



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

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to outline my concerns in relation to the proposed changes to youth allowance to take effect in January 2010.

It is an unrealistic pressure to place on teenage school leavers to have to work for 30 hours for 18 months after leaving school to qualify for independent status for youth allowance.

There are not enough jobs for school leavers to obtain to achieve 30 hours a week of employment. Students are either looking for work to support themselves or looking for work to assist to get them through to university and it is very difficult for them to secure permanent positions. Most positions are casual or part time and do not offer 30 hours a week consistently for 12 months let alone 18 months. Most available positions are casual and the hours drop off in the low season especially winter so it is even more difficult to achieve 30 hours a week for 18 months.

The majority of rural students have to move away from home to further their studies. The cost of university and supporting these students is well beyond their own reach or the majority of their parents. Hence without youth allowance many students will not be able to study beyond school. As more and more jobs are requiring formal qualifications it then restricts their options to join the workforce.

My son finished year 12 in 2007. He worked as much as he could and it became very demoralising not achieving permanent or regular work throughout his gap year. He was unable to attain independent status and hence got no assistance from youth allowance. He was lucky to obtain an apprenticeship and as such gave up his offer to study at university in Canberra, as we could not afford to pay for his living expenses.

My daughter finished 12 in 2008. She also chose the gap year to ensure that she would be eligible for youth allowance to assist with further studies. She would like to do childcare and ultimately infant teaching. It has now been made compulsory for carers to have a formal qualification so without the study she cannot work in this industry. She has almost achieved her independent status under the current system as she has worked a minimum of two jobs and up to five jobs at any one time to earn as much as she could. However, she has not secured 30 hours a week of work since she left school. Hence, she will not qualify for youth allowance under the proposed system in 2010. As she almost qualifies now under the current system, we inquired about her leaving her current full time job, enrolling to study at TAFE and applying for the allowance. However, childcare courses do not offer mid semester enrolments and to apply for the allowance now, she needs to be in full time study now. There are many of the year 12 students from 2008 in exactly this position. Students who planned 12 months ago to work in a gap year and now it has been a loss.

My youngest son is in year 12 now, 2009. For those who finish school from 2009 onward the following ramifications arise:

- Universities do not defer their courses for more than 12 months and most university courses do not have a mid semester intake.
- Numerous TAFE courses do not have a mid semester intake.
- Students cannot work 30 hours a week for 18 months after leaving school and take up any deferral for university or enrol in any course that is only offered at the beginning of each year.

Hence:

- They either have to go and study straight from school and pay for university themselves (How I don't know), or
- Defer studies, work for 12 months and take up any acceptance they have deferred. If they do this they would still not qualify for youth allowance so they would have to pay there way again. Or
- They can work for 2 years after finishing school because again universities do not defer for more than 12 months and they do not offer mid semester entry on most courses. Student will then have to apply for courses as a non-school leaver, which means they are not only competing against students leaving school in their year but two years below them, for a position in a course.

I have had one child already give up the opportunity to study at university, as we could not financially support him to do so. I sincerely hope that the proposals are not enforced or it will mean my other two children may be forced to chose a career that does not involve tertiary study. Without youth allowance they will not be able to study further and under the proposed scheme from January 2010 they are most likely not to qualify for the allowance as it is an unrealistic demand, especially in rural areas.

Your sincerely,
Hellen McWhirter