

10/11/2010

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir or Madam

Submission : Exemption under the Fee Help Scheme

My name is Martin Watson and I am currently completing my Bachelor of Aviation course at the Swinburne University of Technology. I have successfully acquired my Single Engine Command Instrument Rating (SECIR) Commercial Pilots Licence (CPL), and I have just recently upgraded to a Multi-Engine Command Instrument Rating (MECIR). Unfortunately I have encountered a significant problem in the last semester with which I was hoping you could assist.

I started the degree in 2008, where all university subjects were held at Swinburne and the flight training was conducted at Oxford Aviation Academy at Moorabbin Airport. When first starting the course I was required to self fund the flight training and had paid up until I acquired my Private Pilots Licence (PPL).

However from 2009 the government loan scheme FEE-HELP (administered under the Higher Education Support Act 2003, by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations), became available to Swinburne students, and a loan limit of \$83,313 was available to all students undertaking flight training.

The FEE-HELP loan was structured to be available to students as a Graduate Certificate in Piloting, where the training was divided into three compulsory practicums and four elective practicums; where each practicum had a set credit value of 12.5, and the graduate certificate would be complete when a minimum of fifty credit points were reached.

If a student were to use the loan scheme from the start of their flight training, by completing the three compulsory subjects and one of the electives both the monetary limit and the credit point limit will be reached.

However as I had self funded my PPL, the first of the three compulsory practicums had already been completed, as such I was exempted from the first practicum, and I did not start using the FEE-HELP loan until the second compulsory practicum. The link at the bottom of the first page will explain the Swinburne course of aviation study.

It was assumed by both the students and Oxford Aviation Academy that as we had the first practicum exempted there was extra room at the final stages of the flying training to undertake two elective practicums, and as such I was advised by my instructor to enroll in the MECIR elective in the first semester, and the Instructor Rating (IR) elective in the second semester.

As advised I withdrew my initial enrolment for the IR for semester one, and enrolled myself in the MECIR elective. Once I had completed my MECIR and put my enrolment in for the IR for semester two I was advised a day before the commencement of the semester that I was unable to undertake the IR elective as I had reached the credit point limit of fifty points, even though I still had enough money remaining on the loan scheme to complete one more elective.

Although having a MECIR is very desirable in the aviation industry, I am still considered a very inexperienced pilot with only 198.1 hours; with most charter jobs requiring in excess of 400 hours.

Having an IR makes it a lot more accessible for inexperienced pilots to get a job as a flight Instructor to build hours, and if I was aware that I was unable to undertake more than one elective, I would have definitely not made my choice of doing the MECIR instead if the IR.

I am not the only person to go under the FEE-HELP loan scheme from my class of 2008, there are at least five other students affected in the same way that I am.

I am hopeful that an exemption could be sought, so I could use the remaining funds on my FEE-HELP loan account to undertake the IR and open various doors into the aviation industry that are currently unavailable to me.

If the committee could assist, it would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely

Martin Watson