



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Youth Allowance Gap Year changes welcomed

Word that the Government has heeded calls to postpone proposed changes to the Youth Allowance eligibility particularly as it relates to students who have made decisions to take a “Gap Year” to meet eligibility criteria for “independence” prior to entering higher education options has been welcomed by the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor made many representations to the Minister Julia Gillard on behalf of students in the New England Electorate and presented petitions organised by students from schools in the electorate to the Parliament seeking the Government’s recognition of the negative impact of introducing the new criteria immediately given that many students had made decisions about their future studies based on the old rules.

“I am very pleased to see that the Government has listened to students and their families about how the changes to the Youth Allowance eligibility criteria will impact on students already in the process of taking a Gap Year to meet the existing “independent” status.

The proposed changes, had they been passed, would have been retrospective in nature and therefore unfair to those students who made decisions based on existing rules.

As I have said in the past on this issue, retrospective legislation is not fair to anyone but particularly in this instance to the young people who we are trying to encourage to become better educated and be positive contributors to society.

Had this retrospective change been successful, the message we would have sent to our young people is that they can’t make solid plans for their future,” Mr Windsor said.

Whilst Mr Windsor is pleased about the Gap Year postponement, he says the issue of the requirement to work for eighteen months out of two years for thirty hours a week is still to be sorted out and he is still very concerned about the proposed changes not fully taking into account the fact that young people in country towns will have no choice but to move away from home to meet this requirement.

“As I indicated when these changes were first mooted, the requirement for young people to prove their ‘Independence’ by working 30 hours a week for 18 months over a two year period is going to mean that many country students will have to move away from their home town to find work as in most country towns this is fulltime work.

This also means a student must defer their entry to University for two years when this is not allowed at most institutions without having to re-apply for their place.

They therefore have the added cost of accommodation to find if the higher education course is in the city,” Mr Windsor said.

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