

# **Assessment of the adequacy of Government measures to provide equitable access to secondary and post-secondary education opportunities to students from rural and regional communities.**

## **Background**

My daughter completed her secondary education in 2008 and was offered a place at the University of Western Australia (UWA) Perth. She is currently on her gap year working towards independence so that she can afford to take up her offer and attend UWA in 2010. We live in the south west of Western Australia about 300km south of Perth. She is the youngest of 3 children her two siblings both attend university and completed a gap year to gain their independence. All of our children need to move away from home and move to the city to attend courses only offered at the city campus of UWA.

In good faith our daughter complied with the existing rules as did her siblings and if the new rules are applied 83% of the way through her gap year she will not be able to take up her university place or attend until 2011/12 as she will be required to have worked 30 hours per week for 18 months in a two year period.

### **a. The financial impact on rural and regional students who are attending metropolitan secondary schools, universities or TAFE;**

My daughter will be required to find shared rental accommodation as she cannot afford to pay for residential college fees which are generally about \$300 per week. Rents in Perth vary between \$260 to \$360 for a one or two bedroom unit close to the uni. She has had to buy herself a car to access work locally and she will use this to get to the city and return to the country during breaks. In the city she will need to fund her transport needs, food, clothing, rental, medical, books etc and have considerable savings for emergencies. A conservative poverty line costing for this per week is:

Transport	\$35 (Bus or train) not including vehicle costs	
Food	\$70 (this includes toiletries)	
Clothing	\$5 (notional)	
Rental	\$130	
Electricity, phone, water	\$15	
Internet (for study)	\$10	
Medical	\$5	
<b>Total essentials</b>	<b>\$270/week</b>	<b>Youth allowance is \$185/week</b>

***Single one off Purchases Conservative Annual cost.***

Books	\$800
Computer	\$2,000 includes software and printer
Vehicle	\$5,000

She will need savings of between \$8,000 to \$10,000 just to get started.

As she will not be living at home we will need to help her with costs as we can. This is generally in the vicinity of anywhere between \$100 to \$200 per week depending on unforeseen costs that arise such as repair maintenance household goods, vehicle repair, extra clothing and food costs . These figures are derived from our experience with our other two children attending university who have attained "independence".

She will need to also get a part time job if her course contact hours allow this and currently she can only earn \$118 per week before it would reduce her allowance.

**b. The education alternatives for rural and regional students wanting to study in regional areas;**

Nil if you are studying specialised courses such as Podiatric Medicine, Human Movement Dentistry or Medicine. If you have the opportunity to attend the best rated university as in this case then you have to move to the city.

**c. The implications of current and proposed government measures on prospective students living in rural and regional areas;**

Under the current centrelink rules you are deemed eligible for youth allowance under the independence category if you have been out of school for at least 18 months and have earned at least 75% of the maximum rate of pay under Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale in an 18 month period that is you have earned \$19,532.

In order to achieve this students need to find jobs. As you will be aware the economic situation over the past 12 to 18 month has been depressed and competition for jobs is high especially in rural areas. Young people with little or no experience in the workforce compete with experienced workers who may have lost their jobs. Work in the country is generally seasonal and as in this area limited to the farming winery or hospitality industry. At the peak seasonal times local youth compete with the influx of experienced workers from all over the state and country. Those students lucky enough to get work will only get casual work for a few days here and there. In our daughters case she has 2 to 3 jobs of varying hours and days of the week that enable her to

earn enough to be able to meet the criteria above. She will have earned enough money to be deemed eligible by January or February 2010. Ready to start uni in February and having to live off her savings until May 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 when her first Youth Allowance payment can be made.

She has in good faith adhered to the guidelines and compromised her social and emotional wellbeing. By working the several jobs at odd hours this has resulted in her not being able to socialize with friends and or participate in family recreational pursuits/ sport. She is happy to do this for the longer term gain.

**The proposed changes will mean that:**

1. She can not take up her deferred place at uni in February 2010
2. She will not be deemed eligible for youth allowance under the independence criteria until 2011 when she has been out of school for 2years and has worked 30 hours per week for 18 months during that 2 year period.
3. I am advised by centrelink that the criterion is **30 hours per week consecutively not an average of 30 hours per week**. Therefore if she works 60 hours one week and 25 the next the second week does not count. This will mean that the 18 months could stretch to 20 or 24 months unless she has regular 30 hours per week. This is not possible in country areas where the work is seasonal and or highly competitive.

**d. The short- and long-term impact of current and proposed government policies on regional university and TAFE college enrolments;**

Clearly new high school graduates seeking and needing youth allowance will not enrol in regional institutions if those institutions do not provide the relevant accredited and valued courses that will lead to employment. They will not enrol if they are not financially able to do so. Enrolments will be taken by people who are financially able and who are looking to obtain a degree (any degree) because they have been casualties of the economic downturn and or unemployed for long periods of time. Regional institutions need to provide competitive specialised courses that lead to jobs. Comparisons between universities indicate that a specific discipline degree from a prestigious university has a far more significant correlation to obtaining a job especially in the areas of dentistry, medicine, engineering, psychology etc.

**e. The adequacy of government measures to provide for students who are required to leave home for secondary or post-secondary study;**

*See studies relating to Poverty in Australia.*

**f. The educational needs of rural and regional students;**

**g. The impact of government measures and proposals on rural and regional communities; and**

**h. Other related matters.**

My comments here relate to the items e,f,g above. Rural youth have many and varied challenges that their city counterparts never face. When it comes to travel distances are huge, housing is in short supply, education is of a lower standard, recreation while plentiful elite sport is only catered for in the city, employment is difficult to obtain, social and emotional wellbeing is a challenge in very small isolated regions. Yet rural youth learn resiliency and believe that if you work hard and develop trust you can achieve whatever you want.