

Tracy Wilson
School Council Chair Person
Mount Barker Community College



27th August 27, 2009

The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural & Regional Affairs & Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir /Madam,

Re – Proposed changes to Youth Allowance – Independent Student status.

I am writing on behalf of the Mount Barker Community College School Council. We are a collaborative group consisting of parents, staff and students of the school community who share a keen interest in our college and what happens within it. Our primary concern is for the education and welfare of the students who attend the school. We were all alarmed to hear of the proposed changes to the Youth Allowance. We were relieved to hear yesterday that this change has been postponed so our current gap year students won't be affected. However it is of great concern that you are still planning to put these changes into effect in the future. It is going to have a profound affect on our current year twelve students, and all future school leavers bound for university.

There is no comparison between students from the metropolitan area, who can remain at home whilst attending a tertiary institution to further their studies, having the financial and emotional support of staying with their families. Our country students have no choice, they must move to the city to enable them to pursue a tertiary education. The financial differences are astronomical; country students have to find and pay for suitable accommodation and find the means to support themselves, not to mention the stress of not having the security of family close by.

The current system allows students who live in country areas to be eligible for the Youth Allowance once they have a "gap year" between high school and tertiary study. In order to meet the criteria the student must work full time for that twelve months. We live in the small country town of Mt Barker (Shire of Plantagenet has a population of 5000 people), so employment opportunities are not necessarily abundant. The local businesses are aware of the situation of our year twelve school leavers and their need to find employment in their gap year, fortunately they accommodate as many as possible. This is with the knowledge that they will only be employed for the twelve months and then the

following year there will be a new group of school leavers in their gap year. With the new proposed changes to the Youth Allowance this will push the twelve month gap year requirement to eighteen months; therefore there will be a cross over of year twelve school leavers from one year to the next seeking employment. Obviously there will not be enough job opportunities for all the gap year students in a rural town such as Mt Barker.

We support the gap year as it stands now, we see it has many benefits:

- Have a break from study – twelve years at school is a long time
- Give students a taste of the “real world” , find out what work is all about
- A year to have support from their family while making the transition from adolescence to adulthood
- Earn money to buy a car ready for their move away from home
- Time to prepare for living independently
- Hopefully enable them to save enough money to be able to support themselves from when they stop work to when they are entitled to receive the Youth Allowance payments.

It will be country people/students who are going to be the most affected by the proposed changes, putting them at a distinct disadvantage. The students will find it harder to gain employment for eighteen months because it is not going to suit all employers to lose an employee part way through the year. As a result students will be either pressed into working for two years, or not be employed at all. By delaying their studies for this length of time it is quite probable that they may choose not to pursue their tertiary studies at all, you get out of the habit of studying. This would be of great detriment to the future of bright, intelligent students who have so much potential by furthering their education.

For other students it might be that finding employment in the short term is just not possible therefore making them ineligible for the Youth Allowance. This would then put great financial strain on their families trying to support them, maybe forcing them to seek a different pathway to a tertiary education.

As a school the Mount Barker Community College takes great pride in the number of students that graduate from our school and go on to further their studies at a tertiary level. We would be bitterly disappointed if the proposed changes were to take place because we know the impact it is going to have on our intelligent young graduates. Please consider the country students' plight carefully before enforcing the change to the Youth Allowance.

Yours sincerely,



Tracy Wilson
School Council Chair Person
Mount Barker Community College