

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this submission to express my deep concern over the proposed changes to elements of the workforce participation criteria for independence under the Youth Allowance system.

The current system allows children of middle income earners to access Youth Allowance for study purposes by earning 75% of the Youth training wage over an 18 month period after leaving school.

Traditional 'GAP' year students work extremely hard to reach this income level something that is particularly difficult in the tough economic climate in rural Australia at the moment.

The new budget proposes that this criteria is removed as proof of independence.

If students are no longer able to achieve independence in this way many students will be eliminated from the chance of attending university. This move will particularly impact negatively on country students who face astronomical costs for living expenses due to being unable to live in the family home.

Current year GAP students will not be able to achieve independence as they will not have been away from high school for the full 18 months on 01/01/2010.

Many of these students especially country students will be unable to take up course offers in 2010 due to the severe financial strain this will place upon themselves and their families and many may end up as long term welfare recipients due to the lack of qualifications and education.

By implementing this change, pressure will also be put onto parents who would normally be looking at placing funds into superannuation for their own future once children have become independent – these parents will need to rely more heavily on Centrelink income when they would normally become self funded retirees in many cases.

These changes also do not consider the seasonal employment of rural Australians where to achieve 30hrs per week every week for 18months is virtually an impossibility, what about consideration of the hundreds of hours put in during harvest and tourist seasons.

Those lucky enough to obtain employment in their gap year will be forced to stay another 6-12 months in their jobs thereby denying the jobs to the next batch of school leavers who will then be hanging around unable to continue studies and not working due to the unavailability of jobs.

Unemployed youth is an enormous social issue in Australia already and this shortsighted measure to change the independence criteria will compound this problem greatly.

Australia is currently importing skilled labour. How amazing that the government is willing to do this but not willing to invest a minute portion of the welfare budget on the group of young Australians that are the best hope for the future of this country.

A student who has worked through their 'GAP' year will be 19 by the time they attend university, old enough to vote and old enough to be viewed as independent particularly after working hard after leaving high school to achieve the goal of university attendance.

These students have not sat back and just expected government handouts, they have worked hard for the right to be viewed as independent from their parents.

To deny young people the chance to develop independence via this criteria is an erosion of their rights and a miscalculation by the government - after all this group of people will be tomorrows voters and tax payers.

I register my protest and request that the government of Australia reconsiders this discriminating budget measure.

Yours Faithfully

Nicola Gibson

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