

20 July 2009
The Committee Secretary,
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport,
P.O. Box 6100,
Parliament House,
Canberra , ACT 2600.



Dear Secretary

I am writing to voice our opinion on the changing of the rules for Independent Youth Allowance Criteria.

We believe this new ruling will adversely affect rural students who do not have the choice of going to University while living at home. Accommodation at Universities or surrounding towns is very expensive.

One of our children is currently at University and next year we were hoping to have two of our children at University. That means accommodation alone could cost somewhere around \$500 per week. It was planned that our son has this year as a gap year so he would be eligible for youth allowance under the old system. This would assist with the accommodation and other costs such as text books and equipment.

We think it is grossly unfair to change the system that these children have based their planning on mid way through their gap year, and also for those currently doing their HSC.

Our son, Luke completed his Higher School Certificate in 2008. He has deferred his enrolment to Newcastle University to study engineering. Australia has a current shortage of engineers, and these new rules will not do anything to allay this shortage, or shortages in other professions. Also many of the Universities only allow students to defer for one year.

Luke is currently in employment for this year and is keen to study next year. We are a farming family and needless to say things have been very tight. Fortunately I have been able to secure employment locally. This puts Luke in the position of not being eligible for Youth Allowance as a dependant.

I think it is also extremely bad planning and short sighted to extend the period to 18 months full time work, as many children who may have been planning to go to University find that they enjoy earning money and will not end up going to University at all. All our lives will be influenced by the decisions made today and we believe the changing of the criteria will have serious consequences for the future.

With the proposed changes to the Independent Youth Allowance criteria, it appears that the gap between people from the city (whose children have the choice of living at home while attending University) and people from rural areas is widened once again.

Yours faithfully

Eric and Vicky Higgins

Eric Higgins

Vicky Higgins