

My name is Kahlia Vandyk, and I am currently completing Year 11 at Bundaberg State High School. At the moment, I'm looking at my options for starting university in 2011, and becoming increasingly worried about being able to afford it. Now that the federal government has decided to change the eligibility guidelines for Youth Allowance, I feel as though it will be nearly impossible for me to be able to pay for university at all. This is not because of the cost of university itself, but because of the associated costs involved in moving away from home in order to obtain the degree I want.

Many of the courses I am interested in, such as law and journalism, are not available here, simply because Central Queensland University does not offer them due to lack of staff and/or enrolment numbers. Friends of mine wishing to study science based subjects such as medicine are also facing similar problems, despite the government constantly encouraging as many people as possible to study subjects like these at university. This means that many of my friends and I will be forced to move at least four hours away in order to attend university and pursue the careers we want.

Based upon my parents' combined income and what I am currently saving from my part-time job, there is no way I can afford to cover the costs of moving away from home. At the moment, I estimate that it will cost me anywhere between \$15,000 and \$20,000 just for rent each year. As I am considering studying a dual degree, studying either law or journalism as well as political science, I would be at university for up to five years, meaning that the total cost of rent would be anything up to \$100,000. I would also need to consider basic living costs such as food, phone bills and fuel, and the cost of relocation, including removal fees and the time it would take to find a new job.

As the majority of universities cite ten hours per subject per week as a typical workload, there is no way I could complete a degree and also work thirty hours a week to qualify for Youth Allowance. It would also be impossible for me to work reduced hours and still earn enough money to cover all my expenses, meaning that any government assistance I could qualify for would be vital. This means that I would then have to defer my studies for two years, which would inconvenience me as I would still be paying back my HECS-HELP debt at a much older age. Deferring my studies would be further complicated by the fact that some universities only allow you to defer for one year, not two.

I don't believe that I should be disadvantaged simply because I come from a regional area and want to attend university. Both state and federal governments in Australia encourage Year 12 leavers to study at tertiary institutions; however, they do not fully consider the difficulties that many students face in terms of financial eligibility. I would like to see more assistance provided to regional students, simply so that we are no more or less disadvantaged than students from city and metropolitan areas. Australia has long had a reputation as a "fair country", and I think this should extend to allowing everyone the option of university.

Yours sincerely,
Kahlia Vandyk