

6 August 2009

To Whom it May Concern,

I write in relation to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities. In particular, the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance Eligibility Criteria.

I successfully completed Year 12 last year, deferring my place at the University of Melbourne in order to acquire full time work in an attempt to qualify for Youth Allowance to assist with the costs of moving from the rural town of Warragul to Melbourne for studies. I acted in accordance with the best possible advice given to me by my parents, friends, teachers and careers advisor, all who recommended that taking a "Gap year" and qualifying for Youth allowance was the best option and greatly helped in alleviating city living costs for rural students.

However, this year I find that half-way through my working year, the Rudd Government has planned to change the rules of the game. These proposed changes would mean that I would no longer be able to qualify for Youth Allowance. To do this halfway through the year is downright unfair and affects hundreds of students, all who have taken a "Gap year" for the same reasons. Enraged that the government would pull such a stunt halfway through the year, I wrote to my local MPs, urging them to act. Some were more helpful than others. My letter was forwarded onto Ms Julia Gillard, who sent back a response. This only angered me more, as the response was full of spin, ignoring my points, side-stepping around the real issue and changing the topic in their favour, detailing how wonderful the new changes would be, with Ms Gillard all the while arrogantly ignoring how the proposed changes will unfairly disadvantage rural students and their families.

The Rudd government does not seem to understand the costs involved with families having to relocate their children closer to the city in order to continue their education. Instead, they appear to have proposed these changes to counter the number of city students taking advantage of the current Youth Allowance system. This view is horribly distorted, as the government is ignoring a huge number of students, particularly those in rural areas, who need the sort of support that the Youth Allowance offers. By all means, change the logistics of the system, but take into account the bigger picture and who is being adversely affected. In this case, it is the students from rural areas, particularly those like me, currently undertaking their gap year, who have had the rug pulled out from under their feet. To do this halfway through the year, after we have already deferred our respective University courses and secured full time work (another difficult aspect of rural life), is downright sneaky and unfair. To go further and ignore the outcry of thousands of rural people on this issue is foolish. I demand that you guarantee that all deferred rural students currently on their gap year will qualify for Youth Allowance or its equivalent.

Don't move the goal posts after someone has already kicked the ball.

Yours sincerely,
Aidan Kirkbright

