

To whom it may concern,

The current rules relating to Youth Allowance and equity support for tertiary students living in 'Inner Regional Australia' are grossly unfair. In the 'Hastings Area' where I live on the Mid North Coast, 'Inner Regional Australia' includes: Laurieton, Bonny Hills, Lake Cathie, Wauchope, Port Macquarie and Telegraph Point. Living in Port Macquarie, I know that an amendment to these rules are essential if students from these areas are to have relatively equal access to tertiary education, and in the long term, sustain Australia's prosperity.

Currently students living in these areas must complete an 18 months Gap in a 2-year period, whilst averaging 30 hrs p/week, and earn \$19,532 in that time to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. This is extremely difficult. Firstly, working an average of 30 hours per week for 18 months can be difficult to achieve with the casual work unqualified students generally engage in between school and university. I have to juggle 3 casual jobs in order to have a chance of reaching the 30 hour threshold. This places a significant amount of stress on me, which my city or rural peers do not have to experience. Also, in a smaller economy, finding work is also more difficult. I have been lucky that I have good experience and qualifications, but many students who have not worked during their school life in order to concentrate on their studies have found it even more difficult. Also, those student who are not 18 have been even further disadvantaged in that it is even more difficult to find 30 hours per week of work when you are 17. Working for 15 hours per week would resolve many of these issues.

The extended time period of 18 months is also very problematic. Living in 'Inner Regional Australia' still means that I have to move away from home to pursue my tertiary education. However, 18 months calculated from my date of graduation means that I will have to survive my first few months of university unsupported. I cannot see how working for 30 hours per week on top of university study and lectures is achievable or fair. Moving away from home is very stressful, and the current financial situation I face exacerbates this, jeopardising my experience in the first few months of university. I know that for many, this is the most crucial time for students deciding if they will continue their studies or not. If they do not have to sacrifice their dedication to university in order to satisfy the excessive Centerlink criteria, these issues will be resolved to a degree.

Please, make the right decision for Australia's students, youth and future my making the outlined amendments to the bill. It would be greatly appreciated, and restore fairness between Australian students seeking tertiary education.

Sincerely yours,

Alex Siegers