

**Thursday, August 06, 2009**

To the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee

Re: Proposed changes to eligibility to Youth Allowance

“Students who have worked full-time for a minimum of 30 hours a week on average for at least 18 months in a two-year period since leaving school will still be considered independent – but students who have undertaken part-time work or earned over \$19 532 over 18 months will not.”

This is bloody rank!

My second daughter Clea is currently taking a "gap" year. This has been part of a plan she put in place before she started her VCE - i.e. Years 11 and 12 in 2007 and 2008 respectively. She has ended up at the end of 2008 with a very good VCE result and has gained and accepted a place at the University of Melbourne.

She has always lived in the country - *Traralgon* - 160km from Melbourne.

In order to attend University - she will have to live away from home in 2010. So currently she is working a stack of hours in the local Safeway deli and some week nights and weekends in a pizza joint all the while saving hard and hoping to qualify for Youth Allowance and then be able to live and study in Melbourne. Her whole focus for the past two and a half years has been to prepare herself for financial independence and forge her own way through University and then on to a career.

It is a major step for any "kid" to decide to take a "gap" year.

For country kids, the need to live away from home has made assistance via the Youth Allowance an essential part of their plans. They still have to work – my eldest daughter studies at RMIT and can't survive on Youth Allowance alone. She has three part time jobs just to make ends meet.

So with those rules in place, Clea was prepared to do whatever was necessary to responsibly prepare herself for 2010 and beyond. This includes finding accommodation in Melbourne towards the end of this year (is anyone in Canberra aware of rental shortages and rates in Melbourne?)

Hence, she is working very hard (casual, on-call), saving like hell including trying to qualify for Youth Allowance. (Unfortunately, some of her friends are in a worse position and can't get enough work due to the economic climate to even come close to qualifying let alone having enough in savings).

She has abided by all the rules so it is shameful to even contemplate changing these rules mid-stream.

In summary, there is real concern now that she won't be going to Melbourne now.

Clea would have had to work anyway but my wife and I can't afford the support she would require. We have a third child at school.

The local campus of Monash University does NOT have any offerings that could change her decision to study there. Our third daughter can forget up-front about tertiary study unless she changes her mind in the next 12 months and selects something local.

I'm asking the committee to do the honourable thing and take whatever steps are necessary to make sure that these eligibility requirements are not implemented which affect country kids who have to study away from home and in particular, the current crop of country kids who have taken this year as a gap year.

Will you please act on my daughter's behalf and do whatever is required to ensure that these proposals do not go ahead?

To change the rules mid-stream when a country kid has made a life decision based upon the said rules which in turn will now see her more than likely miss out really is a lousy act! So much for the 'smart' country.

So my wife, daughter Clea and I are asking for help.

I would appreciate an acknowledgment of our request.

Paul Haarburger