



SUPRA submission to the Inquiry into the Social Security Amendment (2007 Measures No. 1) Bill 2007

SUPRA is pleased to see these changes to the Social Security Act 1991 as they go some way to alleviate some financial pressure on students, particularly students with parenting and caring responsibilities. SUPRA's responses to the schedules outlined in the Explanatory Memorandum are detailed below.

Schedule 1 – Mobility Allowance

Schedule 2 – Youth Allowance

Schedule 4 – Amendments relating to dependent children

Schedule 6 – Technical amendments

SUPRA acknowledges the changes proposed to the above schedules are designed to

- a) increase access to ancillary payments for those most vulnerable in the community, and
- b) provide clarity of processes within the social security system.

Schedule 3 – Parenting Payment recipients having a partial capacity to work

Schedule 5 – Participation requirement and activity test

SUPRA acknowledges the changes proposed to this schedule are designed to extend eligibility for ancillary payments to the most vulnerable members of the community.

SUPRA has concern that 'approved study' for the purposes of meeting the participation requirements for receiving PP do not include coursework or research higher degrees. This omission skews the education and social security system to be biased against postgraduate students, who are often older and have greater financial and personal responsibilities than undergraduate students.

The continued illogical distinction between undergraduate and postgraduate students does not recognise that postgraduate study is often self-funded, requiring higher levels of participation and work output than undergraduate study, is shorter than undergraduate study for full-time coursework students, and is often directly related to the students current or prospective career needs.

Requiring postgraduate students receiving PP to undertake 15 hours of paid work on top of their studies is already proving onerous for some students and forcing them to choose between their studies and working to continue receiving PP. This discourages many prospective postgraduate students from undertaking studies, and does little to value continuing education and research in Australia.

SUPRA recommends adjustments to 'approved study' be made to include all postgraduate study as eligible for meeting participation requirements for persons receiving PP (partnered and single).

SUPRA further recommends changes to the Social Security Act 1991 to make Austudy and Youth Allowance available to all eligible postgraduate coursework students. SUPRA believes the eligibility requirements for postgraduate students to access Austudy and Youth Allowance should be the same as the current eligibility requirements placed on undergraduate students.

In the absence of clearly established DEST guidelines detailing both the process and requirements necessary to approve courses as eligible for access to income support for postgraduate students, our support for this amendment can only be provisional. It is certainly a welcomed first step and reflective of long term and ongoing lobbying by various students organisations. We are, however, yet to see evidence of the wide-ranging impact it will have on alleviating the financial burdens on Australia's Postgraduate students.