length of this commute, which would be quite difficult considering I can't get my licence until mid next year, not all courses are available at rural campuses. Engineering, for example, is not taught at either of Albury/Wodonga's universities, Charles Sturt or La Trobe.

So if I wanted to study a particular course, I would have to leave home to do so. And the financial impact of doing so is quite strong. Depending on the type and location of accommodation total costs for a year total around \$13,000-\$15,000, about \$10,000 higher than for those studying at home.

For most families this is a significant cost, in some cases so significant that it postpones or prevents them from sending a child to university. Others, with careful budgeting, part-time jobs in addition to studying and many meals of two-minute noodles, are able to afford going to University. Just.

The government's "Youth Allowance" provides some students with money to make their university life more comfortable, allowing for better studying. The problem with the Youth Allowance is its criteria. Many students do not qualify despite living away from because their parents earn a poorly defined 'too much'.

However, there was a way for students to prove their independence. By earning a certain amount of money within a period of eighteen months, an amount many earn within a year, they could qualify for the youth allowance. To the annoyance of many, the federal government recently decided to change this.

This means any students who have deferred university to take a 'gap year' to earn this money and assert their independence may find their efforts in vain. Others who were planning on doing this before starting university will have to revise their plans. In some cases, this could mean changing their course or not pursuing tertiary education at all.

Changing the Youth-Allowance will likely cause a drop in university attendance by rural students, and barely any change on metropolitan students. So is it really fair that it should be harder for rural students to follow their dreams in their desired course?

So if the government wants end the disparity in tertiary education, to give rural students the same chances in tertiary education and life, then they need to rethink the changes. Keep

the Youth Allowance as it is. Or change the criteria so that everyone who lives and studies away from home qualifies. Or subsidise the accommodation for us students who do. Don't make it even harder for rural students to get the opportunities they would have if they lived closer to the city.