

## To Whom it May Concern.

This is a submission to Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Group in relation to proposed changes to Youth Allowance. We request that you review this proposal in light of inequities of opportunity for students from rural areas.

Our family has lived in Manjimup, which is 300km south of Perth, for 20 years and we have found the local public education system to be of the highest standard, with our three children all graduating with TER scores between 96 and 99. The staff are dedicated to ensuring their students achieve to their maximum potential and encourage realistic expectations that students will undertake a university course suited to their ability. In the case of our children, this has been physiotherapy for our two sons and law/communication for our daughter who had intended to commence study in 2010, after completing her "Gap Year". These courses are not offered in Bunbury so they had no choice other than to move away from home.

The gap year has allowed them to earn enough to qualify for Youth Allowance, which was vital in financing themselves through university to achieve their goals and become valuable citizens contributing to the Australian economy. The boys have received Youth Allowance and were able to be successful at University by spending their semester time committing to their very difficult courses, and working during semester break to stockpile a little extra money to get them through the coming semester.

With the proposed changes to Youth Allowance our daughter will have a much more difficult journey, as she would have to rely on money earned during the semester at the same time she is undertaking her course. Given that rural students already have the added complexity of running a household and preparing all their own food, this added burden of having to financially support themselves is totally unrealistic. The financial and physical cost of living is a major obstacle they should not have to deal with at a time they are already experiencing the psychological and emotional trauma of leaving home and fending for themselves. Moving away from a small supportive community to set up home in the city where they have no family support or friends can be very confronting to a young person, and in fact many rural students return home without completing their studies as they face too many stresses.

Our daughter planned ahead in good faith and mapped a future for herself using the current information which included a year's delay in graduating from University and the subsequent forfeiture of a year's earnings at a graduate's rate of remuneration. The proposed changes in the Youth Allowance would be extremely unfair to her both financially and in the lifestyle she would have to lead as a student. I only hope she has the fortitude to continue with her studies under what would be very difficult circumstances.

As country residents we are very aware of the difficulties of attracting professional people to work in the country, with shortages in many areas. The proposed changes would only exacerbate this situation, as it is generally the

country students who return as professionals. Given that many families will be unable to afford to support their children through university, there will be far fewer graduates with a country background who would be willing to fill these shortages.

We strongly urge you to review the proposed new eligibility requirements for Youth Allowance to enable equitable participation of rural students.

Yours sincerely

Robyn and Tim Harrington