

To whom it may concern,

I, Chella Armstrong from Busselton in South-Western Australia, will be directly affected by the changes in the youth allowance criteria if they go ahead for graduates of 2008, particularly for country and rural students of the south-western area. If the proposed changes take effect I will be greatly disadvantaged in my future education, as I will be delayed for up to 3 years, not beginning university until the age of 21. I would like to express my opinions on behalf of my graduating year, discussing the subject of the planned changes for the youth allowance workforce participation independence criteria as I believe the changes will disadvantage country and rural students, both now and in the future. Few options are available to students from the south-western country and rural areas resulting in many students attending metropolitan universities. The youth allowance criteria in place at the beginning of 2009 allowed such students to attend university with a one year delay, while metropolitan students are able to begin immediately. I am currently aiming to gain youth allowance as I completed my tertiary entrance studies and my parents are unable to assist me financially. To meet the youth allowance requirements I found a full-time work position expecting to leave in late 2009, resulting in the possibility that I may be asked to leave on these terms. I understand that the alterations will reduce undeserved payments but I believe students like myself who are currently attempting to gain youth allowance for 2010 (graduates of 2008) will be greatly disadvantaged, especially by time delay. I will use my own situation as an example, involving my employer, family and myself and the difficult situation the changes will place on us in. Students from country and rural areas lack options of education, which will be further reduced by the proposed changes to the workforce participation independence criteria.

Options of study other than attending university in the metropolitan area for country and rural students from the south-western area are very minimal, resulting in many disadvantages for such students. The city of Bunbury is the site of an Edith Cowan University with no available courses in environmental or medical degrees which I wish to study. Busselton and Bunbury both have a TAFE, while agricultural universities and schools can be found further south as well as courses in the wine industry. Most universities offer systems of studying through the internet, but this option is unrealistic as little or no physical contact or help is given. None of these options are found suitable for many students and my interests and ambitions, resulting in students from the southern area moving to Perth to complete suitable courses. For many, receiving youth allowance is vital in this situation, resulting in a year of employment being completed before university is begun. As I'm sure you understand, this creates many disadvantages for students in my position and the proposed changes will only increase these.

The youth allowance criteria in place at the beginning of 2009 allows students from country and rural areas to meet the requirements by taking a year off to work before beginning university, then financially supporting themselves through their years of higher education. The current Workforce Participation Independence Criteria states that students must earn, in an 18 month period since leaving school, an amount equivalent to 75 per cent of the maximum rate of pay under Wage Level A of the Australian Pay and Classification Scale generally applicable to trainees (in 2009 this requires earnings of \$19,532). This allows students to continue to study with only a

one year delay behind locally living metropolitan students. Although this program is not perfect and creates disadvantages to country and rural students, it is acceptable and often suitable as the delay is not of great affect. I personally planned my employment and time of leave as well as recreational interests and plans for living in Perth around the current youth allowance requirements to allow me to begin university in the coming year.

I completed my tertiary entrance studies in 2008 successfully gaining acceptance into all Western Australian Universities and am currently aiming to receive youth allowance for 2010. I accepted a Bachelor of Science (Molecular Biotechnology) degree at Curtin University to begin in February 2010, as no other venue teaches this degree. I aimed to receive youth allowance by working throughout 2009 to aid me through my studies, as my parents are self employed and will be unable to assist in the payment of new expenses which I will be exposed to when I leave for university. Such expenses may include stationary, text books, practical study activities, and university fees, as well as expenses greater than metropolitan students such as rental payments, groceries, power, water, gas, other essential household requirements and travel expenses while living without family and support. As I will be required to move to Perth to complete my studies I will not be able to meet the expenses without financial support, as working must be kept to a minimum. As a result I gained employment to ensure I received youth allowance as it would be impossible for me to attend university next year without the financial help.

To qualify for youth allowance in time for university I found employment in December 2008 in a full time position as a 'gap-year' student, expected to leave at the beginning of 2010. My current employment will cover the requirements which were in place at the beginning of this year for me to gain youth allowance, but I will be in an inferior position if my circumstances change. My employer had planned her work structure and future employment around my time of leaving as this was my intended work period, but with the changes of the workforce participation independence criteria I will not meet the requirements until July 2010. This has put pressure on my employer to rearrange her plans, which she may be unable to do. If this is the case I will need new employment which may result in me beginning university as late as the age of 21 while metropolitan students would have completed the same degree by this age. They will then have more experience and higher qualifications at a younger age, resulting in country and rural students and my future employment being compromised. This is a severe and underserved disadvantage imposed on myself and many others from country and rural areas, which could be easily avoided.

I am aware that payments are given to students who do not require them and understand that this is an important concern, however this creates unnecessary inconveniences for already disadvantaged country and rural students. The current criteria for youth allowance forces country and rural students to delay their studies for an average of one year. The proposed changes to youth allowance furthers this disadvantage, forcing students like myself (who have begun to meet the criteria) to delay their studies for a further one to two years, in my case until 2011. In this case I will not be able to begin university until I am 20, or if I am unable to continue or regain appropriate employment immediately, until I am 21. For these reasons the changes should not take effect to graduates of 2008 as such problems will arise making university study very difficult to begin for county and rural students. This

delays the beginning of my profession, while my higher education is put on hold for up to three years. Although undeserved payments will be reduced, the proposed changes to the youth allowance criteria will only disadvantage country and rural students and delay our opportunities.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration concerning the changes to the youth allowance workforce participation independence criteria as these changes are only causing more difficulty for students from country and rural areas. Students from South-Western Australia already have minimal options of study which are suitable for their current educational interests. The current criteria allows such students to attend metropolitan universities with only a small delay, but the workforce participation independence criteria changes will lengthen this delay making enrolment far too difficult for most students. Graduates of 2008 will be particularly affected, as many of us will not be able to meet the new requirements as we began our current employment with the aim to qualify for the criteria in place at the beginning of 2009. These changes will also affect employers as well as students and their families. The aim to reduce undeserved payments is an important issue, but the disadvantages created by these changes only target graduates of 2008 from country and rural areas. I personally ask you to consider my concerns and the effect the changes will have on our education, employment and future opportunities.

Yours sincerely,

Chella Armstrong  
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