

I am alarmed at the proposed changes to Youth Allowance that will become effective on 1 January, 2010. The 'Class of 2008' in particular will be grossly disadvantaged by the timing of these changes.

Centrelink officers visited many high schools last year and advised students on how to qualify for the independent rate of support. **Students were assured that if they earned \$19,532 in a 'gap year' before attending university they would achieve the criteria required to be eligible for Youth Allowance.** With this specifically in mind, many of these students are currently doing just that.

Many of these young Australians have started work nine months ago, and are now midway through earning their independence, and find the regulations have changed. Consequently, those people currently working less than 30 hours per week will have to wait 18 months from present (providing they can find employment!) before starting their tertiary studies; resulting in at the very least a 2 year gap!

The changes that become effective on 1 January, 2010 have effectively moved the goalposts for young people who had been working this year, in the good faith (with Government assurance) that they would be eligible for Youth Allowance to support themselves during their studies.

Rural and Regional young people are the losers here. The allowance was invaluable to country students who do not have the luxury, which city kids enjoy, of living with their parents during their tertiary studies. **They therefore don't have the choice**

on whether or not to take gap year/s.

It is a financial necessity! Many will find that places currently held for them to begin in 2010 may not be available to commence in 2011. In my son's case, he was permitted a maximum 12 months deferral from his University course.

For those Metropolitan students living at home these changes will not affect their studies, as they do not need to provide extra accommodation. However, as parents/students from Rural and Regional areas must pay for accommodation in the city (therefore providing for 2 households), it is a massive financial burden on all of these families.

I'm appalled at the prejudice shown to these youngsters purely due to their geographical location. Where is their basic right of education?

Shouldn't there be equity of access to tertiary education to ALL young Australians?

We Regional Australians are keeping up our part of the bargain, ensuring our primary industry continues to remain strong, yet our future Graduates won't be returning here as professionals as these areas become more and more disadvantaged.

Not only are these young Australians disadvantaged when compared to their contemporaries in the city, during their studies, but now, being forced to take 2 years gap (if permitted) will mean they are 2 years behind their city colleagues in earning a professional salary when they graduate 2 years later/older.

I believe this Government's policy change is prejudicial to many country students, particularly those that are already halfway through their 'gap

year'. The removal of this capacity to qualify for Youth Allowance independent status during their 'gap year' is outrageous. Is this the "education revolution" we were promised?

I urge you to amend these policy changes, particularly for these young country students currently in their 'gap year', who will otherwise be repeatedly disadvantaged.

Fiona Sibson