

I write to protest the changes that have been made to the Youth Allowance in the most recent Federal budget.

These changes are most unfair to the cohort of 2008 school leavers, in particular to country students and if an exception is not made for this very small group, it may well have a detrimental effect on their careers.

My daughter completed TEE in 2008 and immediately found employment in the Manjimup district. She has been working 5 days a week, 7am -5pm in a local apple packing shed until the last few weeks when she was finally able to get job in the township of Manjimup, in a local chemist shop.

She has deferred her university studies until 2010. She did this with the knowledge that she would receive Youth Allowance in May 2010 if she worked hard and met the financial criterion for independence.

Her deferral of her place at university is for one year only.

I think it is unreasonable to change the rules once the students have already deferred their courses. In their minds, these young people are working this year to prove their financial independence with the aim to commence their studies in 2010. This group of students will be focussed on studying next year. I am most concerned that if my daughter has to work two years before she becomes eligible to gain her financial independence, things will have changed for her, and that the focus on tertiary studies may well have shifted.

We are a country family that falls into the middle income bracket and with the current changes it will be very hard to support our daughter financially whilst she studies.

If a family member is living at home it is not such an expense to keep them whilst they study. A country student must be found board at a college or in a share house/flat. Food and travel expenses must be found. Travel expenses to and from their place of study and to and from their home in the country. The expenses for a country family to visit a child studying in the city, to maintain relationships and support the student is an extra financial burden for country families which is not experienced city families.

Whilst living away from home country students suffer because they do not have the daily emotional and psychological support of family life. They do not have their families and the community they have grown up in to help them cope with their studies and the stresses of university life. At the same time as learning to cope with the demands of university life they are in a strange environment - the city. I am sure statistics show that it is not easy for country student to succeed in their tertiary studies.

The changes you are introducing will increase the pressure on these country students who have been able to apply themselves to their studies and gain university entrance. If you remove benefits for these students they will need to work so many hours to help support themselves that it will be detrimental to their studies. Whilst they are doing this, remember that they will not have their families on hand to help them get work, keep them at work and make sure they are well fed and healthy. Add to this that finding a job anywhere is not easy at present. I think it is reasonable to expect young people to earn money to pay for luxuries, however to need to go to work to pay for everyday living expenses and study at the same time seems contradictory. If study is full time - that is what it is, and should be, students should not be distracted from their studies by the need to support themselves paying rent and buying food.

It seems strange that this government which has a platform of promoting equity, especially in education and training, is making it very difficult for country students to gain a tertiary education.

There is a corollary to these changes which will have a long term detrimental impact on country communities. Whilst many country districts today can provide education to a standard that gives country students access to tertiary education many parents are prepared to stay in country towns, rather than shift to the city for their children's education. However, if the government does not recognise the difficulties faced by country families, the financial, the emotional and psychological difficulties they face when their children leave home for tertiary studies, (remember they are leaving both their homes and their schools) and ease at least the financial burden on country families it may influence these families to leave country districts. The country districts will lose not only the young students but their families as well. This will be a double "brain drain" on country districts with long term consequences for country Australia.

I trust you will make an exception for the 2008 cohort of students from country districts who are currently working to gain independence status to enable them to start their tertiary studies in 2010 and that you look to ways of encouraging and enabling all students from country districts to pursue tertiary studies.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Nixon,