

Senator Fiona Nash  
Australian Parliament House

4/7/09

Dear Ms Nash,

**Regarding Youth Allowance - Please resist changing the rules for 2009 gap year kids from the country**

I am a current gap year student from country Victoria. I completed my year 12 in 2008 and as the cost of moving to the city is so great I decided to work for a year to qualify for youth allowance under the rules as I understood them. I now find out that the Government plans to change the rules half way through the year leaving me in a very awkward position. So I am writing to express my anger and concern over changes to the independent qualifying criteria for Youth Allowance for regional kids.

The Government proposes to remove the criteria "you have been out of school for at least 18 months and have earned at least 75% of the maximum rate of pay... in an 18 month period (approx \$19,500)", from the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2010.

This will affect me along with thousands of secondary school leavers and mid course students who are currently working a GAP year this year (2009) to qualify and apply for Youth Allowance in May/June 2010. We have planned our studies, income and lifestyle after finishing secondary school last year assuming we were doing the correct thing in order to qualify for Youth Allowance.

I have been taught not to change the rules in the middle of a game and to not go back on what is in place without warning, but this is what the Government is planning to do - without warning. I would have chosen a different course of action if I knew they were going to pull the rug from underneath me – mid year.

We are talking about kids from the country who have to move to the city to take up their chosen course. We take a GAP year to work and earn money to save for University expenses and qualify for Youth Allowance. Country kids and their families are up for much greater expenses when we move to the city to study, accommodation being a huge part of this, up to \$200.00 per week. We need this Youth Allowance to survive. Yes parents can and should assist financially but what average family can afford to support their kids and pay around \$400.00 per week for rent and food not to mention fees, books and other incidentals. Even if I get part time work, there is a fine line between the amount of hours I can work which will not affect my studies and put huge stress on me. Without Government assistance, it becomes impossible to support yourself if you have to move away to University.

I thought I had planned my future and I want to study to better myself but am now left in limbo. I don't agree with this change at all, but why does it have to be introduced without warning for my wave of students who have deferred a university place and are working. Surely we should have been given sufficient warning that this policy is

changing and then be able to plan our income and studies. This change should exempt country kids at best, or at least not be introduced until the next financial year.

The Government needs to know that country kids like me are being treated unfairly.

**At the very least, please fight to defer these unfair changes for one year in fairness to the current gap-year country-based students, who have dedicated a year of their life on the understanding it would lead to accessing youth allowance.**

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roslyn Whiteman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Roslyn Whiteman