

The changes to the Youth Allowance criteria will greatly hinder regional and rural students who must move away from home to study at a University or another educational institution. These students are faced not only with hefty university fees and HECS debts, but must find and pay for accommodation in their place of study.

I am an eighteen year old female who lives in the coastal town of Geraldton in Western Australia. The population of Geraldton is approximately 27 000 and there are four high schools and one University available to students in this area. However the university offers a limited number of courses, forcing many students to relocate to Perth, some 422 kilometres away.

At the end of a year of hard work and sheer determination I was lucky enough to be accepted into a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Western Australia, to study Political Science and International Relations. However, living in Geraldton I was faced with the decision of whether I was to move to Perth, with no money, or to stay here in Geraldton and work for a year. Provided with the incentive of gaining youth allowance after eighteen months, which would allow me to claim independence to fund the move to Perth, I decided to take a gap year.

However, now I am being told I must work for another six to twelve months for at least thirty hours a week before being able to claim youth allowance. This is virtually impossible whilst trying to adjust to a new environment, let alone juggling a demanding university course.

The costs involved with moving to Perth stretch as far as hefty university fees and HECS debts, accommodation, transport to and from Perth and text books. I have planned to stay at a college on campus at UWA, the fees for which are approximately \$10 000 a year. It is impossible for me to pay for this without youth allowance, or an accommodation scholarship, which may cause me to change my plans for pursuing this course. Not to mention the commute to and from Perth is expensive, with the price of fuel in rural areas having sky rocketed in recent years.

It is not just myself who has been placed in this situation. Every year many students from Geraldton defer their university course to work for a year, to ensure they are financially independent and can afford the move to Perth. Previously Youth Allowance has helped these students pay the ongoing fees and costs involved with the move, but now the government is expecting them to find some other way of funding their studies.

It is sickening to think that the Rudd government is making these changes to help pay for the massive debt created in the recent budget. They are clearly taking money from the youth who will be responsible for paying off this debt for years to come. Working full time this year has meant I am paying income tax, but the tightening of the youth allowance criteria now means I will not be getting any direct benefit from this, however I will be contributing to providing funding for

those youth who fall pregnant at a young age, or who have been living in a “marriage like” relationship. The government is prepared to fund this section of the community, but it is not prepared to help those who are trying to make a contribution and a difference to society.

The government claims to be improving the situation for rural students through the initiation of the Student Start up Scholarship and the Relocation Scholarship. However, this is only available to those students who already receive income support. Where is the assistance to those rural students who were planning on receiving Youth Allowance, but now cannot, and therefore miss out on receiving these scholarships?

They claim that increasing the parental threshold will help out rural and regional students. It will not help those who have already made the decision and are currently working towards receiving youth allowance. The retrospective nature of this legislation is what makes most of the difference. Young adults, like me, who have already made the decision to take a gap year, are greatly affected. It affects those who have chosen to work to become financially independent, those whose plans are now quashed because of the reckless spending of the government.

The government clearly does not understand the sacrifices made by students in regional areas. Tightening the criteria means families and youth in WA will have to stretch their budgets, and many students may be deterred from pursuing study. The future generation will not be able to reach their dreams or make a difference. I may now have to reconsider my plans to study in Perth, and choose a different career path, studying a course which is available in Geraldton. Australia may have lost an upcoming politician or foreign affairs delegate because of their reckless spending.