

My family is deeply concerned about the proposed changes to Youth Allowance. The changes are especially unfair to rural and regional students for the reasons set out below:

My daughter Sarah has deferred her Uni. course this year and with some difficulty is juggling two part-time jobs to meet the existing criteria in order to qualify for Youth Allowance when she leaves Bendigo to commence study at Monash University in 2010. This decision was made based on the belief she would become eligible for independent status under the present legislation. Now, the government wants to change the rules mid-stream. She cannot defer her course for a second year, and she must go to Melbourne to study her chosen course in Behavioural Neuroscience, so staying at home to study locally is not an option. Surely fairness dictates that any proposed change needs to be phased in to prevent disadvantage to students like Sarah? The proposed changes to the retirement age, for example, are designed to not adversely affect those whose retirement is imminent. The proposed changes to Youth Allowance eligibility however, to take place in January 2010, do not extend a reasonable period of notice to allow families to make plans to fund the high cost of living independently in Melbourne to study. This situation is grossly inequitable to the many students like my daughter who live in rural or regional areas of Australia, and for whom the changes will mean little in terms of meeting their financial commitments living and studying away from the family home. Many families like ours earn an average income (I am a nurse, my husband works in agriculture), and would struggle to pay the necessary costs of supporting one or more students in Melbourne, estimated at approximately \$20,000, yet we would just miss out on any financial support under the new scheme.

Sarah plans to return to work in country Victoria, an area of demonstrated and urgent need. The proposed changes at such short notice have jeopardised that plan. Please urgently consider what is proposed. The impact on country students who have deferred this year, and their families, has been unnecessary stress and a loss of faith in an equitable Australian government. Any changes to Youth Allowance must consider the issues of current year Gap students, and rural and regional students who MUST move to Melbourne, to allow them to follow through on their dreams and plans unimpeded.

Yours sincerely

Sue Tarrant