

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Evette Sanders. I'm nineteen years old and a resident of Wollongbar in the Far North Coast of NSW. At the conclusion of my senior education last year at Alstonville High School, I was offered a place at the University of New South Wales to study a Bachelor of Commerce based on my UAI of 96.85. At that time, I elected to defer my offer to study in Sydney in 2011 for fiscal reasons.

Put simply, I didn't have the money to be able to afford University in 2010 and instead chose to have a gap year, working toward earning financial independence and youth allowance from Centrelink in May 2011. I'm from a single parent family, and my mother does not earn enough money to be able to support me through my studies, so my potential access to financial assistance from Centrelink was critical in my decision to defer my education.

At the time I elected to defer, and for six months afterward, I was operating on the premise that (as in all previous years), I would need to earn 75% of the minimum rate of pay under the Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale in an 18-month period. When I made my decision, I spoke with numerous Centrelink workers at the Ballina branch, who informed me that if there were to be any changes, they would be small and unlikely to affect young people in my situation.

As of July 1, 2010, this rule was changed. Now, gap year students must work an average of thirty hours per week for eighteen months in order to qualify for the independence. I have had two jobs consistently for twelve months, regularly working up to sixty hours per week. I have already earned the \$19,532 that would have been necessary for me to qualify for independence before July 1, 2010 under the old rules. As I deferred my offer to study next year, this presents as a huge problem for me.

To begin with, studying full-time and working for 30 hours per week in Sydney until May is, as you can understand, logistically impossible. I will not be able to maintain my studies and work close to full-time hours in a new city with new demands. What it means is that effectively, this entire year of work has been for nought, because, despite my considerable savings, I will still not be able to support myself in Sydney for a prolonged period without assistance from the government. I feel like this is grossly unfair: I began the year under the assumption that I would have to fulfil a particular requirement, I have done so, and now the rules have changed to prevent me from studying and gaining a tertiary education for future employment.

As grandiose as it sounds, I have based my life around the decision to stay at home in order to earn \$19,532. Now, I'm in emotional and potentially geographical turmoil. Do I move to a city where I will be unable to support myself without any assistance from a government that promised to give it to me? Do I stay at home and squander the opportunity I've been given to study my dream course at a prestigious university? Why are rural students discriminated against in their quest to gain an education as their city counterparts seem privy to? Why have I been put in a position where I have

to make a choice like this one when I made the best decision possible based on the information available last year?

I don't feel like I should be arbitrarily discriminated against, nor should any 2009 school-leavers in my situation. These changes came into effect half way through this year: too late to begin study for a second semester, and certainly too late to defer the offer I'd been made from UNSW. How was I to know this was going to happen? Why were these changes arbitrarily enforced?

As one of your constituents I ask you to lobby the Government to move the cut off for this year so that those who started a gap year in 2010 are eligible for Youth Allowance in 2011. These changes are grossly unfair and discriminate against rural youth wanting to gain a university education. So I ask you to champion for all of my peers in the same situation as myself. As you can imagine, it is far from a pleasant one to be put in.

I would like you to contact me and can be reached using the above details.

Yours faithfully,

Evette Sanders.