



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Forrest Electorate: Youth Allowance

SPEECH

Thursday, 25 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 25 June 2009	Source House
Page 7269	Proof No
Questioner	Responder
Speaker Marino, Nola, MP	Question No.

Ms MARINO (Forrest) (9.48 am)—I rise to call on the Minister for Education to respond to students and parents in my electorate who are affected by the proposed changes to Youth Allowance. There is no doubt that these changes will have a major impact on students, parents and families right throughout the south-west of Western Australia. We have seen no analysis of exactly how many current gap year students in my electorate will be disadvantaged and worse off under the proposed changes to the independent youth allowance as a result of the proposed retrospective starting date of January 2010. Parents and students in this category are extremely worried.

The proposed changes will disadvantage all young people currently taking a gap year. The decision to change the criteria for these students will preclude many of my regional students from attending university at all or, alternatively, add a significant financial and emotional burden to both the students and their families. It will also compromise the tertiary opportunities for other children in the same family.

A second major concern is the new work criteria; the requirement to complete 30 hours of employment a week for 18 months in any two-year period. I would like to see the analysis on how many students in regional and rural towns in my electorate will actually be able to find those 30 hours of employment. I understand that in the 15 and over age group there has been an increase in youth unemployment from 3.2 per cent to five per cent. At any time in small regional communities, it is extremely difficult for a young inexperienced person to find 30 hours work each week. In the current economic circumstances, it is virtually impossible. Employment options are few and far between, or considerable travel and therefore cost is involved. How many students from towns such as Balingup, Donnybrook, Brunswick Junction and Dunsborough, Cowaramup, Harvey, Yarloop, Nannup and Augusta will meet that criteria? This requirement will also preclude the seasonal work option, sometimes the only option for regional, rural and remote students. You can spend 100 hours in one week in a header during harvest, or on a tractor during the hay season, and perhaps 18 hours the next doing similar work, but you will not qualify.

Many parents in regional areas both work now just to support their children's education. Where in such small towns can the same parents find additional employment to meet the extra costs—the additional costs that are not borne by students and families who live in cities who are often just a public transport cost away from their university? Many regional families rely on their children meeting the independent criteria, the gap year, to afford the significant additional cost of educating and accommodating their children or child at a metropolitan university.