

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing to give you a real life explanation of how the proposed changes to Youth Allowance criteria will actually impact on my daughter, and obviously others like her whose families live in a rural community.

My daughter, Alice, completed Year 12 in 2008 and received a UAI of 97.05 and was offered a place at Sydney University to study Psychology this year. She diligently researched and discussed with the school counsellor/careers advisor, Centrelink and others who had been in the same position in the past, and could see the best option for her financially was to defer university for a year and earn an income to meet the YA criteria. She is now working as a gap assistant at a school in England during 2009.

It beggars belief that the Government is proposing to change the Youth Allowance criteria for this cohort midstream. These kids have worked hard at school, are working hard now to save money, they practised due diligence to set out on a career path only to find they are to have the rug pulled out from under them.

If they start a university degree next year, how will they do justice to study and juggle working 30 hours per week for up to the first 6 months? And this is assuming they can find work. My daughter will have to move 700kms away from home to attend Sydney University. Even our closest university at Wagga is over 250kms away so living at home is not an option to undertake tertiary study.

If families cannot afford to send their children to university without YA support and they are forced to defer for 2 years to meet the YA criteria, what guarantee is there that universities are willing to allow students to defer for 2 years? Also I would be very concerned that if forced to defer for 2 years that many kids, and especially young men from rural areas, might decide not to go to university at all.

Living and working from home is also not an option for our daughter. She does not have a car and there is no public transport. We live 25kms from our local town of Hay which has a population of approx 3,000 and employment opportunities for unskilled school leavers are very limited. There is some casual or seasonal work but nothing like 30 hours per week.

The biggest losers if these proposed changes go ahead, will be students from country areas – not only this year's cohort but all future cohorts. To disadvantage country kids will have the flow on effect of disadvantaging country communities in general. These kids are the ones more likely to return to country areas after attaining their degree. And we so badly need skilled professionals in rural communities, which continue to suffer from the effects of the prolonged drought.

I applaud the reasons for the proposed changes to YA criteria and the flow-on that more students will benefit. However I implore the Government to revisit and take a closer look at the real affect this will have on students who are geographically isolated and unable to live at home to attend university. Surely it is not their intention to disadvantage these kids?

Please let me know if there is any other information you might require to see common sense prevail.

Yours sincerely,
Beth Bowman