

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a submission to Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Group in relation to proposed changes to Youth Allowance. I request that the changes be reviewed in light of inequities to rural students.

In 2008 I graduated from Manjimup Senior High School with a TER of 98.55, earning a certificate of distinction from my school in tertiary English and Applicable Mathematics. I also received a certificate of distinction from the Curriculum Council for finishing in the top 0.5% of the state in TEE English. I accepted a place at the University of Western Australia in a Law/Communications double degree and deferred to begin my studies in 2010.

I planned to take a gap year this year, 2009, to make enough money and qualify as independent in order to receive youth allowance. However under the new law, I am now not eligible to claim any allowances off the government in this manner.

As a rural student, going to university is already a difficult task. Manjimup is a four hour drive south of Perth, which means to attend university, I must move away from my family and support myself. Financially, rural students such as myself must find a way to cover accommodation, transport, living expenses on top of university costs such as textbooks and other fees. Under the old system, the maximum payment from Centrelink of \$482.60 per fortnight only just covered these living costs. Hence without this payment, there is no feasible way for rural students to live independently away from home without the support of family and working part-time during my studies.

While undertaking a double degree, I understand that it would be unwise to take on a part-time job if I intend to give my studies enough attention. However in order to live, this must now be done. However to earn the required amount of money to support myself while studying full time will be impossible, thus this is not even an option for me.

Coming from a small community, I have seen first hand the conditions under which some of my peers live. By taking away Youth Allowance, many students will not attend university as their families can not afford to support them. This, in turn, affects the achievement of country schools. At Manjimup Senior High School, there has traditionally been a strong positive attitude among staff and students alike to work hard and get in to university. Without Youth Allowance to allow rural students to support themselves, this attitude will be lost and only the wealthier families will be able to allow their children to further their studies at a tertiary level. Thus, schools like Manjimup will lose focus and ambition.

In 2008 I was elected Head Girl of Manjimup Senior High School. This role meant I worked hard to support and encourage my peers to achieve the best that they could. For many, this meant being accepted in to university. I witnessed first-hand just how hard students can work when putting their minds to it. However in this role I also witnessed the already evident inequality between schooling in the city and schooling in rural areas. To attend things such as open days and educational workshops we at Manjimup had to travel up to 4 hours on a bus. Because of this, there are many opportunities we as rural students miss out on. By taking away Youth Allowance, this is yet another hurdle we as rural students must face in the race to attending university, yet sadly this hurdle will be much too high for most of my peers.

To me as a rural student, it has always been my intention to take a year off studying after high school to make enough money to qualify for youth allowance thus becoming independent of my family. At the end of 2008 when I'd graduated school, I continued to take this gap year with the understanding that the youth allowance system remained in place. However in May 2009 when I found out that the structure of youth allowance had changed in the national budget, I found myself suddenly without support and with no way of supporting myself through six years at university. The abrupt nature of these changes is exceptionally unfair on those of us who took a gap year with the belief that we were working to be financially supported by the government.

It is very difficult for me to understand why the government keeps making it more and more difficult for students, especially middle and lower socio-economic students, to achieve a tertiary education. For the future of this country, the proposed changes to Youth Allowance need to be reviewed. By cutting out a good proportion of rural students, we as a country are cutting out a large group of potential

leaders. The new changes to Youth Allowance are neither fair nor considerate of the hardships of rural families. I personally will find it very difficult to get by the next six years if these changes go ahead. I took a gap year in good faith, believing that the government would support me but have found myself very unfairly stranded financially.

In conclusion, I urge you to reconsider the changes made to Youth Allowance in the 2009 national budget.

Yours sincerely,

Ella Harrington