

The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Youth Allowance Scheme for Rural Tertiary Students 2010

I am writing to your Committee to express my deep concern and frustration at the changes to be introduced from 2010 to the Youth Allowance Scheme for Rural Tertiary Students, which were announced by the Government in the recent budget.

Our daughter is one of the many rural students who deferred their tertiary studies for 12 months, in order to work to accumulate enough funds, (approximately \$19,000) to qualify for the Youth Allowance under the previous criteria for eligibility.

Importantly, she was on track to achieve the monies by working extremely hard, sometimes long hours of overtime, whilst forsaking her first year of studies. Many rural students undertake this pathway, as the allowance is necessary to offset the high cost of re-location to the city to study. As you are aware there is limited scope to undertake tertiary study in the country, even in major regional centres. The diversity of tertiary courses is limited, as are the number and the quality of institutions. Therefore, the preferred and necessary option is to work for a year, then relocate to the city to study their tertiary courses. Often these rural students do not wish to do this, they would prefer to study immediately after completing their secondary education, however, many rural parents cannot afford this pathway.

We see these proposed changes to Youth Allowance Scheme as a huge letdown for rural students and their parents. Moreover, these changes will favour city students over rural students. By having to take a minimum of 18 months off study to work, before commencing their tertiary studies, rural students will be left behind their age cohort and peers as they move through the tertiary system.

Furthermore not all tertiary institutions have mid year intakes for all courses. Some pre-requisite university courses for first year students are generic and are only offered in first semester, the idea being these courses provide new tertiary students with a general grounding in tertiary studies and a platform to go on and undertake their speciality courses with a high degree of confidence. Mid year intakes may mean these courses will not be offered until the following year and hence again disadvantaging these rural students.

Our specific situation now means my wife will have to work longer, when she was contemplating a reduced working week. We are lucky that our daughter has work at present; however, the economic downturn does not guarantee ongoing employment as

she is employed as a casual. It will also be difficult for her to gain casual work in the city, deemed necessary to complement the monies she will have earned during the last 12-18 months, to enable her to study.

Importantly, our daughter is ready to commence her studies, now. She is not interested in another 12 months of casual work to qualify under the new criteria for the Youth Allowance. If you ask her and many of her friends, they will tell you they have been duped by these changes and are extremely disappointed to learn that their preferred option to undertake tertiary study in the city has been surreptitiously delayed by the Government.

These young people, the country's future work force and leaders are now faced with the added costs of setting up a new residence, which is not cheap in the city. They will be dislocated from their immediate families and friends, necessitating many long distance road trips just to visit. These issues accumulate and cause people to worry, when they should be leaping into a new phase of their lives with enthusiasm and confidence.

Therefore, I respectfully request that your committee advises the Government of these issues and recommend that they retrospectively use the previous criteria, which were well known to prospective tertiary students and their parents, for qualification for the Youth Allowance in 2010.

Yours sincerely

Kim Nardi B.Sc; B.Sc (Hons); M.Sc

4 August 2009