

6/10/09

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

SUBMISSION RE: Proposed Youth Allowance changes

The proposed changes to the Youth Allowance support will adversely affect our family and will prevent our daughter from being able to attend university for the following reasons:

1. She will leave school at the completion of her Year 12 in November 2009 but will be unable to obtain full time work or work that is equivalent to 30 hours or more per week. Our two older daughters, one who has graduated, and one who is attending university were able to qualify for Youth Allowance because during their gap year they worked in a variety of jobs in order to earn the prescribed amount of money required to qualify for Youth Allowance. It had not mattered that some weeks they were only able to work 15 or 20 hours and other weeks up to 50 or 60 hours, depending on the work. In the South West of Australia there are not enough full time jobs available for all the students who will graduate. Our daughter who is completing Year 12 cannot be guaranteed 30 hours per week. Immediately then this means that she will not qualify for Youth Allowance.
2. Without this financial support we will not be able to pay for her to leave home, set up home in Perth and pay for her living costs. It is estimated that the cost of having a student leave home and move away for further education is a minimum of \$20000. Our combined income puts us over the limit of the Parental Income Test.

The 30 hours per week for 18 months simply means that our daughter will not be able to attend university for at least 2 years after completing school should she be able to obtain full time work in the South West, which is highly doubtful.

Educational opportunities need to be made readily available for rural students without excessive demands being placed on the rural youth. There are too many cases of rural students attempting higher education but leaving because the cost of supporting themselves in the city is too much. This then leads to rural youth feeling disenfranchised and a sense of helplessness. Educating rural youth means that these students are more likely to return to the country with skills which the country areas need. Due to the fact that overall rural students make up a very small percentage of students in higher education they are mostly an overlooked and forgotten number.

Rural students need a different pathway into higher education than students from the city. Government should be about supporting all students but some need extra support because Government cannot build and provide higher education facilities near all rural students. Rural students should be able to access higher education with financial support from the Government after they leave school without the requirement of Parental Income Threshold

(unless it is raised to a 6 figure income) or Age of Independence allowing or disallowing them access to financial support.

**The criteria for support for rural students should be that if the student has attended a country high school and has to leave home to further their education then a Rural Higher Education Allowance should be automatically available which should be equivalent to the Youth Allowance and the Commonwealth Accommodation Scholarship allowances.** This should apply to rural and Aboriginal students equally. In this way then Government would not be penalizing rural students and ensuring “that support is targeted to students genuinely in need of assistance”.

The new proposed changes will make it more difficult for students to live at home, attend university and work as has happened in the past and claim Youth Allowance. These changes, however, as they are proposed will make it impossible for rural students to receive financial support, unless their parents earn so little, i.e. less than \$44,165 or earn well into a 6 figure income.

We urge the Senate Committee to re-evaluate the proposed changes to Youth Allowance and make genuine allowances for rural students so that these students are not penalized from attending higher education away from home after they have completed school either immediately after Year 12 or after a gap year.

Yours faithfully

Nola and Wayne Hickey