

28<sup>th</sup> August 2009

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**To Whom it May Concern,**

I am a 19 year old country Victorian currently on a gap year. I finished year 12 in 2008 after spending two years working hard through my VCE at Gippsland Grammar to achieve an enter score of 90.95. I got a scholarship to attend my school for years 11 and 12 and I travelled on a bus for 200km daily just to attend school. I am a highly motivated student who has been planning her future education since year 10. Personally, I would have preferred to have gone to university straight after completing high school; however, the financial burden would have been too much on my family, so we decided that I needed to have the year off to become independent.

This year, I obtained a full time job at a local pharmacy in order to reach my aim of earning enough money to qualify for youth allowance. After five months of hard work towards my goal, I was struck a severe blow from the Federal Government, with their proposed changes to youth allowance criteria. For me, this currently means if I was to try and qualify for youth allowance, I would have to defer from university for two years, meaning I would be turning 21 in only my first year of university. Not only does this mean I would be coming on 26 years old before I had even entered my chosen profession, I would also need to get back into study after a two year non-study period. Not an easy task. These kinds of statistics will also only deter students from taking up university placements in the future.

In parliament on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2009, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard argued, that the government is changing the system 'because we are a responsible government that believes that every dollar of student support – indeed, every dollar of government expenditure – should go to the place that it is going to do the most good. "For me, this raises the question, is Ms Gillard suggesting that the \$371 per fortnight maximum youth allowance – that is currently going to, and will continue to go to several local youth's who sit at home daily, unemployed and certainly not aiming to seek employment in the future – is doing more good than supporting myself through university to become a professional and future tax payer of this country? To use Ms. Gillard's own words, **what a very silly suggestion.**

For me to attend my chosen course at university, I must move 300km away from my home. So basically, the only option for me is to move out of home. This means, that my family will be required to come up with approximately \$20,000 per year, just to cover the costs of my living away from home expenses. That is \$80,000 for my four year course. I have two siblings and for my parents to give us all the same opportunity, it could amount to \$240,000 just for our living away from home whilst studying expenses. This would be reduced to around \$124,000 if the youth allowance criteria remained the same. As you can see, country kids and families are severely disadvantaged in comparison to city students and families, who still have the option of living at home while studying. Furthermore, the government is arguing that there are also going to be Student Start-Up scholarships available of \$2254 per year; however, these are only available to students who qualify for the youth allowance anyway! Yet again, students such as myself, miss out.

I fail to see why students who; have grown up in metropolitan areas, have worked just as hard towards their VCE and whose parents have the same income as those in the country, should be given an unfair advantage. I am a dedicated and motivated student who is feeling severely disheartened by the government's stance in helping, or lack there of, country kids gain a tertiary education

In closing, I would like to urge the government to do the right thing, the only fair thing and stop penalising country kids by placing another barrier in the way of them achieving their goals.

Regards,

Emma Armistead