



CONCERNS: From left, Sian Postma, Senator Steve Fielding, Nadine McNamara and Jake Foley discuss Youth Allowance.

Allowances changes creating uncertainty

by David McKenzie

Proposed changes to youth allowance have filled Colac students with uncertainty as they prepare to apply for university places.

Family First Senator Steve Fielding visited Colac yesterday to discuss concerns about the Federal Government's planned changes to Youth Allowance.

The change would force students to work for 18 months before qualifying for the allowance to support them while studying at university.

People at the meeting said students took a year off between school and university so they could qualify for the allowance.

They said students might cancel their study plans if they had to work for 18 months,

and a lot of universities only allowed people to defer studies for one year.

Senator Fielding said Year 12 students were preparing to apply for university positions, and the government's changes made students uncertain about their applications.

Today's Year 12 students will be old enough to vote at the next Federal Election.

Colac student Nadine McNamara said students would be thinking of the Youth Allowance issue when they voted.

"It's one of the major things that are affecting us," she said.

Senator Fielding said city students could live with their families while studying at university, but rural students needed Youth Allowance so they could move away from home for study.

Nadine said the disadvantage made the country a less attractive place to live.

"It's not attracting us to come back and bring up our kids here," she said.

"It's going to disadvantage us."

Student Sian Postma said the uncertainty made it difficult to apply for university positions.

"It's making it really hard to take that further step," she said.

Senator Fielding said the changes disadvantaged rural students.

"Why should you be forced to take a year off just to get to uni?"

He said young people might struggle to find jobs to work for the 18 months.

"Are the hours in Colac? Are the jobs here in Colac?"

Senator Fielding said the changes would disadvantage students who deferred university this year.

"They're worried about the rules being changed half-way through," he said.

"We understand the government wants to make changes because there are problems with it.

"But why pull the rug out from under their feet?"

Senator Fielding said he believed the government would change its policy after Education Minister Julia Gillard met with students this week, but he said the change needed to come soon.

He called for the government to put off changing the system until it could work out ways to help people attend university.