

Deputy Secretary  
Standing Committee on Rural & Regional Affairs and Transport  
PO BOX 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600



Dear Sir

As a group of extremely concerned citizens and parents we write to you to express our concern and to lodge a formal complaint at the total lack of responsibility shown by the current government in changing the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance.

Many of us have children who graduated from secondary education in 2008 and after being accepted for tertiary study, have deferred those studies for a year in anticipation of earning the required amount of \$19500 to become eligible for Youth Allowance. It seems that with the new laws which come into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2010 that this particular group of students have become victims of the transition between 2 protocols with no understanding or consideration. With the new regulations stating that they will now have to work a minimum of 30 hours per week for a minimum of 18 months, these graduates are left with few options. Even if they were to commence full time employment the day they graduate from secondary school and continued in that employment until the day they started tertiary study it would only amount to a time of approximately 15 months that they have worked in a full time capacity for the required amount of hours. This timeframe obviously falls short of the new government requirements by 3 months and to expect that they would continue in full time employment as well as attend university full time is quite simply impossibility. **The only option left open to these graduates of 2008, to be given any chance of going to university as planned, is to defer for another period of time or go onto university with absolutely no support from the government.** Even this presents problems as most universities do not allow deferment from studies for a period of 2 years. To do this would mean that the 2008 graduates will in effect lose their OP's (a lot of hard work for no advantage!) and have to compete with the graduates of 2009 onwards to gain a placement for tertiary study. This decision by the government has negated the sacrifice these students made this year by deferring their studies. In reality it has made this "gap year" a **total waste of time** as they could have gone to university immediately out of secondary school and at this point in time completed the first 6 months of their degree without any monetary support from the government – the exact same outcome that they now have due to this change in eligibility. The reason they chose not to do this was to attempt to fulfil the criteria to be eligible for monetary assistance from the government to help them to gain a level of independence and assist with living expenses. This decision has not allowed the school leavers of 2008 an informed choice about their future pathways. We acknowledge that the new rules and regulations may apply successfully to the graduates of 2009 and beyond because they will have the luxury of knowing all the requirements before they finish secondary school, the graduates of 2008 have not been afforded this knowledge. Now they will have to rely on the already over extended "family budget". It seems that only the monetary wealthy amongst Australian citizens will be able to afford to send their students on to tertiary education.

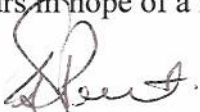
We are lucky to be living in a rural community which strongly supports graduating secondary students in their endeavours to become independent before moving on to tertiary studies. Many of the local businesses have established internships for "gap year" students and each year the students know that they will be given the opportunity by the townsfolk to meet the criteria to make them eligible for Youth Allowance. As stated these jobs are offered for 1 year so that all students throughout the years are offered the same chances. **They are not on offer for 2 year periods.** So

what is to become of the currently employed “gap year” students – the 2008 graduates? At the end of this year they will be unemployed and so have to actively seek other employment if they decide to make the decision to defer (or effectively reapply) or **they will go on to tertiary studies with absolutely nothing gained from deferring for the 12 month period.** Another point is the federally funded “gap year program” defence force jobs. This program which was initiated by the government has been a popular choice for many of the 2008 graduates. Once again however the time frame for this program is 1 year. Those students who chose to undertake this course for their “gap year” will find themselves unemployed at the end of the 12 months with exactly the same outcome – a waste of a year because now they will not be able to fulfil the new eligibility criteria.

The inconvenience of living in a rural community is that all students who wish to move on to tertiary study will also be living away from home. They are at a disadvantage that their city counterparts do not have – having to pay for accommodation. The Youth Allowance had a component in it which covered these circumstances. With the new criteria and the fact that the 2008 graduates have not been given the opportunity to fulfil these criteria, they will have to find another way to pay for this. The cost will once again have to come from the over extended “family budget” or they will be forced to gain immediate employment in the city to pay for ALL living expenses as well as undertaking many hours of tertiary study. As mentioned earlier many universities do not allow deferment for 2 year periods, these rules also apply to residency in colleges on campus. It seems that no matter which decision the graduates of 2008 make they have been left “high and dry” by the government’s decision to change these criteria.

We implore you to present our case to your government and to consider the implications of their decision on this particular group of students. We all want to see these young adults take their place as independent professionals in their chosen fields and consider that the government’s decision has severely hampered the chances of this happening for many.

Yours in hope of a fair deal

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Kent'.