

Brett Patience

RE: Youth Allowance Changes

Previously, students were able to qualify for Youth Allowance to support them at university, by working on their "gap years" after finishing school, and earning \$19 532 within a period of 18 months. Most students were able to earn this amount in 12 months, and then support themselves for 6 months while studying at university until the payments came through.

Under the new changes to Youth Allowance, to qualify as independent and get the full rate of allowance, future leavers such as myself must now work 30 hours a week for a minimum of 18 months, or work 15 hours a week for two years.

3 out of the 4 Universities here in Western Australia only offer the option to defer your university position for 1 year. This means that for all future leavers, including me, and university students who were counting on Youth Allowance to support them during their studies, and are going to those 3 universities who only offer the 1 year deferral option (UWA, Murdoch, and ECU) they can no longer qualify!

I am from a Year 12 student Geraldton in regional Western Australia, and I need Youth Allowance to support me while I study, because the cost of moving to Perth for higher education is enormous. Now thanks to these changes, they just put another obstacle in the path of regional students; I can't qualify as independent because my University only allows me to defer for one year, and my parents earn over the \$43 000 threshold which entitles me to the full rate of Youth Allowance, but they still can't afford the extra cost of supporting my living expenses in Perth. Thousands upon thousands of other students are facing this same problem, especially in regional areas.

I support the move to increase the parental income test threshold by 30% to just under \$43 000, and believe this is a positive move to allow more students access to Youth Allowance. I also think the 'start-up' scholarships for regional students such as me are a fantastic idea, but in order to qualify for them, you have to qualify for Youth Allowance, which now is simply impossible.

These new criteria not only make it impossible for students of particular Universities to qualify because of the deferral rule, but they also don't make sense. For example, if I was working 30 hours a week for 18 months to qualify, does this mean I have to work non-stop for 18 months? What if I want to take a week off for a holiday and miss out on 30 hours of work? Does this make me ineligible? These criteria are ridiculous!

I hope you will take this cause on board on behalf of the regional students of Western Australia and Australia alike, who are striving to achieve their best but keep having obstacles thrown in their path, and I urge the Government to reconsider these changes in light of the impact they will have on thousands of students across the country.

Bring back the old criteria!