

## Senate Committee Hearing Submission

Re: Enquiry into Higher Education Support Amendment Bill 2009

I am the parent of an 18 year old, Madeleine, who has taken a Gap year in 2009 and is currently working and travelling overseas. We live in a small rural community 110 km from Melbourne.

Madeleine chose to take a Gap year after deferring an offer to study Science at Melbourne University. She deferred in the knowledge that she would be able to fulfill the existing criteria for accessing the living away from home Youth Allowance – that being earning \$19,000 over an 18 month period.

The proposed changes to the eligibility criteria disadvantage Madeleine in a number of crucial areas:

She took her Gap year in good faith, believing that she understood the eligibility criteria for gaining Youth Allowance in 2010 – criteria she is in the process of meeting. She will be unable to meet the proposed eligibility criteria without deferring her studies for another year and, as a consequence, losing her place at Melbourne Uni. Coming from a small rural community, she does not have the option of remaining at home while she studies – an option that can be exercised by students living in larger cities. Given that the proposed criteria now stipulate that she must work for 30hrs per week for 18 months – where, in a small rural community in the middle of a recession, are these jobs to be found? Work for unskilled 18 year olds in a community such as ours is seasonal, always part time and dependent on tourism.

Madeleine is one of thousands of rural students who will be denied government assistance to undertake their tertiary studies if the proposed legislation is passed into law. It severely discriminates against students in rural areas, especially those currently undertaking a Gap year.

However, I do not believe that simply delaying the implementation of the new eligibility criteria is not a suitable compromise. Rural students will continue to be disadvantaged, purely as a result of where they live. This places undue financial strain on the parents of these students who must find a minimum \$20,000 each year to support their child through university. And this is only for one student. For each further sibling, parents must find another \$20,000 each year.

The proposed changes to Youth Allowance eligibility represent poorly considered and discriminatory legislation. While the existing system has had some evidence of rorting, the best means of eradicating this is not to introduce draconian legislation that precludes legitimate applicants from accessing the system. The single eligibility criteria as proposed under the legislation cannot be met by students unless they take two years off between

finishing school and beginning university. As such, it is impractical and unfair. It will serve only as a deterrent to rural students accessing tertiary education. I urge you to vote against its introduction to the Senate