

Submission to The Senate Regional and Rural Affairs and Transport Committee, in response to the inquiry into Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.

My name is Michael Poulton. I am writing to you regarding the current bid to change the eligibility for youth allowance. At present I am living in Toowoomba, Queensland working part-time at Myer as a customer service officer. My twin brother and I (as well as a majority of my schoolmates) have taken a year off between secondary school and tertiary studies not only for a break, but also to become eligible for the youth allowance scheme by earning approximately \$19,500 in an eighteen month period.

Last year I finished my secondary school education at Downlands College in Toowoomba, where I was only able to study because I was granted a cultural scholarship. I finished my final year with obtaining an Overall Position (OP) score of 2 as well as having a significant proportion of my Associate Diploma of Music. (A.Mus.A) completed. Following my year off, it was my desire to attend the Conservatorium of Music either in Brisbane or Sydney to pursue a Bachelor of Music in Advanced Performance.

However, to continue my studies in the best possible conditions next year, I will need to move from my current home town, Toowoomba, to Brisbane or possibly interstate to Sydney. The university in my hometown does not offer the exact degree I wish to pursue and I believe it would be detrimental to my future career if I did not take on opportunities elsewhere. This will be an incredibly expensive venture, as I also have a twin brother who wishes to pursue the same degree. My parents are middle income earners but their combined salaries render me unsuitable for many scholarships or alternate government support. So in preparation for 2010, I embarked on a gap year to do some good in the world, receive a broader perspective on life and to take a break from study. I was able to do this because of working part time throughout years 11 and 12 and was fortunate enough that my position at Myer could be extended to a part time contract, averaging 27 hours per week. Many of my friends have had immense difficulty in locating substantial work in the current economic climate, so I thought myself very lucky! (That said, I have had to work extremely hard to earn my money this year- being only 17 and on a part-time contract, I have been on \$9.83 an hour!!)

I had then planned to earn the money for youth allowance, to be able to support myself for the next four years of my intense course whilst living in Brisbane or Sydney.

Without the government's independence allowance I would find it extremely difficult to juggle both university studies and work. I would need to be working at least 20 hours a week on a pay rate of \$15.00 an hour to be able to afford accommodation near the university on top of studying for a full time degree. The following table outlines the average predicted cost for oneself for 2010; the figures are based on living in a three bedroom apartment in the outer suburbs of Brisbane, sharing with two others. This of course does not outline any additional university expenses such as textbooks or musical expenses (e.g strings, sheet music, and rosin.)

Expense	Average Cost(weekly)
Rent	\$130
Electricity	\$10
Food	\$70

Public Transport Fares	\$15
Social	\$50
<u>TOTAL:</u>	<u>\$275</u>

The Bachelor of Music course is highly competitive and very intensive- with an average of 15hours of contact (lecture/tutorial) time; one must also take into consideration the expectation of at least 30hours practice a week, assignment time, both day and night rehearsals and the occasional concert on a Friday or Saturday.

I felt that the best way to avoid this situation was to gain independence and receive the fortnightly payment from Centrelink.

The money that I was planning on receiving from the government was to go towards paying for my accommodation and food. While I knew that I wouldn't be able to live entirely off this money, it would mean that I would have to work fewer hours during the week and weekends. This would leave me with more time to study and to be a better student, and therefore better preparing myself as an educated, prosperous member of our countries future workforce.

We are the youth, we are Australia's future. What kind of a workforce are we going to have if our current students begin to skip on study as their main concern is earning enough money just to survive? If anything, the current amount being given to independent young people should be increased to match inflation and the struggle of the current economic times, and not eradicated. I ask you to seriously consider the criterion that allows a person become independent when viewing the 2009 Budget. Think of the many students all over the country who have taken the year off to earn money now so that they can throw themselves into their future study. Either reject this reform that the Rudd Government has proposed or lengthen the cut-off date so that students who have taken the gap year in 2009 can still be eligible. This will mean that our hard work doesn't go to waste. We shouldn't be disadvantaged for planning for our futures.

I strongly recommend that if the government goes ahead with this measure that the proposed grandfather clause should be extended to this year's gap students who have arranged their life in good faith based on the policies in place until this budget announcement. Action needs to be taken.

We, the students, are the future of this country. Isn't supporting us a worthwhile investment?

Yours sincerely,
Michael Poulton.
