

Senate Submission

Dear Senate committee,

I am writing to you in response to the proposed Youth Allowance changes.

At the end of 2008 I decided to take a gap year so that I could earn the \$19,532 required to gain Youth allowance. This would allow me to afford on campus accommodation, books, university fees, food – and the many other expensive purchases that come with attending university. I was instructed by my school and Centrelink that this was a wise decision to make for my future.

Now half way through my Gap year – with no chance to change my mind and go straight to University – I am told that changes to the current Youth Allowance requirements are being brought in. I cannot understand the fairness of this to all the current Gap Year Students. We made the choice to defer and now we are all going to be let down.

The course that I have wanted to study since I was young (a Nursing/Midwifery double degree) is not available to me in my rural town. This means that if I have any hope of completing it, I need to move over an hour and a half away to Melbourne. The new changes make no consideration for rural students. I can understand that there were students living at home with all the luxuries that come with this as well as receiving youth allowance and I agree that this is unnecessary - but now this all falls back onto rural students! We have to move away from home to complete a majority of university courses and have to pay for food and accommodation.

The new changes will mean that many of us will have no choice but to rethink our dream of entering the tertiary system. I thought education was a top priority to this Government!

It is confusing because the government is constantly stating that educating all young people and having equal access for Rural students is one of their priorities but now I'm being discriminated against because I don't live in a Capital city.

There are five children in my family. I have a brother pursuing his tertiary education in Melbourne because he cannot complete his field of study in Bendigo. He was a top student and received excellent marks therefore enabling him to be accepted into Medicine at . He qualified for Youth Allowance which now pays for a majority of his food and rent. Youth allowance does not, however, cover his university costs, clothing or petrol and he will still have a huge HECS debt at the end of his course to pay off. The new changes will mean that for my other three siblings and myself under the new Youth Allowance scale we will qualify for a small amount of Youth Allowance enough for a tank of petrol per week, if we are lucky, leaving my parents to pay for five children's university fees – not to mention any 'living away from home' costs that come with this. Working for one year under the old system to gain Youth allowance will not take all the pressure off but it will certainly be that extra bit of money for food or books that my parents don't need to pay for and will definitely be able to utilise elsewhere.

Once upon a time if you got OK marks, you could walk straight into University. Now it is a painstaking two years to get an ENTER score high enough so that you can qualify for your course, then if you are 'lucky' you can generally go in your home town with only the enormous HECS and book fees to worry about. But if like me, you need to defer your course to qualify for Youth Allowance - which as it turns out may not be available anymore; so you can move to a capital city -the only place your course is available. I am more than willing to work part time whilst at University to pay for some part of my accommodation, food and other living expenses but under the proposed changes I will

need to work 25-30 hours per week just to meet basic living cost. I am unable to see how I can do that and devote the time needed to attend University lectures and study.

The changes to Youth Allowance may be beneficial to a few but right now I'm not really seeing how they are fair to the students who have currently deferred and the rural students who do not have easy access to their course of choice. The very least that should be done is to enact the changes after the current deferred students have qualified for Youth Allowance under the system they commenced their Gap Year in. Please make an effort to help us - we are the Doctors, Planners and Lawyers who will be looking after you in the future.

Yours sincerely,
Jessica Verbeek