

To The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing in protest about the proposed changes to Youth Allowance for university students and the changes to qualifying for the independent status. I am a country parent of three boys aged 21, 19 and 17. My oldest will finish an accounting degree at ANU this year thanks to his hard work and the help of Youth Allowance. He was able to attend university because he began as a cadet with an accounting firm for two years and studied part time. He was then able to study full time with the help of Youth Allowance. This means that he will begin working, being a responsible and contributing member of society, and repaying his HESC s fee in 2010. This was a success story.

All my children have been raised and educated in a small country town which was something we chose to do when they very young. My ex husband and myself chose to move to the country to give our children a `better` quality of life. Little did we realize that perhaps we would have been wiser to stay in the city. This would have meant that attending university and living at home would have been possible.

Living in the country has disadvantaged our son's education in many ways. They have had little access to the special facilities & experiences that city children have such as development programs for music or sport or educational experiences such as galleries, exhibitions etc. It has meant that we have had to pay board and fees for two of our sons final 2 years in a city school. Our last son has stayed in our town rather than cause me any more financial strain, this however has meant he has missed out in many ways.

This year our middle child has spent his gap year in the defence force as a Gap Year Cadet believing he would be ready with his saving and the help of youth allowance to begin his physiotherapy course in 2010. It is really distressing to have his hopes dashed of the possibility of tertiary education and further postponement of his studies. The postponement of his career is very disheartening to a young man. He will after all also become a valuable member of society and ultimately repay his dues in HECS and future tax.

My youngest son will also complete his HSC this year and was also prepared to earn his independence with a year's hard work. It appears that any possibility of a tertiary education is well out of reach and the future looks dismal. Employment is difficult and there is no security regarding long term or permanent opportunity. It concerns me that this government is taking any hope of tertiary study and gaining of employable qualifications away from our bright young students.

I can see that the government feels it is our parental responsibility to provide our children with the finance needed to pursue university studies. This is not always possible. As a single parent for most of my son's lives I have been the sole provider for two of my sons. I am a teacher which is not a highly paid profession but a reliable one. My income places my sons well out of the reach of the threshold for assistance for country students. It is a sad fact of life that I am also aging and trying to organize my own financial future, I still have a mortgage and only a small superannuation due to the fact I always used my income to provide for my family and was unable to make any voluntary contributions. I have little confidence in my ability to even plan for myself yet alone bear the cost of providing accommodation, food, text books for both of my two sons for another four years.

Living in a small town means my sons have to live away from home to attend university and I have no chance of providing this for my children. I realize I am indeed fortunate to earn a wage but this does not guarantee my children's opportunity to secure a good future. Surely the fact that a young person can prove themselves independent by earning above \$18000 over a twelve month period is proof enough that they will be worthy recipients of assistance in their tertiary career and repay this through future earnings. The governments guidelines of qualifying as an independent (working for 30 hours for at least 18 months) are restrictive in that students can only defer their studies for twelve months. Is Youth allowance then really to encourage our youth to study? How can we expect our young people to delay their education indefinitely?

It is a undeniable fact that country students are disadvantaged and the governments provision of some allowances for the severely disadvantaged does not go far enough in providing for the majority of Australian country students.

I fear we will lose many bright young people in our future society and workforce if we cannot provide an equitable opportunity for tertiary study. I myself was only able to study with the help of TEAS and certainly did not have HECS upon graduation. Most of my teaching colleagues also claim that without government financial assistance they also would not have earned their teaching degrees. This is a frightening thought when we consider that teaching is an ageing profession and there is a real need to supplement our force of teachers.

The introduction of HECS and now the proposed changes to the guidelines of qualifying as an independent are unfair and a money saving ploy by the government that ultimately will lead to a return to 'education for the rich' and a future workforce that will be missing some of our brightest and best country students. I have lived my life being ever thankful that I as a (country student) was given the opportunity to complete a tertiary education solely from my own independent means and the help of TEAS. If not for the help of this allowance I would not have been able to consider university. I am sure I have contributed and repaid this through my earnings and the 26 years I have spent educating young people. It is these young people who deserve a fair chance to prove their independence and to complete their education especially those disadvantaged by living in a rural area.

Yours sincerely

Ms J Greacen

