



Media release

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## Free Guides Fill in the Gaps about Studying at University or TAFE

The Australian Scholarships Group's (ASG) two free guides answer students' and their parents' questions about higher education. ASG's *Get Smart Guide* and ASG's *Get Smart Scholarships Guide* provide comprehensive and expert information, including the recent government policy changes to youth allowance and student support.

ASG commissioned tertiary student-services expert, Mr Vince Callaghan to update the e-guides to provide students and their parents with all the information required for them to navigate their way forward in the potentially confusing terrain of higher education.

With the passing of the Australian Government's *Student Income Support Bill*, ASG's *Get Smart Guides* provide all the details of the changes and what they mean for students and their families in city, regional or rural locations. The guides explain the costs of study, how to access student support and entitlements, scholarship opportunities, plus the tips and traps involved when dealing with the new government regulations and criteria.

Mr Callaghan said that there was often a lot of "misinformation" passed around to students and their parents and ASG's *Get Smart Guide* and ASG's *Get Smart Scholarships Guide* aim to fill in the gaps with the facts.

"The changes to youth allowance and student support really came through at the 11th hour, and while there are some very positive outcomes for students, particularly regional students, understanding and accessing information about the new changes could prove a challenge for students and their parents," Mr Callaghan said.

Mr Callaghan urged students and their parents to download the free copies of ASG's *Get Smart Guides* (from ASG's website – [www.asg.com.au](http://www.asg.com.au)), which aim to fill the information gaps for students and their parents.

ASG's General Manager, Development, Ms Frida Kordovoulos said that university and TAFE studies are the pathways for young people to gain a complete education.

"ASG is committed to assisting parents provide education opportunities for their children and supporting young people's participation so they can gain the lifetime benefits that education opportunities can provide to them.

"The announced changes to youth allowance and student support will dispel some of the uncertainty of the past few months. Students and their parents now have access to information that spells out the policy changes to government assistance for higher education.

"At the same time, the announcement also demonstrates just how vital it is for parents of young children to plan early for their children's education so wherever possible they're not in the position of having to rely solely on such support," Ms Kordovoulos added.

Mr Callaghan said: "while there had been much media discussion about the real estate mantra – location, location, location now applying to youth support, the new policy changes have broader consequences both positive and negative in nature".

### On the positive side:

- The introduction of the Start Up Scholarships and the Relocation Scholarships.
- Also the long awaited change to parental income testing which will assist many students, particularly regional and rural students.
- The annual reduction of the age of Independence down to 22 years (from 25 years) by the year 2012 (previously the criteria until 1998 and is now returned).
- The change to how much a student can earn being changed up to \$400 a fortnight without it eating into Centrelink benefits commencing in 2012 is also long awaited, given that the current amount of \$236 a fortnight hasn't changed since 1993.
- Some rural and regional students will be happy with the gap year concession.

**Possible problem areas:**

- Likely confusion occurring about what constitutes “very remote”, “remote” and “outer regional” in order to take advantage of the concession.
- The other negative here is that many “gap year” students who defer their tertiary places don’t take up their deferred places.
- The Relocation Scholarships post year one go from \$4000 in the first year down to \$1000 subsequently, which may not be particularly realistic.
- A major issue is that the whole debate on this bill has demonstrated that there are real problems for regional student participation and yet the regional taskforce will not be established until 2012.

ASG’s *Get Smart Guide* and ASG’s *Get Smart Scholarships Guide* are available for free download from ASG’s website: [www.asg.com.au/resources](http://www.asg.com.au/resources) – under Guides.

ASG is Australia’s leading not-for-profit friendly society specialising in education benefits. ASG’s Education Program™ offers a unique, convenient, and proven way for families to plan for their children or grandchildren’s future education. The program can be tailored to suit the needs of most family budgets.

For further information about ASG and ASG’s Education Program™, visit [www.asg.com.au](http://www.asg.com.au) or phone: 1800 648 945.

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**Note:**

- **Mr Vince Callaghan**, expert tertiary student services adviser and author of *ASG’s Get Smart Guide* and *ASG’s Get Smart Scholarships Guide* is available for interview.
- **Images** (low and high-resolutions) are available at: [www.asg.com.au/ images\\_asggsg](http://www.asg.com.au/images_asggsg)

**For more information, please contact:**

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