

MEDIA RELEASE



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



17 August 2009

LABOR AGAIN DISMISSES RURAL AND REGIONAL STUDENTS

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard today again arrogantly dismissed in Question Time the very real concerns of rural and regional students in Western Victoria who have been gutted by the Government's decision to strip away their entitlement to claim Youth Allowance next year.

Federal Member for Wannon, David Hawker, along with the Leader of the Opposition, Malcolm Turnbull, today met with a delegation of rural and regional students, including four local south-west students, to hear first-hand about the effect of the Rudd Government's changes to the Youth Allowance eligibility criteria.

"These students told us that under the new rules, it would be nearly impossible for them to afford to go to university," Mr Hawker said.

"We know that the Government's changes to Youth Allowance will hurt hundreds of students from farming and small business backgrounds in Western Victoria – these students will not be eligible for Youth Allowance even if their families can't afford to send them to the city to attend university.

"They do not have the luxury enjoyed by many city students who can stay at home when they study."

Mr Hawker said the Rudd Government's changes will also punish all students who are currently on their gap year – having taken the decision to defer their studies in order to meet the workforce participation criteria that were in place and on which they relied when they were at school last year.

"To meet the new criteria, they will have to work thirty hours per week for eighteen months. More often than not, there simply aren't enough full time jobs in our local communities for these potential students," he said.

"The Coalition has been arguing since the Budget that Labor's changes will suffocate many rural students' dreams of a higher education.

"Today in Question Time the Education Minister continued to arrogantly assert that she knows best and everyone else must be wrong, despite having listened first hand to the pleas of these local students earlier in the day.

"It is time for Ms Gillard to swallow her pride and admit that she is wrong," Mr Hawker said.

Mr Hawker said the Coalition has a three point plan to reverse the inequity for rural students:

1. When the legislation comes before the Parliament, the Coalition will move amendments to delay the start date for the abolition of the gap year provision from 1 January 2010 to 1 January 2011 to help those young Australians currently on a gap year.
2. In government, we will look after regional and rural students with a targeted scholarship program that will help thousands of needy students from the country who do not qualify for Youth Allowance assistance.
3. In government, we will fix the ridiculous situation under the Rudd Government's proposal where these young people will be looking for full time work (30 hours per week) for 18 months so they can qualify as independents.

"Students in rural and regional areas deserve better from this so-called education revolution," Mr Hawker said.

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

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Note: Please find attached a photograph of Mr Hawker and Mr Turnbull meeting with the delegation of South West students today at Parliament House, Canberra.

L-R: Carolyn Jennings (South-West parent), David Hawker (Member for Wannan), Geraldine Edar (Youth Development Officer – Moyne Shire), Hannah McDonald, Malcolm Turnbull (Leader of the Opposition), Dylan Stephenson, Jarrod Caveny, Christopher Pyne (Shadow Education Minister) and Nathan Holscher.

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