

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE

The Albany Youth Advisory Council does not support the changes to Youth Allowance criteria.

The proposed criteria grossly disadvantages country and regional students who wish to pursue tertiary studies either at University or a Metropolitan Tafe as for most students they have no option but to move to either a Regional city or Perth to pursue their chosen career path.

The change from a set target amount to 30 hours a week for 18 months is impossible for many regional students. There isn't the work in their communities to be able to clock up the required hours – any work that is available is usually casual or part time, and this could open the flood gates to young people being exploited by employers to meet their required hours.

It is also extremely difficult for regional families to be able to financially afford to support their children through university studies. It is more than just the unit and books costs. The financial burden on students moving away from home is huge – rent, utilities, transport, food and that is without other things like clothing, entertainment and any type of social life that is integral to a young person's well being. We already have many university students living below the poverty line – these changes will increase the number of students living below the poverty line! And their families themselves will also be put under extra strain as they struggle to support their children at university. With depression in rural areas already a problem, this could deepen the issue. Metropolitan students have the option of staying at home – rural kids simply don't have that choice if they want to pursue a career that is not a trade.

For those students that decide to go to university without Youth Allowance will be forced to work more hours than their fellow students just to make ends meet. This will be detrimental not only to their studies, but also to their mental health. The increased stress of juggling studies on top of an increase in paid employment hours just to make ends meet can lead to anxiety and depression.

Current university guidelines only allow for a 1 year deferral of studies. Most students who take this 'gap year' use this 12 month break to earn some dollars to help them at university, or to pursue volunteer work. If they are forced to clock up the 30 hours per week instead of the cash target, they may have to defer their studies beyond the 12 months which many courses do not allow. This could stop many students from pursuing any university studies at all! Uni would become 'too hard' or there will be too many barriers for them to continue their education. It is also not allowed at most university to start a course Mid Year, so if they are unable to get 30 hours a week straight out of school, they will have to reapply to get in to university, which may or may not work for them if submissions for later years are of a higher grade than what their TER scores were.

For students living in Albany who want to pursue their studies have limited options

available to them.

The local UWA campus only has a limited number of 1st and 2nd Year course, and a very selective range of subjects and there is a limited number of degrees that can be completed externally through universities like Murdoch.

The Tafe does offer some university courses, mainly nursing however most of their courses are targeting the trades/business level and will not give the students the qualifications they require for their chosen career.

The proposed changes will have a negative impact on university enrolments in key areas important to rural areas, as rural students are more likely to come back to rural areas than metropolitan students. We are already facing a crisis with not enough rural doctors and teachers – this has the potential to make the situation even worse.

It could also lead to an increase in Tafe enrolments as students choose to pursue a Trade or Tafe qualification instead of university. While this could address the trade shortfall, in the long term we will have less university qualified young people. This is also dependant on having Tafes with their preferred course close enough to home that they don't have to move. Tafe is seen as 'cheaper', 'more affordable' and 'easier'.

Current measures in place do not do enough for regional students. Despite the higher costs for regional students to move in to cities, both financially, and emotionally, they receive the same rent assistance as metropolitan students who could live at home and still attend their studies. Regional students should qualify for more rent assistance than metropolitan as they have the greater expenses and lack the family support that comes with having family close by.

The Government could do more for regional students, by providing a Food Stamp system to ensure no student is forced to live on nothing to get by. They could also increase the amount of student accommodation both on and off university campuses, and give rural students especially transport/fuel cards similar to those given the seniors to enable them to travel home when required. For some regional students, the cost to travel the 4-5 hours home to family is beyond what their meagre budgets can afford, so are forced to spend even more time away from family.

The Government could also increase the range of scholarships available to regional students, and provide better promotion of these scholarships. Too often students miss out on the financial support scholarships bring because they just aren't aware of what is available to them.

To ensure students can pursue studies closer to home, the State and Federal governments should work at increasing the number of tertiary courses available in regional centres, and support the increase in university partnerships which sees full university courses offered through tafes. Alternatively the Government should support the expansion of University centres in regional areas (like UWA Albany), and make high speed internet access more affordable and obtainable for regional students so they can pursue flexible learning options to complete their degrees.

The impact on regional students with the proposed changes to Youth Allowance is huge. They will be forced to live way below the poverty line just to make it through their undergraduate degree, or diploma level certificate, and make it even harder for regional students to go to university. There are already so many barriers to regional students, this just makes it another reason not to attend.

Instead of a lump sum they can earn over the summer break by working long hours at CBH or whatever other holiday work they can obtain, they could lose their position in the preferred course at university as they are forced to defer beyond the allowed one year. Also if work is available it is usually casual or part time and extremely difficult to accrue the 30 hours a week, even if they work more than one job.

The proposed changes are grossly unfair to regional students and will place undue pressure on what already is a stressful time of their lives.