

Submission to Senate Inquiry into Youth Allowance Changes

I am a Bundaberg resident who completed high school in 2008. I am endeavoring to become a Physiotherapist. No such courses are offered in nearby rural universities or through external institutions. To undertake study in this field it is imperative that I move from my current residence and seek accommodation in a larger city where such courses are offered. I have been accepted into and deferred a (Pre-Physio) Bachelor of Exercise Science course at Griffith University on the Gold Coast. Griffith University on the Gold Coast is 5-6hrs from my hometown of Bundaberg which means I would definitely have to move to the Gold Coast and find independent accommodation, as we have no family or close friends living in the area.

Seeking accommodation in a large city for five or more years will require finances above what would be affordable for me or my parents. For this reason, I made the decision to defer my course and take a gap year for the purpose of earning some money and applying for youth allowance in mid 2010. The belief that I would be able to gain this allowance was a major contributing factor in making the decision to take a gap year.

I was offered a full time position in retail for 12 months or more before completing yr 12. I made the decision to take the position and work for 12 months after leaving school (a gap year) with the belief that I would be eligible to claim financial independence and receive the youth allowance when studying in the following year, having earned the required amount of money in the 12 month period. So currently I am working full time and mid way through a gap year on base retail salary. If am not able to obtain the youth allowance once I go to university I will have basically wasted a year. I could be one year ahead in my studies and be in the medical industry treating members of the community and earning more than a base retail salary 12 months sooner.

The newly proposed changes are simply incompatible with the options provided by university institutions. Under normal circumstances the maximum deferment period available with the grantee of maintaining our accepted university position is 12 months. This is the case for me. The proposed changes stipulate that in order for students to gain the youth allowance 18months must be spent in the work force. In order to do this fulltime work would have to be undertaken while attending school or full time university neither of which is realistically achievable. If I were to apply for the youth allowance next year under the proposed requirements I would have to continue to work for at least 30 hrs per week until June 2010 at which point I could apply for the youth allowance. If I were to do this it would be necessary to secure work in a flexible enough environment to be able to attend lectures and study.

This five year course involves a three years of study in exercise science, and followed by a 2 year Doctorate of Physiotherapy. To continue on from the exercise science degree and undertake doctoral studies, I must maintain high grades (GPA of 5.5) during the first three years. This achievement will be more difficult if I have to gain near-full time employment in order to support myself.

The changes proposed to the youth allowance in the next budget, will force many community members and students to continue or look for work in an already strained job market. Under the existing circumstances these people were able to attend university and further their education in order to fill positions of better service to the community.

My decision to further my education through university studies, with the goal of gaining employment in a position of better service to the community has been severely and

adversely affected should the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria for the youth allowance go ahead. There are no other study options for me to be able to fulfill my chosen career path, and so despite the changes I will still be moving to attend university in 2010 which will however result in severe and long-lasting financial strain on me and my family. I will undoubtedly have to search for a significant amount of part-time work whilst studying full-time, hindering the quality of my studies.

I urge the Government to reconsider its plan of attack and take into account the effects to students such as myself, and many others who will be drastically affected by sudden changes to eligibility requirements to the previously available youth allowance system.