

The Committee Secretary,  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural & Regional Affairs & Transport,  
PO Box 6100,  
Parliament House,  
CANBERRA ACT. 2600



Dear Mr Secretary,

I am the parent of a student who will now be affected by the changes to Youth Allowance. I have read about the obvious effects they will have on our country kids who have **dared** to aspire to attend uni in the next 2yrs.

We are an average SA country family of 4, living & working in Maitland, with our own small business. We have mortgages and business loans, like most people. I work for my husband, to keep costs down, our son is completing his final year at uni & our daughter is completing Yr 12 this year. It was with great pride, that 3 yrs ago we backed our son to be the first one in our families, (on either side) to attend university. He was very academically minded, focussed & had the will to succeed. At that time he desperately wanted to go straight from Yr 12 to uni, with no gap year. He was not eligible to receive youth allowance due to our family income being too high, so he knew he would have to become "independent". Therefore, he worked locally full-time, from the end of exams to March 07, prior to start of uni. He had to move to Adelaide, get as much part-time work there as possible to reach the "income requirement" over an 18mth period, while studying at UNISA Magill campus.

Fortunately, his course load allowed him to fit in enough working hours.

We applied for scholarships all over the place, but even with his high academic achievement record in yr 12, he could not get any, (even those that specified 'economic hardship'), even though we were from a rural area. It seems that our income was lost in the middle- too high for them, but not enough to easily pay for his costs. Once he had his Health Care Card though, he qualified for a Cwth Learning Scholarship- Accommodation assistance, which has helped enormously with his rent over the last 3 yrs. Obviously; we have helped pay his rent (in a share house) & weekly expenses over that time. It all takes its toll on everyone, as I'm sure you are aware. There were many times that he wanted to quit, because it was all too hard- he was sick of working all the time, studying with deadlines, and having no money- as most country uni students experience.

To his credit, he earnt the required income to qualify for Yth Allowance & Rent Assistance, in May 2008.

What a huge difference this made to him, as he could reduce his work hours & his stress levels, to concentrate on his studies, and to us as a family, as we did not need to continuously provide financial & emotional backup.

He will finish his degree at the end of this year. What an achievement!

This is obviously a 'Best Case Scenario', though, isn't it?

To get to the point of my letter:

We have experienced the 'Old Yth Allowance', which was attainable for our son in 2006,07 & 2008. It was damn hard work for our son & a strain on our family to set him up in Adelaide when we had no other ties to the city. Our family's income situation has not altered, so I am worried that our daughter will also struggle financially when she attends uni in either 2010 or 2011.

It seems that our income level does not allow us to access many avenues of financial help for our daughter- too high for the 'financial hardship' criteria but too low to provide for her without causing us financial stress.

- I am confident that she will attain the required TER this year to get into her preferred Uni course. She has shown great maturity & focus for year 12, but she does not have the same stamina & drive as her

brother. She has seen his **success & the opportunities that are available outside of our small community & to her credit, wants to have a go.**

-She can't get Yth allowance due to our family income still being too high, so she has to become 'independent'.

-She planned to do a "gap" year in 2010 so that she could get Yth Allowance, due to the fact of having seen how hard her brother had strived to keep in all together when he started uni. She **does not** want to go straight to uni from school.

-I am concerned that, with the 2 year 'Gap', she will ultimately decide **not** to go to uni at all. I am **extremely** concerned that she will 'settle' for employment locally with little, or no, long-term benefits (in a rural area with very limited employment prospects). Obviously, that will mean no higher education & no prospect for higher paid employment.

My view, also, is that country girls are more at risk of not going onto higher education or not completing it due to becoming attached to their local areas, which means that they don't want to go to the city to pursue a career.

-I am also concerned that considering how hard it was for her brother to get a Commonwealth scholarship, whether she will qualify for any at all, as she is an average student- another area where the Uni's, government & residential colleges don't acknowledge the 'battler' average student. This makes the youth allowance with its rent assistance even more important to her as a source of regular income.

-Nowhere in the new changes to youth allowance, has it been mentioned that the Uni's intend to make it possible for yr 12's to defer for **two** years instead of the current 1-year. So, if a student has deferred for 1 yr as it is now, they will be dropped out of their secured preference and have to re-apply in 2yr's time for the course of their choice & be competing all over again for a placement!

-If, in fact she does go to Uni after the one year 'Gap', and her Uni course has extremely high contact hours (which is likely), how is she possibly going to manage the required 30hrs work per wk in order to reach the 18 mth period or 15hrs/wk to reach the 2yr period? Doesn't it mean that she will have to 'sacrifice' good grades in her first Uni year so that she can make it all 'fit in'? I know that the students have to be committed, but that is ridiculous!

The system is just so damn unfair to country kids who are entitled to the same education as their city counterparts who can live at home! If city students had to cope with the same conditions in order to attain a Tertiary education, of those from the country, **we know there would be 'hell to pay' & it wouldn't be tolerated.**

The government has just spent billions on the stimulus packages - Do they think that these changes will save them much? So much for helping the rural communities: don't they know that country kids are an untapped source of our country's brainpower, growth & prosperity? Why aren't they given the chance to make a difference!

I wonder if they considered (in their savings), that the staff at Centrelink will now be overwhelmed with more paperwork to satisfy the new Youth Allowance criteria? So, do they put on more public servants to cope with the load or expect that of existing staff?

The longer I write, the angrier I am getting about the whole situation.

We are an average country family who has a daughter who wants to go to Uni. If she needs to work for 2 yrs under the current criteria in order to qualify for 'Independence', then I am very concerned that she may not get there.

Let's hope that we can all make a difference and help our country students to gain easier access to the Youth Allowance so that **they can** make a difference!

Yours Sincerely,  
Peter & Anne Hallett

*Anne Hallett*

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