



## EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PRACTITIONERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AUSTRALASIA

14 August 2009

The Senate Committee of Enquiry into Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education opportunities

Australian Parliament

Canberra

Australia

### To Whom it May Concern

Equal opportunity practitioners in higher education institutions around Australia commend the government on a number of the budget measures that have positioned student equity matters as a significant issue for the sector.

While we are cognisant of the shortcomings of the Youth Allowance provisions that has benefited some people for whom it was never intended, i.e. people who were effectively still supported by their parents but unable to access Youth Allowance due to an inability to meet the means test, we draw attention, however, to shortcomings in the new measures related to this issue; namely:

- The revised family income threshold,
- The 18 month working requirement for prospective tertiary students to qualify for Independent Youth Allowance, and
- An apparent lack of access for students on Disability Support Pensions, Carer's Payments or Parenting payments.

We would request that you consider the following comments in relation to these.

1. While the family income threshold as a measure of entitlement to full Youth Allowance has been raised and should capture those in extreme poverty, the costs of attending university are considerable and for those families who might be classified as 'moderately poor', the costs are often beyond their means. A further lifting of the minimum family income threshold to a more realistic level, would better address the real disadvantages of low income.
2. The new test for Independent Youth Allowance is based upon hours worked. This specifically disadvantages people in rural and remote areas who often have extremely limited access to paid work. Individual consideration needs to be given to people in such circumstances, for example those who have been unable to obtain post-school employment and are on some form of unemployment benefit. It is essential that flexibility be embedded within the testing arrangements.

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PRACTITIONERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AUSTRALASIA**

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In particular, this new measure impacts on the current cohort of students who anticipated being able to commence studies at the beginning of 2010. We would recommend that a transition period be permitted in which those students received an offer in 2009, but who deferred to take a gap year, and who wish to be considered for Independent YA for 2010, to be considered under the current rules.

In addition, 18 months is a peculiar timeframe to set, when the majority of university courses commence at the beginning of the year. Further consideration should be given to the logic of this time frame.

3. There is lack of clarity about the situation for students on Disability Support Pensions, Carer's Payments or Parenting payments and whether they will have access to these new Centrelink-managed scholarships arrangements. These students should not be disadvantaged further and access to appropriate levels of financial support should be incorporated into support programs. Clarification on this matter would be welcomed.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise these concerns. We hope that early decisions will be forthcoming in order that prospective students and their families can appropriately plan for their tertiary study in 2010 and beyond.

Sincerely

Dr Ann Stewart  
National Co-Convenor (student issues)

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