

Dear Senate,

My name is Sasha Miles. I am eighteen years old and I live in Mount Gambier, South Australia. Last year I deferred a place at Flinders University, a Bachelor of Psychology with Honours. This course is extremely competitive and I studied very hard to earn the Tertiary Entrance Rank required to win my place. Next year it will be necessary to move up to Adelaide, approximately a five hour journey, for six years in order to complete this course and to gain accreditation with the Australian Board of Psychology.

A gap year seemed the most appropriate option as I would be eligible for the full benefit of \$9,600 when I leave home next year. So, just weeks after completing my final year twelve exams I began working. This has included working long hours in a coffee shop for minimal wage and working twelve hour shifts within a potato factory. I have few leisure days. This tedious and tiring work is made bearable by the notion that my life would be made much easier next year. However, under the proposed legislation I am unlikely to receive government support and this year feels like a waste of valuable time given that I am now one year behind in beginning my six year course. It seems that the extra \$15,000 cost of living away from

home has been completely ignored within the proposed changes.

If the legislation passes, I have few options. Take a further twelve months off, working a minimum of thirty hours per week. Yet this will be at the least of my hard earned Psychology place that can only be deferred for one year. The prospect of gaining a full time position is also unlikely as the current national recession results in the few full time positions being given to employees that are likely to stay on long term. I may also make the move up to Adelaide next year, without government assistance, meaning that I will need to work which will cut into my studying time. This is a serious threat to my studies as the honours course I am undertaking requires a seventy percent average mark in order to continue. Without government aid I will be forced to ask my parents for financial support. They will find this difficult as I have two younger siblings, both with tertiary aspirations, whilst my parents are also working towards their own retirement.

It is unfair that students from the country should be disadvantaged through this proposed legislation. Making the move from our country homes to the larger cities for tertiary education is emotionally unsettling enough and now we have the

added financial strain of trying to make ends meet with a lack of government support. This government talks about increasing university attendance, as advised by the Bradley Review, yet these proposed changes will undoubtedly result in fewer country students receiving higher education qualifications. Decreased numbers of university graduates from country areas is likely to have a drastic flow on effect for rural Australian towns and communities. With tertiary education restricted predominantly to city students, it is the rural areas that suffer with city professionals reluctant to use their qualifications in rural areas. Students originating from country areas are more likely to return to rural areas where tertiary qualifications such as medicine, nursing, psychology, teaching etc are desperately needed. Without these much needed professionals, rural towns cannot hope to survive. In my own and many other youths positions we can see that it may now be simply more feasible to undertake an apprenticeship (if available) or to enter the workforce after leaving school. Yet, as an aspiring psychologist my qualifications will be valuable to my community and country and this government should therefore be aiding my endeavors, not hindering.

I am angered most about the retrospective nature of this change. If we, the students of 2008 had known about these changes at the start of this year, we would have made different choices. I could have gone straight to university and accepted a variety of scholarships that I had passed up in favour of the long term benefits of youth allowance. I am also now not eligible for a large number of scholarships as, under the new legislation, I cannot achieve youth allowance. We are angered that we have followed the system and now the system will be changed in the middle of our gap year efforts. This retrospective change has not allowed us to make informed choices about what is best for our future.

While I understand the need for a reform of the system, as I myself am angered at the many city university students who live at home and receive the full benefits of youth allowance, these changes will disadvantage country students. I also see the motion to lower the age of independence from twenty five to twenty two as a positive step in the right direction. Yet, I believe the age of independence should be further lowered to eighteen. At eighteen we have the legal rights to drink, smoke, enlist to vote, be tried and punished in an adult

court of law and to die for our country, yet we are not deemed financially independent from our parents. As a legal adult who works, pays board and for all of my expenses I am disappointed that I cannot be deemed financially independent from my parents. The Labour government attempts to support its proposed legislation by stating "68,000 more students will be able to access youth allowance in 2010." Yet little consideration has been to the 30,000 students in 2009 alone that will, ~~lose~~ under the new legislation, not be able to receive youth allowance benefits in 2010. This statement also remains unjustified by the Labour government as under the current system all students, regardless of financial situation, have the opportunity to receive youth allowance assistance. Therefore in reality, the new legislation is merely the Labour government answer to the national debt, yet at the expense of 30,000 students per year, and our rural communities. I therefore propose separate laws for country and metropolitan students as we clearly have different needs when it comes to tertiary education. Perhaps youth allowance legislation could be created for those needing to relocate from their homes in order to receive tertiary qualifications.

Senate government, clearly the motion to

change to current youth allowance system is likely to do more harm than good. For my sake, and the sake of thousands of students that the changes will be disadvantaging, I ask you to block the changes to youth allowance. At the very least I ask you to amend the decision to enforce the changes beginning January first 2010, which would make mine and the gap year efforts of the students of 2009 a complete waste of time.

Senate, I have been organising protest marches, communicating with local government, creating web pages and contacting senators in an effort to block this legislation. This is an issue I am very passionate about.

Please do not allow the changes to Youth Allowance to pass through the senate.

Yours Truly,

Sasha Miles.

