

Dear Minister,

I am writing about the recent changes to youth allowance which I believe are very unfair from a number of viewpoints.

- I am a mother of a girl who is currently half way through her 'Gap Year'. In order to earn enough money to qualify for the independent youth allowance she went through a long and arduous process in 2008 to be one of just 800 Australia wide recruits for the Australian Defence Forces Gap Year Program. Basic Training was extremely gruelling but she saw it all as a worthwhile way to spend her 'gap year', gaining new skills, leadership and toughness knowing that she would be able to get the independent allowance should she still want to go to university in 2010. When she 'Marched Out' in May I didn't have the heart to tell her then that the government had changed all the rules!
- I believe that participation and completion of Australian Defence Forces Gap Year program should qualify the recruits for automatic Independent status. They cram so much into that year, it's worth two of most jobs! The first 80 days of basic training consisted of 16 hour days where they are up at 6.00 every morning and never got to bed before 10.00 at night, with no time to call their own or do what they want. She only had 4 x 5 hrs off over the 80 days. There were also several bush training exercises where they were pretty much on call 24hrs a day, and night for up to 10 days at a time. She knew and accepted that Army training was going to be tough, and it was, but the carrot was always that the Army training was going to make her physically fit, mentally tough and give her an option at the end of the Program to enlist in the Army or qualify for Youth Allowance and go to university.
- One of the new Youth Allowance requirements require that one has to work 30 hrs a week over 18 months. In the Army every second day she clocked up 32 hours. That's the equivalent of 41 weeks work (30 hrs a week) in less than 3 months! While her hours are more normal now, by the end of her 12 month stint she and other in the forces would have worked way beyond what most jobs do. They have valuable training and learn many useful skills to protect the country, which I know in my daughter's case, she will continue to use in the Army Reserve.

I also have other concerns about the changes to the Youth Allowance.

- A parliamentary enquiry last year showed that kids in the country don't attend university at the same rate as their city counterparts. That disparity is only going to widen further with the proposed changes. It further discriminates and

alienates country students to attend university as it makes it too expensive for parents to support their children. City parents only have to come up with uni and transport costs. Country parents have uni, transport, accommodation and food costs. The additional accommodation and food cost is around \$15,000 per year which puts a huge hole in a country parents income and it gets even more difficult if you have two or more children at university.

- While the changes to the Youth Allowance are reprehensible overall, they are particularly unjust to students who currently are in their 'gap year'. Changing the rules mid year is really unfair. They based their next 4-6 years following the rules that were in place when they applied to university. At the absolute minimum, any changes that are made should not occur until 2011. At least those studying this year will know the rules (however ridiculous they end up being) but the current 'Gap Year' students did not have that knowledge. Many would not have had a 'Gap Year' at all if they had have known. It has just put their graduation and earning capacity back a year. Is the government going to compensate them for that ?
- One of the reasons for the change of rules I believe was because too many people 'rorted' the system. I know there are plenty of people out there who use 'creative accounting' practices but why punish those who don't. Make the rules tougher so people in their own businesses can't put their kids in the pay book without actually doing the work. Plenty of young people have been working hard, legitimately getting their \$18,000 together, so why should they suffer because of the greed of others and the creative minds of their financial advisors and accountants ?

I have gathered 50 signatures of country people who also disagree and are concerned about the changes. Many of those said that they would not have been able to afford uni themselves had they not been able to get some assistance.

I hope that the government sees some sense and makes fair and appropriate changes. In particular to the special needs of

- Those currently in a Gap Year in 2009
- Country and Regional Students
- Those who have completed a Gap Year in the Australian Defence Force

Yours Sincerely

Jackie Horkings

Dear Minister,

My name is Katrina Horkings. I am 18 years old and completed my year 12 studies last year in 2008. Growing up in Mildura Victoria I am a regional student, who to attend my chosen university course must move away from home to complete my tertiary education. As the cost to move away to attend university is excessive including accommodation, food, general costs of university i.e. fees, books, I decided that my best option was to have a gap year so I could save money and be eligible to be an independent student qualifying for youth allowance and a commonwealth accommodation scholarship.

To achieve this goal in 2009 I enlisted in the Australian Army as one of only 500 students in Australia to take part in the Australian Defence Force gap year program in the Army. This program was marketed to me so that not only could I experience army life but also as great way to save money for my future and earn the required amount of money to qualify to be a independent student in 2010.

However whilst I was at Recruit training at 1RTB Kapooka, the new policy for school leavers was released revealing that I now would not be entitled to be an independent student in 2010. I now would not qualify for any Commonwealth Accommodation scholarships and that now whilst I am already half way through my gap year in the Australian Army serving my government and the people of my nation, that to live away from home and attend a full time university course the only payment from the government that I would be eligible to receive would be fortnightly rent assistance of approx \$20. 00 ! That's going to be a real help when most uni accommodation is at least \$150.00 a week!

This is extremely distressing news to me as now I am left to figure out how I am going to be able to even go to university. It is very unfair, particularly to students like me, currently doing a gap year in 2009 as we were following the process that had been set for the past several years. Changing the rules half way through the year has put us at severe disadvantage. If we don't qualify for youth allowance (which most of us won't now) our 'gap year' ends up being a waste of our time. It means we can't graduate with our peers and puts back our earning capability 1 year. What we earn in our 'gap year' is insignificant, compared to what we could earn once we have graduated. Who is going to compensate us for that?

The removal of the \$5000 accommodation scholarship as well as being cut out of claiming independence is yet another blow. It was at least contributing to the high cost of moving away from home for country students. My city counterparts who are able to remain living at home whilst attending university have a huge advantage over me, only having to pay transport to and from uni. Country students have that, as well as food and accommodation. We are also a long way from home with everything unfamiliar around us and costs us more to communicate with our families and visit home.

Please reconsider these changes as I believe that they are very unfair, particularly to 2009 'gap year' students but also to all country students and parents. I know that I, and most of my friends as well as possibly thousands of other young adults won't be voting Labor in the next election unless there are some serious changes to this legislation.

Yours Truly

Katrina Horkings