

Dear Sir/Madam

I would like to ask that measures be taken to address the Rudd Government's changes to the workforce participation criteria for establishing independence under Youth Allowance by removing the following two eligibility criteria: that the recipient worked part-time for 15+ hours per week for two years or more since leaving school; and the recipient earned, in an 18-month period since leaving school, an amount equivalent to 75% of the maximum rate of pay (in 2009 this requires earnings of \$19,532).

The effect of this change is that eligibility criteria for the Independent Youth Allowance will retrospectively require participants to complete 30 hours per week over a 18/24 month period, compared with earning \$19,532 over 18 months. This means a student who has complied with the previous rules but not worked 30 hours per week will have lost the credit for their effort and must start again, thus losing two years before being able to commence a University course.

These changes may not necessarily have an effect on metropolitan youth who move from primary education to secondary and then on to tertiary without much upheaval in their lives (i.e. they are able to live at home). The proposal does, however, further disadvantage rural and regional young people who must fund their total accommodation costs over and above the other direct costs of tertiary education. Rural and regional youth already have enough difficulty having to move away to study without having additional financial worries. Working 30 hours per week while attending University is virtually impossible while attempting most courses.

Many country people are very angry and frustrated about the changes to the criteria and feel it is just further evidence of the federal government not caring about the families of the average wage earner and ignoring the needs of those living in regional centres. While there are deserving measures in place for the low income earners, everything else appears to be customized for the wealthy, while the "middle income" people are left to struggle.

Something must be done to address this unfair change to the Independent Youth Allowance criteria and ensure that the needs of the youth in regional and rural Western Australia are addressed.

Regards

Ann Boyle