

Senate Hearing
Re: Changes to Youth Allowance
To whom it may concern,

Dear Sir,

I am writing in regards to the proposed changes to the current youth allowance system by the Australian Labor Party Government.

Though the current youth allowance system has a number of flaws it is grossly unfair that the changes be made retrospective, on students that are currently following the guidelines that are still on the Center Link web site.

These guide lines state that "to be eligible to receive youth allowance you must, in an eighteen month period on completion of year 12, earn 75% of the minimum wage".

Decisions, financial and academic, that will affect the next 5 to 10 years of a student's life have been made on this information.

Scholarships have not been sought, others have been declined, courses have been deferred and if the changes go through a year will be wasted.

If nothing else the Australian adage of "a fair go" should apply and the Students who are currently on a "Gap year" should receive Youth allowance as they are proving their independence and are following the rule as set down for them.

Beside how the proposed changes to the youth allowance will affect current gap year student for this year, my real concern is the long term effect of these changes on country students or students who have to leave home city for their further studies.

These discriminatory changes will reduce the number of country students seeking further education as the burden of the \$10,000 to \$15,000 accommodation costs alone will not be able to be afforded by many country families.

If a country family could afford to send one child but has two children of University age they would be forced into choosing which child to send, if either!

None of these accommodation costs are carried by city students as they are able to live at home and be looked after by their parents.

Which brings me to another issue that I have with the proposed changes and that is "Proof of independence".

I believe that any students who are forced to leave home to study should be deemed as independent and therefore receive the independence living allowance.

They have to take on their studies, their own financial management, their own health and their own transport issues. They no longer have the emotional and physical support of families that city students do.

Asking a student to complete 30 hours of work a week for two years so that they can access Youth allowance is ridiculous. How is a student supposed to attend lectures, study and work almost full time?

Two other ways to prove that a student is independent is to get pregnant or to form a Defacto relationship. As a parent of two daughters of University age I will not be recommending either of these courses of action.

There is already a large divide of goods and services between people who live in the city and those, through no choice of their own, live in the county. These changes would only add to this divide making it even more difficult for country students to attend University and would reduce the number attending even more.

However, if an un-means tested allowance of between \$7,000 to \$10,000 was given to country students or students who had to leave their family home to pursue a field of study of their choice. This would help cover their accommodation/living costs and would go some way to help over-come the disadvantage that these students face.

I am not suggesting that there should be free University, as there was for most of the members of parliament who are proposing these changes, but equality of access to education.

On those “who are proposing the changes”, my belief is, most were born in cities, grew up in cities, lived in close proximity to where they were educated, had financial and emotional family support through all of their education, received free University (without even a HEX debt) and have never experienced what a country student goes through to receive their education.

If they had any inkling as to what a country family goes through to get their child to and through University they would not be proposing these changes as they are.

Country students, whose parents can afford to send their child to University, will have their education paid for with planned retirement savings.

The financial burden of putting students through University will still fall on the Australian Government. Instead of assisting the student now the government will be assisting the parent later as the parents will have insufficient funds to retire on.

The Bradley Review had some forty-eight recommendations; look at the report as a whole, not just select one point to base the changes to the further education policy.

By taking the “Youth Allowance” recommendation in isolation to the rest of the report it is at direct odds to another recommendation which is to increase access to University for country students to match that of their city counterparts who are attending University. Already the percentage of city students going on to attend University is far greater than that of country students. Thirty percent more students from a city back ground compared to those of a country back ground go on to attend University.

These proposed changes will only help to widen the difference not decrease the difference as recommended.

Like I have said “these discriminatory changes” will adversely affect the number of country students attending University.

We believed the Labor Party when we were sold “The Smart Country”.

Was this policy only lip service to get votes?

These proposed changes will not help support this policy but will only open the divide between “City” and “Country” even more and will only help to dumb down the “Country”.

In closing I will quote the United Nations 26th basic human right.

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be **equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.**”

Yours Sincerely
Morris Dickins