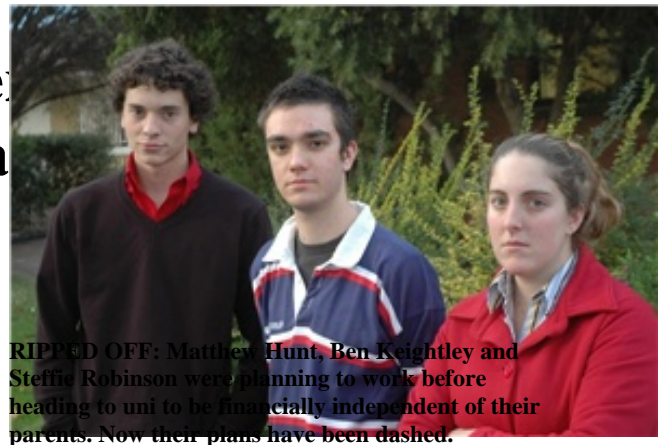


Not happy Kev: Inverell at changes to youth a

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RIPPED OFF: Matthew Hunt, Ben Keightley and Steffie Robinson were planning to work before heading to uni to be financially independent of their parents. Now their plans have been dashed.

Proposed changes to the independence requirements for Youth Allowance, outlined in last Tuesday's Federal budget have been met with disbelief and anger from some of Inverell's youth.

Students relying on receiving Youth Allowance after taking a gap year to work before attending university have had their plans shattered with the announcement that students will have to work for a minimum of 30 hours per week for 18 months before being classed as financially independent.

Former Macintyre High School student Steffie Robinson is working at HN McLean Retirement Village in administration since finishing school and was focussing on earning the money necessary to qualify for Youth Allowance before moving to the Sunshine Coast to undertake studies in Paramedic Science.

"This news has completely ruined my plans, I have already started to organise accommodation up there for next year and for the government to turn around and say 12 months is not good enough changes everything.

"I was counting on getting Youth Allowance to help me live."

Ben Keightley is another former Macintyre student who has been shocked by the announcement.

"I thought the news was disgraceful, thousands of students have taken the chance to have a gap year and now our plans are up in arms.

"I have been planning to take a gap year since I decided to go to uni and now it feels like I have done it for no reason.

"The way I see it, if Kevin Rudd can give everyone \$900 to spend on whatever they want, like pokies or in the bottle shops, surely he can give students trying to get an education \$240 a week."

Ian Ryan is the careers advisor at Macintyre High School and he estimated that 30 per cent of school leavers from 2008 took gap years before going to university with the aim of getting Youth Allowance.

"This decision affects a whole stack of kids, and I think the government has to consider the situation a lot of country kids are in having to move a distance from home to go to uni.

"These kids went into their gap years with the understanding they could work for 12 months, get the required amount of cash and then get assistance when they went to uni. Now they are faced with the prospect of working for 18 months when they never planned for that. It reeks of unfairness."

Matthew Hunt received the highest UAI in Inverell in the 2008 HSC and planned to go to UNSW in Sydney to study Biomedical and Chemical Engineering. Now his plans are shattered.

"My plans are pretty much ruined now, I got offered a \$9000 scholarship if I went to uni straight away but decided that Youth Allowance would help me in the long run.

"I will have to live on campus down there and there is no way I can go with just my mum's money, I thought I would earn a bit of money have fun working and then go to uni, I don't know what will happen now."

The decision has also been met with strong opposition from local politicians. Tony Windsor, member for New England said he hoped the decision would be changed to benefit country kids.

"Those kids who entered a gap year in good faith should be able to get their assistance, I hope we can get that much for them. The lot of them have been hung out to dry by this, and it just isn't fair."

AS TAKEN FROM INVERELL TIMES WEBSITE.