
Senate Inquiry on Proposed Youth Allowance Amendments

I am the mother of twin children, aged 19, current 1st Year (2009) Monash University, Melbourne students, residing on campus at Clayton. As a hard working rural farming family, who also currently work for wages outside our primary production business. It has taken an incredible effort this year by all contributors to see them being able to reside in Melbourne in 2009.

Our children will get some Youth Allowance under proposed new arrangements based on our taxable income 2008-09, but they also fall into the 'Gap Year 2008' category and the changes announced August 26 by Julia Gillard were very exciting on the surface. However, when you look closely at them on the 'Deewr' website, we will once again be excluded. Julia Gillard announced these changes with a great deal of media hype, announcing exemptions for 'Gap Year' 2008 students. Like with the original changes, 'real' information has been hard to obtain. Local politicians have failed to inform the public thoroughly and our local Labor politician, although able to send glossy information newsletters telling how wonderful the amendments will be, has not been able to fully inform the public or reply to email requests for clarification.

Until the recent Youth Allowance changes were announced, tertiary students could qualify for independent status for Youth allowance by earning \$19532 in the 18 months after leaving school. Proposed exemptions for 'Gap Year 2008' students announced by Julia Gillard on August 26 were very welcome and very public. However the inclusion of the clause that affects us has not seen any media attention, but it is now stated students who fall in the '2008 Gap Year' category 'Must commence University in 2010'. My twin children have chosen, with our support to commence University in 2009 AND earn the 19532 dollars. So it has been an extremely hard year for us all, as we undertook to support them during their 1st year of living in Melbourne, until they qualified for Youth Allowance. I am now looking to increase my time in the workforce, as we have exhausted our financial reserves and if the Youth Allowance changes go through, they will not receive enough to support themselves to live and eat in Melbourne.

The 'Gap Year 2008' amendments were made to allow those who had made plans to continue to achieve these plans. We also made plans and to be now excluded from the proposed amendments is extremely unfair, as my children have actually done double the workload of the traditional 'Gap Year' students.

We are currently within reach of the target in terms of wages earned, providing their employers come to the party over the coming summer vacation period. This has not been easy, but has been achieved by:

1. Having understanding and flexible employers
2. Taking No holidays. Uni break time both mid year, mid semester and during Summer Vacation periods and weekends all mean paid employment time.
3. Holding more than one job and a full university load
4. Finding an extremely tight balance in work and life
5. Being hardworkers who are able to pick up shifts during break times

They meet all the other criteria imposed, we think, but the whole purpose of the changes were to allow '2008 Gap Year' students who had made plans to continue with what they had commenced.

The proposed amendments have only partially addressed this problem. By cutting out those students not commencing University in 2010, because they have effectively undertaken a double workload seems extremely unfair to me. The ninety minutes travel criteria is also a little unclear we assume we will qualify. Does Bungaree to Monash University in Clayton pass or not? We think it does, but will Centrelink, I think we need just a bit more clarity here as well.

If changes are going to be made to accommodate 'Gap Year 2008' students let them be fair to all and not just the traditional group, but all exit 2008 students.

Mrs Debbie Ryan