

Senate Committee Submission

Inquiry into Higher Education Support Amendment (2009 Budget Measures) Bill 2009

It is time country families had a voice regarding university education for their children , especially those who have to move away from home.

I am writing to you about my daughter who is currently on her gap year, intending to study in Melbourne next year, as she is directly effected by the proposed government changes to youth allowance in 2010.

These changes to youth allowance disadvantage rural students who have to leave home to study. My daughter and many of her friends are working full time this year to qualify for youth allowance. They live in Wagga Wagga, but the courses they wish to study are not offered locally. They have deferred courses and have plans in place to commence university in 2010. If the changes to youth allowance go ahead , my daughter will be 6 months off being eligible for youth allowance. Her dilemma is now whether to take up her offer in 2010 and try to support herself by working part time whilst at university or to lose her offer and work for another year. This is so unfair to current gap year students. Do we now have a two year gap program? How ridiculous. The clever country will not be so clever with many rural students in particular putting going to university in the too hard basket. Again, you choose to disadvantage the "bush". City kids have a multitude of university choices and they can so easily live with mum and dad!

These changes to youth allowance will put some students, who are currently working part time during their gap year, three years behind in their plans, because they will have to start again next year to gain their 30 hours per week of employment criteria. Do politicians think things through? It appears not!

I might also tell you of my son who is in his 4th year of mining engineering at UNSW. He has only just qualified for youth allowance in his last year of university and his youth allowance doesn't even cover his rent! Now, if we supplement his income to a level at which he can live adequately, his youth allowance is reduced. This needs addressing urgently. Its not easy for country kids to leave the security of their home and friends/family to live in the city. My son couldn't do mining engineering in Wagga Wagga. and he didn't want to take a year off prior to going to university. It has been a really tough slog financially for us supporting him, but we're nearly there and he has a job lined up when he graduates. He will pay back handsomely into the government coffers in the future thanks

to his university education! I might add that he has worked every long uni break in the mines to supplement the allowance we have provided him. He has also worked part time as well as studying a challenging degree. If we are to be the smart country we really need to evaluate what is happening with our youth who want to further their education. It's easier not to follow that pathway! I really support a senate inquiry into this issue. Take a trip out west and see what's happening to our clever country kids!

Sandra Kerr