

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing about the Senate Committee investigating Rural Education. I completed the HSC in 2008 and deferred a degree in Diagnostic Radiography at Newcastle University. I took a gap year in the expectation that if I earned enough money, 18 months after I left school I could apply for Youth Allowance as I would have proven myself "independent" under Centrelink's requirements. I have earned approximately \$11000 from working 3 jobs since leaving school, and I was well on track to earning the required \$19000 before the 18 months were up, allowing me to concentrate on my university studies in 2010. Under the proposed changes, this eligibility requirement has been scrapped, effectively having a retrospective effect upon the plans and dreams (that were made in good faith) of myself and my contemporaries. I feel this is completely unfair upon my cohort of gap year students—we have made long term plans for our future based on government legislation that is now to be retrospectively changed.

Under the proposed system, I could not possibly qualify for Youth Allowance unless I were to take a second gap year, as my parents earn a combined taxable income above \$100000 a year and have no other dependants. If I were to take a second gap year, I lose my place at Newcastle University, as it does not offer the option of deferring a degree for more than 12 months. This would potentially mean I would need to reapply through UAC, and lose the 6 'bonus points' that I earned from Newcastle University due to the 'rural disadvantage' and my results in certain subjects. If the UAI cutoffs of 2008 applied for 2011, I would not get in to this degree. The alternative, to attempt to work practically full time while studying at university, is completely impractical.

Another effect that has received little attention is that 30000 students have taken a gap year each year, most with the intention of working to qualify for Youth Allowance. If the eligibility requirements are changed, and the only way to prove yourself independent is to defer for 2 years (thus losing your university place), practically all students who would have taken a gap year under the present system would not take a gap year under the new system. This would represent a 'bulge' of 30000 unexpected university applicants, raising UAI cut-offs to unreasonable levels and wreaking untold chaos upon the plans of those completing the HSC this year, and the year after. Many who would have rightful places to university degrees in normal years would need to work far harder to make the higher UAI cut-offs.

I strongly urge you to reconsider the changes so that the new changes apply from 1 January 2011 or 1 July 2010, as I and most of my contemporaries have made long term plans based on the current system. For the Government to change the game at halftime is unfair and has already discouraged many of my mates from attending university study altogether. My argument is not with the changes themselves—most of them are good changes and the intention (to raise university attendance amongst lower socio-economic backgrounds) is applaudable. My argument is with the timing of the changes, which have a retrospective effect upon the 30000 prospective students who made life-affecting plans in good faith the government would financially support them through university study.

Thankyou for taking the time to read this email,

Daniel May
