

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon **David Hawker** MP
Federal Member for Wannon



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COALITION WILL PROTECT RURAL AND REGIONAL STUDENTS

Labor has introduced its discriminatory Youth Allowance legislation that will see tens of thousands of rural students miss out on university.

Federal Member for Wannon, David Hawker, said today that the Minister's changes fly in the face of the Government's claims that they want to increase higher education participation from all sections of the community.

"These changes will actively discourage rural and regional students from attending university – a point recognised even by a Victorian Labor Parliamentary Inquiry into this very issue," Mr Hawker said.

"Two weeks ago the Minister admitted the disastrous effect of her changes in announcing a partial back-flip, but it does nothing for local rural and regional students after this year, and will only help 5,000 of the 30,000 current gap year students disenfranchised by the Government's retrospective changes.

"Minister Gillard's changes will have a particularly harsh impact on local students who are currently preparing for their Year 12 exams. At the very time when they are supposed to be studying hard to get in to the course of their dreams, the Minister for Education is taking their Youth Allowance pathway away from them – unless they can first find 30 hours per week of paid employment for 18 months.

"The Coalition has announced sensible amendments to radically improve this legislation:

1. We will move amendments in the Senate to delay the start date for the new workforce participation criteria by a year. Students who took a gap year on advice from Centrelink officials and career advisers at their schools deserve to have this promise of Youth Allowance fulfilled.
2. For rural and regional students who will no longer qualify for Youth Allowance, but whose families do not have enough disposable income to pay for their relocation to attend University, we have announced a new Rural and Regional Scholarship program worth \$120 million. This will enable more rural and regional students to attend uni.
3. To pay for these changes, we propose reducing the rate of the new Student Start-Up Scholarship from \$2254 per year to \$1000 per year – a saving of \$696 million over four years. This will not affect the fortnightly income of students by so much as one cent, since these new scholarships are only paid at the beginning of each semester. The Coalition's proposal will see all youth allowance recipients get a new payment of \$1000 per year.
4. We will seek to refer the legislation to a Senate Inquiry.

"If the Minister is serious about improving the system of Youth Allowance for all students, and not just those in the major cities, she must consider the Coalition's sensible proposals," Mr Hawker said.

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