

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 2010-2011**

Outcome 3 - Higher Education

DEEWR Question No.EW0899_11

Senator Nash provided in writing.

Question

YOUTH ALLOWANCE- FLOOD MEASURES

Can the department explain what measures are in place to help students who are unable to meet the 30 hour a week work criterion due to the floods? What are these measures? How soon were they put into place? How long will they stay in place? How many students are affected?"

Answer

Existing flexibilities in the operation of the social security law are able to be applied when assessing the income support eligibility of young people affected by natural disasters.

Assessments under the 30 hours per week element of the workforce participation criterion and the application of current circumstances to the parental income test are made on a case-by-case basis.

In assessing whether a claimant satisfies the workforce participation criterion, the claimant's working hours can be averaged over blocks of up to 13 weeks to achieve the 18 month qualifying period within two years. This provides for planned and unplanned breaks in employment.

The following periods may count towards the 30 hours a week average:

- periods of paid leave
- periods of unpaid leave due to employer shutdown that are outside the control of the young person, such as a mandatory Christmas shutdown
- periods engaged in a full-time apprenticeship or traineeship
- periods of overseas employment, and
- periods of full-time participation in a CDEP program.

Where there has been a significant change in income, for example where a claimant's parental income has been adversely affected as a result of the recent floods, Centrelink may estimate parental income according to the current circumstances instead of the usual practice of considering parental income from the previous financial year. Combined with the more generous income testing arrangements introduced in July 2010, some flood-affected claimants may have been able to qualify for income support as dependents who would otherwise not have been eligible.

Figures are not available on the number of flood-affected young people who have

qualified for payment through these flexibilities.