

I am a parent of 2 children. I live in Denmark WA and am extremely concerned about changes to the Youth Allowance.

I have had a child leave Denmark to go to a school in Perth for Year 11 and 12. While he was there he was eligible for a Living Away from Home Allowance. On leaving high school our family income was means tested. My husband and I are PAYE, low income, unfortunately we were over the eligible limit by a small amount. My son ended up being entitled to \$20 a week while he attended TAFE in Perth. His courses were expensive, he had to rent property, pay for transport, food etc. with \$20/week. We were in a position to assist him in a minimal way financially. He left TAFE and has been labouring for 5 years. This year, he has enrolled at University, at the age of 23!! He will be 27 before he qualifies!

If realistic support was available to rural families to support their children when they leave home to study, maybe they would not drop out as much. The University closes to us does offer limited courses for 1st year studies – after that bad luck ... off to the city. Children are taken from their communities and their families to study.

If we lived in the city – obviously – we would be able to accommodate, feed and support our children as city families do.

The situation now is that they have to study and work to earn enough to pay all their costs.

Extending the GAP YEAR period will not help. The only thing I can see this causing is more country students dropping out of studying. Deferring for 18 months is ridiculous.

My daughter is currently in Year 12. She would dearly love to go to Perth next year to immediately commence her studies so that she qualifies at a reasonable age. Again we would not be able to support her and she would have to earn approximately \$300 to pay her costs.

An 18 month gap year means effectively means if she were to enter university after earning her independence she would have to be a MID YEAR INTAKE. Not all university courses offer this. Students sometimes need to enrol in another course for 6 months and then swap over – more waste of time.

It makes me feel like further education will only be affordable for the wealthy.

We are not in a position to run two households.

I support Terry Redman in his press statement:

“I am concerned for all families affected by these changes and particularly for those students currently in their gap-year, who were expecting to qualify for Youth Allowance next year:

“It is clear that many of those will have to defer their studies further and indeed some will abandon their ambitions altogether.

“It is difficult to fathom the Federal Government’s thinking in implementing changes that will effectively discourage regional students from higher education.

“I have submitted that recent changes to Youth Allowance will deny many country students the opportunity to participate in higher education and that it is imperative urgent changes are made to enable equal opportunity.

“The Senate Inquiry provides a vehicle for country families to let the Rudd Government know how seriously these changes will affect them and it is important that they take that opportunity now,” Mr Redman said.

The entire system needs to be reviewed in a more realistic manner for country/rural students having to leave their communities. More support needs to be available and income levels for country families needs to be reviewed so it is fair across the board.

Lynda Gerrard