

As a rural family, we are extremely concerned at the proposed changes to Youth Allowance eligibility. Our daughter is currently studying Year 12 at our local High School. Although committed to her studies, she has maintained her casual employment at a local supermarket, to enable her to (hopefully) continue in this position in her “gap” year. The previous criteria for qualifying for the allowance was difficult enough but at least seemed achievable and her aim was to qualify for the allowance to then enter University studies in 2011. The proposed changes are imposing yet another obstacle by making it even more difficult to qualify.

The small country town in which we live is already suffering under the drought/water restriction conditions and the economic environment of the town likewise. For our daughter to maintain 30 hours of weekly employment for a period of 18 months may not be possible locally and she may have to work elsewhere to even have any chance of doing so. This will of course affect her ability to save any funds towards her university course, not to mention the fact that the deferral of uni entrance is for a period of 12 months maximum.

We are aware that the costs involved in assisting her in such things as accommodation, travel and course requirements can be up to \$20,000 per year. This will put a strain on our family finances, particularly with another younger child possibly seeking further study also. If our daughter is unable to access any type of government assistance, she may well be in a position that she will have to postpone tertiary study to some future date, therefore the likelihood seems to decline somewhat.

Another point to consider is that rural students are more inclined to return to rural areas upon completion of study. We are fully aware that we currently suffer a shortage of the professions in our local area and that any encouragement for country students to seek tertiary study should be assisted at the most basic level.

Please be aware that when country students make the decision to seek tertiary study, it is not a matter of just ‘going’. That student has no option but to make the move from home, town, friends etc and has the added challenge of not only adjusting to a new town and home but quite often new employment too just to be able to go to university. If the proposed changes are to deter people from unjustly claiming the Youth Allowance, then that must be applauded but surely not at the expense of rural students who face a far bigger challenge in taking up the basic right of further education. The possible changes seem to discriminate against the rural population and appear intent on removing the option for tertiary study altogether. We urge the changes to be reconsidered and stop the gap widening between the rich and poor.

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