

Committee Secretary  
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600 Australia

Dear Sir/ Madam

Could we please express our grave concerns with the Governments proposed amendments to Youth Allowance eligibility.

Following the completion of her secondary education in 2008, our eldest child has in good faith made the decision to work through 2009 specifically that she may qualify for Youth Allowance to support herself when she moves away from Taree to commence university study in 2010. She is now well on her way to earning the \$19000 she was required to claim her independent status. She is aware that this figure is adjusted annually.

Unfortunately now that the Government has proposed removing this agreement she now finds she is required to work 30 hours per week for 18 months. It is (perhaps cynically) just not possible to achieve this between completion of the 2008 HSC and the first university term of 2010. In effect she will have to delay full time study for two years. As parents we are deeply concerned that she will find it difficult to return to study or be distracted by other opportunities and may indeed not enter university.

We both work, and our recent investigations through Centrelink have indicated that we will not be eligible to claim support. A good deal of our past years earnings have gone towards supporting our children's education. Frankly, the prospect of helping another two siblings through tertiary education leaves us concerned we will be left with little financial reserves for ourselves in latter years. We are certainly not in a position to help them with their HECS fees.

We would also like to highlight the burden this decision places on rural students. You would be aware of some of the strategies being implemented to address the shortage of tertiary qualified professionals in regional Australia. Seemingly this decision would make it increasingly difficult for a country student to house themselves, whereas their city brethren usually benefit from their family support close to their place of study. Our daughter is now also unable to claim on one of the few concessions to rural students- the relocation expenses rebate.

Currently accommodating a student on a Sydney campus can cost in excess of \$14,000 per annum. The alternative of the transition to self-care in shared accommodation while concurrently dealing with the change to University study causes us to worry about the quality of study that will be achieved. When a course is only available with full time study (and long hours) a country student in a shared house will struggle in comparison to a city student making the use of their family support.

In our daughter's case she was offered a place to study dentistry (yes we certainly need them in the country). Unfortunately this course could not be deferred. She had

to make the anguishing decision to work for a year knowing that she may not receive another offer when she undertakes the admission process again. There is no option for part time study, and 30 hours of employment are impossible alongside the high weekly hours of study. She along with many deferring 2009 students is understandably bitter towards the retrospective effect of this proposal.

We would be extremely grateful if the Government would review the requirement to work for eighteen months, if not to delay its introduction. Surely it would be a fairer proposition commence any such decision till January 2011 giving notice to the students it will have effected.

We urge you to consider the inequity of access that Rural families experience in many forms. Some dispensation towards families remote to tertiary education facilities would be appreciated by country citizens.

Yours Sincerely

Mark and Cate Braithwaite.