

To whom it may concern

My name is Stephanie Domanski and I am currently undertaking a Gap year. I decided to defer university based on the criteria set at the completion of my secondary education. The proposed changes in the federal budget will exclude myself and my fellow students who have taken a Gap year in 2009 from being eligible for allowance, as centrelink reviews a student's eligibility at the end of their Gap year. The retrospective nature of this legislation disenfranchises a huge number of young people like myself, who made their decisions in good faith based on criteria which no longer apply. Needless to say, we do not have the option of changing this decision, and without your support, many like myself will have postponed our education, and a year's worth of graduate salary, in the mistaken belief that this would assist us in supporting ourselves at university.

I live in Port Macquarie, NSW, a regional area, and at the beginning of this year I deferred my place at the University of NSW in Sydney studying Chemical Engineering. In order to complete my degree I will have to move, incurring substantial living costs that will not apply to students from the city who may live at home, and even remain in their current employment while studying. As youth allowance must be received in order for a student to be eligible for any of the governments other proposed student funding, no provision whatsoever has been made for regional students who must relocate to attend university and whose parents earn too much for them to automatically apply but may not be able to support a child studying away from home. Without any funding from the government I will not be able to afford to study Chemical Engineering as I have no choice but to relocate as the course is not available in my local area.

Furthermore, this is also the case with many of my peers, and if no provision is made for regional students to be able to study courses they have to relocate for, fewer students will be able to afford university; parents will only be able to afford to send one child to university while others will miss out and most significantly; The professionals most likely to work in regional areas after becoming qualified, that is those originally from regional areas, will not be given the opportunity to train, and eventually the shortages we already feel will become greater still.

Changes to the qualification criteria mean that prospective students must now work full time for a minimum of 30 hours per week, for at least 18 months. I have been advised by centrelink that if a prospective student is not working full time but achieves 30 hours per week on average over the 18 month period they do not qualify. The vast majority of tertiary education institutions in Australia only allow course deferment for one year, meaning that even if I and my cohort were all able to find full-time employment in our regional hometowns, by this stage in the year we would have to postpone our education by a further year, thereby forfeiting our accepted university places. This would mean that many students may have to alter their desired destination for tertiary education in order to complete the course they have aspired to take, or even reassess their choice of course.

As a base measure, the starting date of these reforms should be pushed back to at least 2010 to make provision for those students who already made their decision based on the then current policy. If the changes must then be made, they must take into account the needs of students who need to relocate to attend university, particularly those from regional areas.

Regards  
Stephanie Domanski