

Senator Fiona Nash
Parliament House
Suite SG 108
Canberra ACT 2600

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28th July 2009,

Dear Senator Nash

My name is Alex Ward and I am currently in my gap year and I am writing to you with much concern regarding the Government's proposed legislative changes to criteria for Youth Allowance eligibility. I urge you not to support this legislation in its current form as it will have extremely negative consequences for students who are in their gap year and for future gap year students.

The proposed changes will have a significantly negative impact on young Australian adults contemplating a University career especially if they live in Regional Australia. I based my decision about having a gap year before going to University on the information available to me at the time and I have been working two jobs to earn the required amount of money over 18 months. I think that it is very unfair to students in this position and may even mean that they change their minds completely about a University career. I was Dux and School Captain of Toormina High School in Coffs Harbour and even I am not sure if I will be able to afford to go to University if the changes come in.

My other concerns include:

1. Regional students will be disadvantaged as most cannot stay at home to attend university unlike students in metropolitan areas who can choose from several universities and live home if necessary. This is a clear inequity for students in regional Australia who need independent status and Youth Allowance support, as well as support from their parents in order to undertake expensive University studies.
2. Regional students who cannot attend a local university and who do not meet the new proposed criteria will likely decide not to go to university at all. This in time will have a significant impact on Australia's economic and corporate future.
3. Insisting on a minimum of 30hours employment for two years will be completely unattainable for gap students in regional areas as jobs are less available and often work is seasonal in nature.
4. Not allowing any minimum hours of work to be averaged over time is unfair and unreasonable.
5. The Bradley Review found that at present 36% of independent students receiving Youth Allowance and living at home were from families with incomes above \$100,000. The proposed changes are misdirected as they will disadvantage regional students who cannot live at home as there is no local university course available to them in most cases. In a time when home mortgages are often in the

- \$300,000 - \$400,000 range a combined income of \$100,000 definitely does not represent wealth, especially when many parents will be supporting several students attending university.
6. Increasing the financial burden on regional students wishing to attend university will require them to work longer casual employment hours while they are studying. This will surely increase their stress levels and decrease their chances of high academic success.
 7. Introducing any changes that affect those students currently on a gap year, based in good faith, on information provided by Centrelink (earning \$19,000 over 18 months) is entirely unfair. If any changes are to be introduced those students currently in their gap year must be exempted.
 8. Students of families who may have a combined income of more than \$100,000 should not be penalised. Family financial circumstances and commitments vary enormously and it is both dangerous and unfair to assume that those students do not need or should not be eligible for independent status and a Youth Allowance.

Again, I urge you not to support this proposed legislation. Rather than “tighten eligibility criteria” in order to make the Federal dollar go further the Commonwealth should be increasing support for students wishing to go to university. If the Government decides to push ahead with making it more difficult for students, especially regional students, to qualify for Youth Allowance then it should be automatic that all students who have to move away from home qualify for Start up Scholarships, Re-location scholarships and the Health Care Card. This would truly support the notion of an “Education Revolution” and would ensure that our brightest young people have an equal opportunity in furthering their education. Ultimately our nation will reap the benefit.

Yours Sincerely

Alexandra Ward