

Dear Sir,

I am extremely angry at the recent changes to the Youth Allowance scheme. The change from 12 months qualifying to 18 months was a massive retrograde step but the latest sweeping 'adjustments' have gone too far, made for an unjust system and rendered the recent hard work of my daughter totally worthless.

My daughter completed high school in November 2009 and has been working ever since in order to qualify as 'independent by virtue of the 75% (\$19532) ruling. I spoke to Centrelink in January 2010 as I was concerned about Government attempts to change the system halfway through her 'gap' (read 'working') year. I was given assurances that should the rules change then my daughter would be protected, as those on the current scheme would continue and the rules would only apply to new students. How wrong did that turn out to be? No protection exists and my daughter has been well and truly mucked up by this latest change.

What choice do MOST students now have? Basically, they either work for two years or accept they are going to have to find other ways of paying for their accommodation, food etc while at university. It might sound melodramatic and, no doubt, the Government would quote '18 months' at me but the reality is that most of the universities will not accept mid-semester joining on core degrees. They might accept them for the underwater basket weaving-type courses but not on anything worth attaining.

What this means to the school leaver is go to university now, with no money to support yourself, or wait for two years and then go. TWO years! How ridiculous. Not only will they be out of the education system for a VERY long time but they will then have to return to a system where they not only do not earn money but they also have to pay money. This, of course, is all predicated on the fact that the university will let them be out of education for two years, something that many do not, as is the case with my daughter's Animal Science course.

The option of being 'outer regional' etc is a farce. I notice the 'inner regional' area depicted by the Government seems to cover a HUGE swathe of WA including, of course, the Bunbury area. So, as we're 'inner regional' are our kids meant to travel to Perth each day for their university courses? Whoever thought of that idea needs removing far away from policy decisions as possible, since they have an extremely tenuous grip on reality. It is only those residing in Perth that can do without living on campus or within the local area; all the others will need to pay to do so, so should be eligible for the allowance. The fact that a student lives in or outside an arbitrary line drawn on a map is irrelevant. We all know what it's really about though; just another hoop through which the kids are unable to jump. Realistically, no-one gets the money but the Government can say it's available and what a caring lot they are.

I cannot, politely, express how angry I am at this change. It has been introduced surreptitiously and we only became aware of the existence of the changes through rumour and then further investigation. Small wonder the Government does not want to let everybody know too much about it as it would incite anger in too many people. My daughter has, in good faith, been working hard to earn the required sum necessary for her to qualify as 'independent and has now been told it is all for nothing. She could have started at Murdoch University in February, been 9 months into her course and, as far as Government finances are concerned, be in the same situation as she will be in February 2011.

Although the Liberal Party's take on the matter is much better than Labour's, I have to say that I am not entirely happy, either, with their take on the 'independent qualification. The clue is in the word; you are assessing the person, not their parents etc. Why should my daughter work hard to earn \$19532 and not be given the allowance because her parent's joint income is over \$150 000, whereas someone else does get the allowance because their parents earn less? Just because I earn more money than someone else (a)does not mean I have more and (b)is totally irrelevant to an INDEPENDENT daughter being able to support herself whilst at university. The same rules should apply to everyone: earn the money, qualify as independent and get the Youth Allowance. If we're going to go down the road of some children being more equal than others then you'll end up opening a can of worms on discrimination. The money should be available to ALL who qualify as 'independent with no further caveats.....unless, of course, you wish to emulate the Labour Government and their smoke and mirrors ways.

In short, many children, including my own, will be so adversely affected by these changes that some will be unable to continue their higher education. The only alternative is for anyone, outside Perth, to sell their houses and move close enough to the universities that their children can attend their courses. How ridiculous that some ill-thought policy by an incompetent government can bring such huge changes to those that are meant to be the future of Australia.

I call for a immediate return to the previous policy. The children should be able to qualify EITHER by virtue of the 75% 'rule' i.e. earning circa\$19500 OR by working for 30 hours per week over an 18 month period. Where they live should not be a facto; if they are able and chose to live at home during their university course, then their allowance would be reduced, as before. Likewise, means testing should not come into the equation. Test the children for their independant status. If they qualify as independant then they qualify for the allowance - simple.

The Labour Government's unjust and ill-conceieved changes will cause many problems that some people have not yet thought about. Come February 2011, those ignorant of the policy changes will become acutely aware of the far-reaching, negative affects of this stupidity and will only then realise the predicament in which they find themselves. So little information has been published, in an effort by the Government to quietly 'sneak' in this new system that many people do not know how bad their situation is going to be. Of course, announcing it honestly would, rightly, cause an uproar which 'our' politicians would rather not see, hence their underhand tactics in both conceiving and implementing this plan.

Let's stop the rot that is setting in throughout Australia where only those that live in the cities or overseas students with lots of money can attend their degree courses. It wasn't broken, so stop trying to fix it and mucking up the lives and the futures of our children.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Simmonds-Short