

We would like to present our objections to the changes to the Austudy Student Allowance.

Ms Gillard, your figures do not seem to add up. If a student finishes Year 12 in November then defers his study for 12 months there is only a 15 month period that he may be able to work a 30 hour week for 18 months. This certainly is the case with our son Riley, who finished Year 12 November 2008, now has taken the GAP year and will commence study at RMIT University Melbourne March 2010. He cannot possibly work for a full period of 18 months /30 hours a week... it is just a total impossibility even if he did not allow himself to have one or two weeks holidays during this time. Besides, RMIT only gave him one year of deferment. He just cannot get 18 months out of a 15 month window. It seems to us you think that these students who have worked so hard to achieve their goals do not deserve any time off and have a bit of a break.

As we are farmers, our son has always worked on the family farm on a casual basis during his High School years and certainly was not able to work 30 hours a week whilst in Year 12. Riley did try very hard early this year to obtain work in our nearest town Sale but was unsuccessful as employment was very scarce due to the economic downturn. So as Riley could not earn the desired amount of money to qualify for Austudy, we decided to employ Riley on a much more regular basis. To do this we have had to not re employ another Casual Employee this year. Parents are not just employing their children so as they can qualify for Austudy. Ms Gillard our son is working very hard indeed for his wages each week and is definitely not being given a hand out by anyone.

It is our belief that our children, both boys, have needed to take a GAP year not only to earn money to qualify for Austudy but also to mature that little bit more and become more responsible for themselves. Ms Gillard you must remember that these young adults are not just going onto further study, they are actually leaving home to live a considerable distance from their families. They are not in a position to be able to pop around the corner to visit or have a family member look after them if they are unwell or need some family contact. Country children have to learn to manage and deal with life's challenges away from their familiar environment. Being removed, from a community where faces and places are all a part of who they are, to the big city can be overwhelming for these young people. We have seen first hand young men (not so much girls as they are generally more mature at the same age) pull out of their studies very early in the first year of tertiary education. Homesick, poor, hating the traffic, not knowing anyone close by, scared of failure ...whatever the reason they have pulled the pin and returned home.

Ms Gillard the gap year Austudy combo was and still can be an absolute winner for rural people. Life on the land has not been an attractive future for young Australians in the past ten years of drought. My comment to my oldest lad when he was about fourteen and helping me in the paddock on a day when the heat and dust were intolerable, "you put your head down at school and learn to do something else other than this farming game". He replied "yes dad, it's not much of a life is it!" Not much of a life Ms Gillard. But that same boy now twenty one, getting distinctions studying mechanical engineering, playing footy for the local suburban team, meeting new people from other walks of life, ask him now about the gap year Austudy combo. It is

a very happy story that that boy will have to tell. Why on earth would you, Ms Gillard, destroy a system that gave such a wonderful opportunity to kids from the country. Sure there may be opportunistic people rorting the system but does that mean that you rip up a system that from where we sit gave rural and remote children a real opportunity to take up the challenge of further education.

Our second son, having watched his brother leave home for a new life studying in the city, set his sights on doing the same thing. As mentioned earlier, he put his head down and got himself a place at RMIT to study Landscape Architecture, deferred for a gap year, then WHAMMO!! The rug is pulled from under him. Ms Gillard he was disbelieving when his mate SMS'd him to say that the gap year Austudy combo had been destroyed. He asked me if it were true, I replied that no one would to destroy that combo without giving the people involved some notice or rather, more importantly, put something better in it's place. But there it was in black and white the next day. Ms Gillard you cannot, as a responsible representative of our democracy, make decisions that take real opportunities away from our young citizens just to get at a few who don't play by the rules. That is not clever at all.

There will be a way to stop rich people rorting the system without causing angst and distress to those young people who have made decisions over the past few years to work hard at school and set their sights on achieving something worthwhile for Australia's future .But don't destroy the plans of those who aspired to operate honestly within the boundaries of the gap year Austudy system. The 18months/30hours a week idea will not work for our rural and country students. Be fair to them, let them implement the plans they have made to have a bright and successful future.

Yours faithfully,
James & Annette Frew