

**Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities**

Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

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Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senators

Please accept the following points as a submission for the Inquiry into Rural and Regional access to Secondary and Tertiary Education Opportunities.

With regard to the Youth Allowance, the proposed changes to the 'independent' status, is incredibly short sighted and will disadvantage many students, particularly students from regional and rural areas.

These are the same areas that face a shortage of qualified professionals, such as specialised medical practitioners, to name but one field. The changes will see less young people affording to leave their homes and be able to go to the city to live and study for these professions.

Independent Youth Allowance enabled young people to prove they could earn a living, and live independent of their parents, capable of living and studying as an independent adult. Not reliant on the hand outs and whim of their parents. Secure in the knowledge that they could focus on their studies.

Year 12 is a particularly stressful time, after 13 years of school, decisions must be made on a future beyond schooling, and now students have to worry about whether or not they can afford to leave home and go to University. Will they have to choose a difference course at a different university? Somehow stay at home, or just give up a life long dream, and not go to university at all? Settle for a job, not a career? How many bright and intellectual young people will have to give up a promising future of personal fulfilment, and contributing to their community? Or do they take the loop hole and get married to someone/anyone, just to gain the Independent status and be able to afford to follow their dream and fulfil their ability?

The proposed changes have left thousands of students in limbo. Many being advised by Centre link staff at the end of 2008 after completing year 12, to defer their University place for one year, and take a GAP year, working for a year and earning \$18,000, making them eligible for independent status to claim Youth Allowance. Not only has this advice ruined many young lives, this advice, given in good faith by Centre link staff leaves the staff facing the possibility of litigation, as the advice given has now left these students ineligible for Independent status and vulnerable to loosing their university place. (Information gained through personal comments made by Centrelink staff).

In addition to the students that took a GAP year in 2009, intending to go to university in 2010, that are now in limbo, many students that had planned to take a GAP year in 2010, have already had to sign up for various types of GAP year programs, and are now faced with the same dilemma. Many of the overseas voluntary

organisations required students to sign up early in the year to take the GAP year with them in 2010.

The Australian Defence Force which specifically tailored a program for students to spend a GAP year in either the Army or Navy required applications to be in by May. Short listing of applications begins in September, leaving applicants in the dark as to whether to cancel their applications and forgo their plans for life experience whilst fulfilling a role in the Defence of our country.

The expectation that in order to qualify for Independent status, a student must work 30 hours per week for 2 years is an absolute idiocy. This requirement was included to either deliberately eliminate the GAP year altogether to save money, or was put in without being thought through or properly considered. I make the following points.

- Universities only allow a one year deferment before the student loses their place
- It is simply not possible for a student to study, attend lectures, complete assignments and tutorials *and* work 30 hours per week. This is simply setting students up for failure.

The problem with the changes are two fold. Students currently on a GAP year have had the rug pulled out from underneath them, dashing the plans that had been the basis for the rest of their lives, left in limbo, ineligible for Independent Status and reliant on their parents to pay for them, or work for a further 12 months, to qualify, but lose their place in University. A no win situation.

Students currently attending Year 12 and needing to take a break after 13 solid years of study, have now no choice but to give up their dream of attending University at all, or go straight to Uni, without a break whatsoever, adding to the stress, burnout and increasing the drop out rate or failure. Instead of the supposed increase in attendance at University, there will actually be less, with a higher drop out rate.

Whilst I applaud this Senate Enquiry into this issue, even the timing of this is making it more stressful for students. VTAC applications open August 3<sup>rd</sup>, and close September 30<sup>th</sup>, leaving students in a position of not knowing the outcome of the enquiry and not being prepared to take the risk of choosing and applying for a course; being accepted, but not being able to afford the course, *and* accommodation *and* living expenses. Thus depriving society of future professionals.

Mr Rudd and Ms Gillard have stated that more students will be eligible for Youth Allowance based on parental income, yet the amount they receive may be as little as \$10 per fortnight.

In closing, I would like to respectfully request Senators to consider the full ramifications of these changes and prevent them from occurring. For the sake of the students, and the future of Rural and Regional Australia.

Thanking you for the opportunity to comment

Yours sincerely

Tracee Spiby