

9th July 2009

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 was most disturbed to hear of the proposed changes to the youth allowance under the terms of the new budget. If the changes stand they will have huge implications for students from our regional areas who wish to pursue a tertiary education. It is well known that country students are disadvantaged in tertiary education because they generally have to move away from home to pursue their studies.

The benefits of a "gap year" were two fold. It gave the students an extra year to mature before having to cope with moving away from home and deal with tertiary studies. City students can generally continue to live in a supportive home environment while pursuing their education. Secondly the gap year gave the students an opportunity to qualify for the youth allowance and relieve some of the financial burden from their parents.

The current proposed changes are yet another area in which country people will be significantly disadvantaged relative to their city peers. It is even more disturbing that the proposed changes will not come into effect for future students but will disadvantage those who made decisions about their future in good faith that they would be fulfilling the criteria for youth allowance. To make it unavailable to students currently doing a gap year is unfair in the extreme.

The new legislation also has the potential to deter people from moving to rural and regional areas and to cause families who are already living in these areas to move back to the city when the time comes for their children to attend university. In the health care professions for example there is an unprecedented shortage of doctors, nurses etc in the country. This is just one more reason why they would choose to either not move to the country areas in the first place or to leave earlier than they had originally planned.

The current means test cut off point for youth allowance is so low as to make it unavailable to many families and yet the cost of supporting a student while they study in the city is prohibitive. I would urge you to amend the start date for any changes to the current system so that this year's gap students are not affected. Please also consider developing a fairer system which makes tertiary education accessible to all, not just those living in the city.

Yours sincerely

Julie Jumeaux
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