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The Senate,

I am recipient of Youth Allowance because I qualify as independent. Being 22 years old, I could not automatically qualify for YA and as such, took a break from my studies in 2003. In this time I was able to find work (in a field and doing work that is completely unrelated to my field of study) and therefore was able to qualify as independent by proving that I had earned enough money over the last 18 months; which I had done in 12 months and was therefore fine.

It seems stupid to me that we have a system that rewards people who take time off from their studies and earn money. We should be encouraging people to stay at university and complete their studies. I know of many people that could not afford to go to uni after Year 12, and have gone into the workforce. A lot of these young people then decide that university is not for them as they are used to the money they are earning. These people were suitable for University studies, but then we wonder why there is a brain drain in Australia.

What frustrates me the most, is when I hear of stories of people using their wealthy families to easily get around the system. Apparently it is easy to work for your family (either in a farming situation or otherwise) in a family business, then show that as personal income making yourself independent by earning over the threshold amount. It seems that the people who work this system have wealthy families whose accountants are able to work this out; and it is all fully legal. For the rest (and majority) of us though, our families may be (just) over the combined income threshold (as by the time we get to uni, both our parents are working, usually to help support us through uni and our accommodation) and therefore we are unable to gain Youth Allowance and thus put further strain on our families. This is especially hard if we are studying where we can not live at home.

At 18 we can vote, buy alcohol and go to pubs, go to war and have children supported by the government (assuming we are heterosexual of course) for the past two years; but are apparently not of independent age. This anomaly can be the deciding factor for many young people in whether or not they further their studies. This is especially true as HECS fees are jumping up.

I hope my story can help with the inquiry into student income support.

Alec Beckett