

To whom it may concern,

I completed my VCE in 2007 and am currently enrolled at RMIT University. I deferred my first year of study last year (2008) because neither I, nor my parents, were able to fund my tertiary studies immediately.

As a student from the country town of Echuca, it was particularly difficult for my family to afford the costs associated with moving to Melbourne. I worked from January 2008 to February 2009 in order to become independent and financially able to pay for my studies. I saved enough money to pay rental and grocery costs until I was granted youth allowance. Without youth allowance I would be unable to continue my studies unless I returned home every weekend to work.

Although it is possible for rural students to find employment in the regions of their universities, or to return home each weekend to casual work, it cannot be done without immense hardship. To begin with there are the unavoidable travel costs which, even with youth allowance, accumulate over the year to become a substantial expense. In current financial times there is no guarantee that casual employees will be given shifts which I believe would make it extremely difficult for students to ensure that they complete the dictated 30 hours of work each week. I also think it is quite likely that students who defer their studies for two years will become complacent in the workforce and remain in jobs which may not fulfil their ultimate potential.

For rural students especially, moving to the city is often a frightening and mentally exhausting experience. Not only are students expected to create a new social network at their place of learning, but they must live independently in new cities and towns, away from the guidance of their parents. It would not have been possible for me to adjust so well to my new home if I had had to return home every weekend. I am quite unusual by university student standards in that I keep the majority of my socialising to the weekends but this is not the case for many. However, social gatherings are an integral part of student life and are important way for young adults to make new friends and experience s. It would be unrealistic and unfair to expect students to give up parties and gatherings in order to work. In reality, it is probable that students will forego their studies rather than their social life and this would have an immensely negative impact on Australian workplaces.

By enforcing 30 hours of work each week upon students who are already required to be in class for approximately 15 hours during the same period of time, it is likely that their studies will be affected detrimentally. I believe it is most important that students be able to spend a significant amount of time on reading and assignments rather than organising homework around their work hours. It would be harmful for Australian citizens if, in five or ten years time, newly graduated professionals were incapable of performing their chosen careers properly because they missed a lesson due to work requirements.

Employers often have little regard to their employees' lives outside of work and will take advantage of the fact that young adults are not confident enough to negotiate suitable working hours.

The current youth allowance system has been an extremely helpful tool in enabling my commencement of tertiary studies and it would be a shame if other students did not have the chance to enjoy the same benefits that I have had. I urge senators to reflect on their own years at university and the difficulties they faced as students embarking upon the adult world. It is vital that the current system remain in place in order to produce socially

adjusted and well-educated graduates.

Sincerely,
Rikki Morgan