

Point 1: The Bradley Report recommends 'Grandfathering out' the present Youth Allowance benefit. However, the government has proposed to 'move the goalposts' for the Year 12 students graduating in 2008. They followed the rules and have been left 'high and dry'.

My daughter decided to undertake a Gap Year. She was fortunate enough to secure a part-time position. She had suffered ill-health since July 2008 and a Gap Year would allow her to recover before undertaking full-time study and earnings from a job with part-time would enable her to comply with the eligibility criteria for Youth Allowance.

Of course unaware the rules would change mid-stream – she now finds that she will need to work another year because she has not worked 30 hours a week, but worse still – she has already deferred a year and cannot defer her undergraduate university course for another year in order to become eligible for Youth Allowance.

It seems that she has been disenfranchised by the government proposals for changes to the Youth Allowance. The 2009 student cohort can make plans to comply with the new eligibility criteria but this opportunity has been denied my daughter.

It is clear that something is wrong with the proposed changes to Youth Allowance.

Point 2: There has been much reporting regarding reduced access to health services for the rural areas. My daughter was keen to gain Youth Allowance in order to study Physiotherapy at university.

The course is not offered in Canberra and necessitated moving away from home with all the associated costs this involves. The course involves high contact hours and will leave little room to engage in part-time work to supplement her living expenses.

Her university place is located at a regional university rather than a metropolitan one. The course has an emphasis on focusing on health delivery to the rural sector. Even though we now reside in Canberra (itself considered to be regional), she has a connection with rural areas since her grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins are farmers.

The difficult decision she now is faced with is this –

take up the physiotherapy place in the knowledge that financial assistance has been denied and it will be financially difficult  
or

change course preference to something else science-based at a local university allowing her to live at home as a cheaper alternative.

It is clear that the governments Youth Allowance changes means reduced career choice for some students and entrenching severe disadvantage for the rural sector in attracting health professionals keen to work in rural health.