

I am writing to voice my opinion about the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance for students studying at university.

### Families Living in Rural Areas

Children living in rural areas need to live away from home to attend university. Our son who completed HSC last year has been accepted into ANU and deferred this year's study to earn the \$19,350 which is required of him to gain independent status. Now with the proposed changes to the youth allowance, his good intentions and hard work have been thwarted. He doesn't have any opportunity to apply for youth allowance through his working because by January 1 2010, he will not have been left school for 18 months only 13 months, therefore he cannot apply under the old scheme. He cannot apply under the new scheme because he has not been able to secure 30 hours work continuous this year and will not be able to attend university and do 30 hours of work as well in the first semester to qualify. If he doesn't attend university next year he will lose his place, as deferments last only 12 months. The possibility of the new scheme was only announced in the Budget and therefore many months had passed since his leaving school before we even knew there was a retrospective change coming.

In this instance it is the retrospectivity of the changes that are most unfair to the school leavers of 2008.

We have a second child that will be doing HSC in 2010 and she will not be able to gain 30 hours of work continuous in our rural area with high unemployment. Seasonal work over summer is available with the majority of the year being very quiet. We regard these changes as favouring families who live in the cities where employment is easier to obtain. We do not want all the school leavers from rural areas throughout the state leaving the country and converging on the city to seek employment to meet the new criteria. This will have a major impact on the life and viability of living in the country especially at a time when it is identified that more employment and industry is needed in rural areas to increase the viability of sustaining businesses and culture of the country.

In this respect we regard that the proposed changes are unfair to all families in rural areas because of the unreasonable expectation of high level of consistent work at 30 hours.

We live in Nowra on the South Coast of NSW where the unemployment rate is relatively high at 7.7% for Shoalhaven Shire. Employment is scarce and certainly gaining a consistent 30 hours per week is almost impossible. Some fortunate few may be able to secure this sort of employment; however the majority of school leavers in this small town of 30,000 would not. Also employers would be resistant to employ a school leaver and train them up only to see them go off to university or other college after 18 months. It does evoke ideas of deceiving employers of the student's intention just to secure the job to gain the 30 hours employment per week, which is not the morals that we have taught our children and would not wish them to be adopting.

It appears from the Bradley Report that the changes are being made because 36% of recipients lived at home and 15% were from high income homes. This refers to city families as country children cannot live at home. It is the country families who are still being discriminated against. This is unfair to make such drastic changes that so obviously continue to favour city families and continue to make it almost impossible for rural children to qualify

through their own industry to study at university. Already only 30% of rural children gain university degrees as opposed to 75% of city children. These changes once again make life so much more difficult and dispirited in the country. I am lead to believe that the Bradley Report identified children from rural and remote areas as a target group who are in need of support to gain higher education, yet the criteria for youth allowance works in opposition.

I refer you to the Shoalhaven Economic Development Strategy which outlines the employment and education levels in our area which are lower than comparative regional areas.

<http://www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au/council/pubdocs/general/ShoalEconomicDevtStrategy.pdf>

Education is supposed to be a priority of this government. A quality Public education system is one of the hall marks of an advanced country. Every student who qualifies for entrance should be able to undertake university education as this is how we maintain and improve our civilisation, health, crime/safety outcomes. The youth allowance does not go toward paying for the HECS fee it merely contributes to the expense of living in a university city. Our son will need to pay more than \$285 for his board and accommodation per week at university. On top of this he will incur the HECS debt. He will work to contribute to his support during this period. These people are young adults fresh, enthusiastic, motivated and wish to contribute to their community and Australia. They should be encouraged and supported to gain their tertiary education.

Please rethink these proposed changes and 1) do not make them retrospective 2) do not tie it to a number of consistent working hours per week  
3) make the system fair for both city and country families 4) add incentives to country children to encourage them to gain a university degree

Colleen Langan