

30th June 2009.

**The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee
on Rural and Regional Affairs
And Transport
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT.**

The Secretary,

I am writing to regard the recent wholesale budget changes to Youth Allowance. These changes will further hurt regional and remote students who need to move from home to study. It is already almost impossible for many students to attend university because of the costs involved which has been exacerbated by the ongoing drought.

We currently have a daughter in 2nd year at the Australian National University. She is living in one of the university colleges which we are paying for, and this is costing us \$13,000 per year. She had no choice but to go straight from school to university due to the drought, and in a small town the size of Grenfell there were simply no jobs available for her to have a gap year in order to earn enough money to receive the independent Youth Allowance rate.

The recent changes simply exacerbate this problem and many students here simply can't afford to attend university at all and sadly most students at the

local high school have simply given up any idea of further education which has led to poor HSC results. In fact very few are now finishing Year 12 and even less are attempting to get a UAI. Due to these factors we were forced to borrow the money to send our children away to school because of the lack of subject choice otherwise they wouldn't have achieved the marks to go to university.

Our son is currently a year 12 student who would like to attend university next year too. This will cost us at least \$26,000 for both the children just on accommodation. Surely the government must understand that any family earning even the new independent youth allowance parental income rate of \$46,000 will not be able to afford to spend this amount of money.

It is also untenable that to receive independent youth allowance school leavers must work for 30 hours per week for 18 months especially in regional and remote areas. This not only is not possible, as the jobs are just not there, but university deferments can only be for one year meaning they will lose their place at university.

I recently read a speech made by the Minister for Education Julia Gillard at the ACER research conference in Brisbane in August 2008 where she focused on the importance of school and education equity. I was very impressed with the sentiments she expressed but these changes to youth allowance fly in the face of these sentiments and in fact discriminate against all those who have to leave home to further their education. This certainly lacks social inclusion because anyone who lives in cities where universities are situated, no matter what their socio-economic background is, can attend university if they get the UAI required. These new rules for youth allowance are fair for students that live and attend university in the same place, but are not for rural and remote students.

Rural students are going to be the losers until there are substantive changes to youth allowance that ensure that all those who are forced to move to attend university are given help. Only then will everyone have the equality of access to education as the government have advocated.

Please reconsider the changes to youth allowance as they relate to rural students. I know that there are many of us in rural areas who would be happy to tell you our stories in person.

I understand from the media that the minister really does listen to those who make contact with her. Please as a committee help rural and regional students get the education that all Australians are entitled to.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kathy Parker". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the "Yours sincerely" text.

Mrs. Kathy Parker