



Narromine High School
Respect, Responsibility & Care

PRINCIPAL: Angela O'Callaghan M.Ed.,BA.,Dip.Ed
REL. DEPUTY: Lisa Bennett B.A. Dip.Ed

13 Merilba Street
NARROMINE NSW 2821
Phone (02) 6889 1499
FAX: (02) 6889 1553

EMAIL: narromine-h.school@det.nsw.edu.au

7 August 2009

The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au.

Dear Sir/Madam

Changes to the legislation governing the operation of Youth Allowance as announced in the recent budget, have given rise to much concern from our students and their families.

1. In particular, the retrospective nature of the changes, whereby students who completed their HSC in 2008 and chose to work in 2009 primarily in order to meet the requirements of the Youth Allowance, now find that they have worked to no avail: the rules have been changed so that they will need further time to meet the criteria for these payments. Universities generally only allow deferment for one year, which means these students will no longer have guaranteed entry to the courses for which they were selected in early 2009.
2. In regional areas – and especially in small rural communities - students find it very difficult, if not impossible, to find employment at the level of 30 hours per week. Such jobs rarely exist. Many students hold down 2 or 3 jobs to maximise their work hours, but most of them would fall well short of 30 hours per week. This new requirement will be impossible to fulfil for the majority of students.
3. Students in rural areas usually need to seek accommodation away from home in order to attend university. This adds considerably to the cost of study. Many families are totally reliant on their children having government support. If they are not eligible for the Youth Allowance, these students will not be able to attend courses away from home. The lack of opportunity in rural/regional areas adds to the burdens already faced by rural families.
4. It is difficult enough already meeting eligibility requirements for many rural people, especially those with farming properties whom the government may deem as asset rich and therefore ineligible. Often these families are reliant upon the payment to enable their children to attend as income levels are too low to meet the additional expenses.
5. Requiring students to take what is effectively a 2 year break before commencing tertiary study increases the likelihood that these students will not take up their places at all. Rural areas already suffer from lower levels of participation in tertiary education. This policy change will only serve to worsen this situation.

A Positive Behaviour for Learning School



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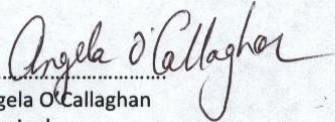
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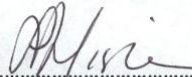
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Traditionally, Narromine High School has had a high proportion of our Year 12 applying for university each year. In 2000, approximately 70% of students fitted into this category. This proportion has dropped significantly to 25% in recent years. Last year, 7 students were offered places. Only 2 students were able to take up their study straight away and are at university this year. The other 5 students are all working in order to qualify for Youth Allowance. I understand their intention has been to start in 2010. However, the changes to the rules for this government support will have thrown their plans into disarray, with many of this group being forced to work for another year. We have real concerns as to how many of these students will actually make it into tertiary study at all.

We strongly recommend that this change in policy be revisited, and that the increased hours of work plus the total amount earned in the eighteen month period be reviewed and returned to more achievable levels.

Yours faithfully


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Angela O'Callaghan
Principal


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Sheran Fisher
Careers Adviser