

11 July 2009

Dear Sir or Madam

We want to express our outrage and concern at the government's decision to change the rules around Youth Allowance as this will have a major impact on our children and a great many others across Australia. I believe it particularly affects children from rural areas at a time when rural communities are suffering enough.

In our particular case we have a son, Christopher, in Bendigo and a daughter, Katy, in Y12 who had planned to go to Geelong to study forensic science. She had planned to defer for a year and work during that time to gain independent status and be able to claim the Youth Allowance. There is no option to study forensic science in Mildura and university courses here are limited, which means most young people have no choice but to live away. The nearest universities are in Adelaide, Bendigo, Melbourne and Ballarat which necessitate living away from home. These rules will not affect young people living in the main cities as they will be able to stay at home and still attend the university that offers their choice of course. This is a luxury that is not available to young people in rural areas.

Katy won't be able to gain independent status under the new rules and we will be faced with the probability of having to leave Mildura to live near her university placement as we can't afford to have 2 children living away at university, with all the expense that entails. That will be 2 skilled workers and a young person who will be forced to move away from Mildura. If we can't get jobs or sell the house up here in Mildura - Katy just won't be able to go to university until her brother has finished, and in that case she may lose her place.

We came to Australia from the UK six years ago as skilled workers and gained employment within a month of coming here. We have both always worked and claim nothing from the state at all. As 'middle income' earners we fall through the gap in the centre - not wealthy enough for it not to affect us but earning too much to get any assistance. The only people who will be able to afford to send their children away to university under these new rules will be the very rich or the very poor.

I am not sure how many people this will affect - probably many tens of thousands who are in Year 12 now and many more who are already working their gap year and have deferred thinking they will be able to get the Youth Allowance next year.

What a way to treat new voters! Just as a generation turns 18 the government pulls the rug out from under them.

Other budget measures were phased in over a period of a number of years, so why has this one just been implemented so quickly, particularly with the devastating affect that it will have?

We think this is a huge mistake and will let down a whole generation of young people whose hopes and dreams could now be shattered by this. It is grabbing money from children and robbing them of their futures. They are the ones who will be paying back the huge debt and how will they do that after being denied their full potential?

The talk about an education revolution is just a joke to us.

Please rethink this decision as it is short sighted and cruel.

Thank you Wendy and Robert Hope