

## To Whom It May Concern

I write in relation to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional Access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.

Previously, any student was able to obtain youth allowance by either reaching the monetary aim of \$19,532, or working for 15 hours a week over 2 years. However, the government now intend to change these requirements, instead forcing students to work 30 hours a week for 18 months in a 2 year period. These changes not only unfairly disadvantage rural and regional students, but will also have massive negative repercussions for those already completing their GAP years.

This year, like thousands of others, I entered into a GAP year under the advisement of both teachers and government representatives that if I were to work this year, and earn the required amount of money, \$19,532, I would be able to qualify for youth allowance. Now, these sudden changes have undermined the work of the previous 9 months. By the 1st of January 2010, when these changes are to become effective, anybody currently in a gap year will be trapped. We cannot qualify until our 18 month period is up, however we have no way of changing our actions since we began our gap year. For anybody who had not managed to work for 30 hours a week, this time is now wasted, and any plans we had made for the future have now become fruitless now that we have lost the prospect of financial support.

Furthermore, this new qualification is something that many rural/regional students will be unable to achieve. Already, it is difficult for an unskilled labourer leaving high school to find work, and most are only able to just scrape through to qualify by the end of the year. Not only do they have little to no experience in the workforce, but they are faced with the choice of either hiding all of their school results, or revealing that they're likely to be leaving for university in a relatively short space of time, as their resume would reflect in their subject choices and the marks they achieved. Many prospective students are forced to move to the city in order to obtain adequate work, where they have no support networks and are able to save only a fraction of the money they earn, as opposed to those able to work from home or have the local contacts to arrange share housing. This new independence requirement of 30 hours a week will place Youth Allowance far out of reach for many prospective students.

Also for many rural/regional students, going to University without youth allowance is not an option. The predicted cost of a student living away from home is \$20,000. In order to support themselves without aid, a student would be required to approximately 20 hours a week, on top of their studies. This will severely limit the time they have to devote to their studies, and removes any chance they had of participating in any aspect of campus life. This will especially lower the chances for those who wished to continue to do honours, masters or a doctorate in their course, which all require a high grade average to continue. Alternately, ones parents could support them. But even for those who are at the top of or just over the threshold to qualify, \$91,000, and apparently don't require the aid of Youth Allowance, \$20,000 is not something they have lying around that they can afford to pay this for the next 3-6 years.

This deferred year was an essential step for many to be able to achieve their visions for their future, and these changes are going to make it impossible for many the achieve that.