



DISCUSSION PAPER – ACCESS TO YOUTH ALLOWANCE FOR REGIONAL STUDENTS.

Students and their families living in regional WA have to face significant barriers to gain access to higher education.

Sourcing accommodation, separation from the family unit and living away from home already provide a substantial impost for our regional students that many metropolitan students will never have to experience.

This is compounded by the significant financial burden that students living away from the family home have to face. Current legislation does not allow for Centrelink to have any flexibility when dealing with students who do not meet the guidelines for accessing Youth Allowance.

FINANCIAL BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

- The financial impact borne by regional families sending their children to study in the metropolitan area is significant.
- Rent is a significant financial burden for those unable to find student accommodation, and unable to live rent free at home like students in the metropolitan area may be able to.
- The cost of fuel and tyranny of distance when travelling to visit parents means that family birthdays or special occasions are not always possible.
- The cost of remaining in contact with family via phone calls and internet access is also a factor.
- Students living in the metropolitan area will also have to factor in bills and the cost of owning and maintaining transport.
- The addition of new compulsory university fees for student services has created an extra barrier to higher education.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION OPTIONS IN REGIONAL WA

- In many areas of regional WA, there is little to no access to higher education opportunities beyond primary school and secondary school.
- A number of public secondary schools in regional WA have closed over the past decade, further amplifying a lack of educational opportunities for regional students.
- University access in regional WA is limited only to major regional centres. (ie Kalgoorlie, Albany, Bunbury, Geraldton).
- The courses offered in regional WA are limited.
- External studies through a metropolitan university is not equal to the option to study on campus, as the opportunity for contact with staff and other students is limited.

YOUTH ALLOWANCE REVIEW

As part of negotiations between the Government and the Crossbench, a formal review into the Youth Allowance system will take place July 1, 2011.

Recommendations found as part of this Review will be implemented by January 1, 2012.

Tony Crook will have the opportunity to make a submission to this Review on behalf of his electorate of O'Connor.

Tony Crook has also ensured the guidelines separating inner-regional and outer-regional students will be abolished by January 1, 2012 as part of this Review.

FURTHER ISSUES

Current Youth Allowance criteria are not flexible and are not readily applicable to all regional students.

Key issues that need to be addressed include:

18 month wait before application is accepted. Universities do not accept a deferral of more than 12 months, so students must either apply as a mature age student later in life or spend the first six months of university unsupported. It has been indicated that the initial six month period is the most stressful and financially demanding.

Parental income assessment. Should a student prove financial independence by satisfying Youth Allowance criteria, they will still be assessed based on parental income. If an adult is living and studying away from home without financial support, why should they be assessed on parental income?

Forced gap year. Not all students wish to take a gap year, and would rather progress through the system without delays. What measures can be put in place to allow students who wish to attend university immediately access to financial assistance?

Scholarships as income. Scholarships provided to students are assessed as personal income when Centrelink determines how much a student is allocated per fortnight. This must be addressed.

“In the seven years after leaving school, close to half of metropolitan students gain a university or TAFE degree, while only a third of rural students gain a qualification in that time.”

(Australian Council for Educational Research)

WORKING TOWARDS A SOLUTION

It is clear that the Youth Allowance system currently does not provide fair and equitable opportunities for regional students to access higher education.

Federal Member for O'Connor Tony Crook will continue to work with the Federal Government to overcome some of these barriers to education.

Tony Crook will raise these issues as part of the Federal Government's Review into Youth Allowance later this year.

If you have concerns about Youth Allowance affecting you, please email tony.crook.mp@aph.gov.au and Tony will incorporate your concerns into his submission.

