

To Sir/Madam,

My name is Jessica Hardy. I am eighteen years old and have recently finished my HSC year in 2008. In late 2008 my careers advisor gave me options as to where I might head into the future, those being; to either enter full time employment, go to university or take a gap year. As I have undertaken a bachelor of arts/teaching at the University of New England, the later two options appealed to me. I researched and made the decision to undertake a gap year before going on to do my tertiary studies. I felt I would like to gain valuable experience in the workforce, but mostly I was driven to achieve the bar of \$19,500, so that when I entered university I could apply for the fundamental financial support. However, with the recent policy changes to alter the criteria in which to be eligible for youth allowance, this has put my future tertiary studies in peril.

Sir/Madam, I am employed at my local McDonald's restaurant, which I have been working at since I was fifteen years of age. I decided to enter full time employment at McDonald's as it gave me great work experience and insight into the working industry, but mostly because I had the full backing of the management team that they would help me achieve my goal of \$19,500, so I may be eligible for youth allowance. As I am currently in the middle of the year, I am on target to meet the bar. However, what the Government needs to understand is McDonald's does not give me a set number of hours a week. Sometimes I work 38 hour weeks, or sometimes I only work 25 hour weeks. Therefore, it is difficult to achieve a set 30 hours a week. Not to mention if I become ill and have to miss work. It is not my decision or in my power to dictate the number of hours I am given. And in the current economic crisis, finding a second job to ensure I met the maximum 30 hour week plan, is proving difficult, as my local businesses are not employing. This Sir/Madam, I believe is not only my pain and struggle, but it is the pain and struggle that thousands of other gap year students are facing.

Sir/Madam, university is a life changing experience. As young adults we move away from our families and homes, hence our comfort zones. With this sudden shock into the real world we must hence delve into our studies, learn to balance a hard work ethic, but also find a stable social network. With all these adversities to overcome, we do not need to add financial burdens to this list. Also it is worth recognising the financial struggle faced by rural and regional students. I am talking about the fact that this particular demographic must travel further away from home and hence these students have no means of financial support from their families. Sir/Madam, we should be encouraging people to go to university, not the other way around. For the continual running of Australia we need its people to go to university and become the doctors, nurses, teachers, barristers and engineers etc. of Australia's future. Hence, by putting more financial stress on university students, you are deterring people from going to university and hence under resourcing Australia in the long term.

Sir/Madam, I understand fully the current financial crisis that we have entered and that the Government wishes to ease the financial strain felt by the Australian people by finding ways

to save money. If this plan must be implemented by the Government, may it be imposed next year in 2010, so that the students who have chosen to have a gap year this year are not negatively affected by this change. In implementing this policy in 2010 students undertaking tertiary studies next year can see the options available and hence make a more informed choice. I believe, Sir/Madam, that the Government would be unjustly treating gap year students of 2009 by implementing this policy as soon as possible, as we had no prior knowledge the change, and hence may have chosen our situations differently last year when it came time to chose our future path.

This new policy could have a detrimental affect on this year's university gap year students, hence negatively impacting occupations in the long term. I beg you, Sir/Madam, to really think about the consequences this policy could have on my future and of my generation's future.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica Hardy