

To Whom it may Concern,

I am writing this submission in regards to the recent changes made to the youth allowance eligibility criteria.

I currently reside in Baranduda, Victoria with my family and completed my VCE at Catholic College Wodonga in 2009. It has long been my dream to study law and after receiving the marks (96.25 ENTER), I was offered a place at Deakin University in Burwood, Melbourne studying a double degree in law/arts.

I had always planned to take a gap year in 2010 to gain practical experience in the legal industry, save money to move and gain status as an independent so as to qualify for youth allowance. I was lucky enough to obtain a twelve-month Legal Traineeship at a local Law Firm at the conclusion of exams last year.

My family is not in a financial position to support me for the duration of my course as living expenses, book fees and other unforeseeable costs continue to rise. The changes to the criteria now mean that I may have to defer my place for a further 12 months or attempt to find employment in Melbourne for 30 hours a week whilst undertaking my first year of University. Neither option is desirable for the reasons that I set out below. Deferring your course for 2 years or waiting to apply to universities for 2 years is not a plausible option. The longer that a person defers their course the less likely they are to ever attend university. Universities are hardly in sync with these proposed changes either. Places are very limited for non-year 12 leavers, mid-year intakes are complicated and finding accommodation half way through the year (whether on residence or renting elsewhere) is virtually impossible. Until these changes are accommodated for in Universities' intake procedures the changes that force us to work for 18 months are just not feasible.

Living in a very small country town, the job opportunities are practically non-existent. I am already travelling to Wodonga to work and even here, positions for young people are limited. Twelve-month Gap year programs are offered but they are competitive and not sufficient in numbers for those applying. Working for 18 months further stretches this problem. Employers are reluctant to hire people for this period as workplace hiring tends to be a cyclical thing.

These changes are also blatant discrimination against inner regional students. The government cannot possibly justify how someone living 20 kilometres down the road (who attended the same school and whose parents have an identical income) can qualify and others cannot. We both still have to move the 3.5 hours to Melbourne. It is ludicrous. These zoning areas are not a true indication of who should be eligible for youth allowance!

The income thresholds are also still very unrealistic. Yes, it may open the door for more lower- income earners but the average Australian family is yet again hit the hardest. These income thresholds do not take into account step-children, outgoings or other mitigating circumstances.

At the end of the day my chosen course of Law is not offered at either of the local universities (La Trobe or Charles Sturt) and to study it I will still have to move the 3.5 hours to Melbourne (the closest city that offers Law). I feel that I, and others in the same situation, are being penalised for wanting to pursue a professional career.

The Gillard government are preaching one thing and trying to put in place another. On

one hand, they are advocating that they are helping to fill the shortages of qualified professionals in country towns, when they are in fact making it more difficult for people like me to gain a degree. The changes are not logical, fair or a representation of what the electorate want.

Regards.

Maddison Hallett