



Mind the gap

Changes to the Commonwealth government's youth allowance that affected school leavers from 2008 who took a gap year before university have been revised.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Julia Gillard announced in late August that the changes would be delayed for six months, enabling students who have taken a gap year and must move to attend university to claim independent status for the youth allowance under the existing system until 30 June 2010.

The Commonwealth government's youth allowance changes were originally to apply from 1 January next year, but that timing would have stranded school leavers who started their gap year under the old rules this year in the expectation to qualify for the allowance in first semester next year.

The six-month delay means school leavers intending to study at university are still able to qualify as independent by earning \$18,850 over 18 months, regardless of their age or parents' income.

'Students who left school in 2008, have taken a gap year this year and who must leave home to attend university will be entitled to apply for independent status under the existing system,' Gillard said in a statement. 'This change will mean that students will not be caught up in the transition between the old and new systems.'

Extending the gap-year provisions by six months is expected to cost the Commonwealth government \$150 million. 'To pay for the change, the alterations to the amount a student can earn before affecting their youth allowance will be deferred by 18 months,' Gillard said. 'Students are currently able to earn \$236 a fortnight before their Youth Allowance payment is affected. This will now rise to \$400 a fortnight on 1 July 2012.'

Performance-based pay

THE LATEST REPORT ON TEACHER PAY CONCLUDES THAT SOME FORM OF PERFORMANCE-BASED PAY MIGHT BE EFFECTIVE.

STEVE HOLDEN REPORTS.

The *Rewarding Quality Teaching* report of consultancy firm Gerard Daniels, commissioned by the Commonwealth government of previous Prime Minister John Howard in 2007, cautiously concludes that some form of performance-based pay or incentive might be a good idea, but you have to search for quite a bit to find it.

'Incentives paid directly to (high-performing) teachers or additional budgets for hard-to-fill schools earmarked for senior teacher roles are the most effective ways of attracting our best teachers,' the report concludes.

'Any model of pay needs to be carefully crafted so that high-performing teachers are found in hard-to-fill schools; and the model does not create barriers or disincentives for these teachers.'

The report hardly throws caution to the wind, but should put the wind up proponents of schemes that tie performance-based pay of teachers to their students' performance as measured by students' test scores. 'Such schemes build on the idea that growth in student performance is a strong indicator of teaching quality, and that it is the indicator for which it is worth paying... (but) it makes no sense to pay for students' average performance – because the quality of teaching explains only 30 percent of the variance in students' test scores.'

The report concludes that:

- a performance management system should underpin a performance culture in teacher employment
- employers should 'embrace differential remuneration for teachers who are assessed as high performers,' and
- success will depend on the quality of the teacher assessment process, and on similar teaching standards across jurisdictions.

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Julia Gillard said, in a statement, '*Rewarding Quality Teaching* was accepted by the Ministerial Council in June and will form the basis of the reform of teacher remuneration arrangements in each state and territory,' but stopped short of committing the Commonwealth government to act on its recommendations, observing merely that it 'will inform the development and implementation of new teacher pay arrangements.'

Does that mean it will inform Commonwealth government policy on the development and implementation of new teacher pay arrangements? Gillard merely noted that, 'New South Wales has recently announced that it will identify its best-performing teachers and offer them increased pay to teach in schools serving the state's most disadvantaged communities.'

'There is nothing more important to learning than the quality of the teacher standing in front of the classroom,' Gillard said, which could mean that Commonwealth and state and territory governments might support the idea of 'incentives paid directly to (high-performing) teachers or additional budgets for hard-to-fill schools earmarked for senior teacher roles,' or not.

'We are working with states and territories to drive reform,' she told Laurie Oakes on Channel Nine's *Sunday* program. 'I am asking states and territories around the country to be there, delivering reform in teacher's pay.'

LINKS:

The Rewarding Quality Teaching report is available at www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Rewarding_Teacher_Quality-Final_Report_-_GDA_2009.pdf

Education at a glance

EDUCATION AT A GLANCE 2009 SUGGESTS AUSTRALIA 'COULD DO BETTER,' BUT IT'S WORTH STUDYING THE DETAIL BEFORE CONCLUDING OUR SCHOOLS ARE BELOW AVERAGE, REPORTS STEVE HOLDEN.

Australian students spend more time in the classroom, but appear to spend less time on reading, writing and literature, or on mathematics and languages, than other developed countries, according to the 2009 *Education at a Glance* report of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Australian students aged seven to eight years spend on average 954 hours per year of total compulsory instruction time in the curriculum, compared to the OECD average of 769. Australian nine- to 10-year olds spend 955 hours, compared to the OECD average of 810, while Australian 12- to 14-year olds spend 962 hours in class, and 15-year olds spend 938 hours in class, compared to the OECD average of 892 and 921 respectively.

Australian nine- to 11-year olds, however, appear to spend only 13 per cent of their time on reading, writing and literature, below the OECD average of 23 per cent, and nine per cent on Maths, below the OECD average of 16 per cent, while Australian 12- to 14-year olds appear to spend 10 per cent of their time on reading, writing and literature, below the OECD average of 16 per cent, and nine per cent on Maths, below the OECD average of 13 per cent.

The figures should be treated with caution, however, since Australian curriculum requirements are typically less prescriptive in terms of the amount of mandated time that must be spent on particular subjects than OECD countries with which they were compared in the *Education at a Glance* report. More than half of all instruction time for primary school students is determined at the discretion of teachers.

Australian primary school class sizes are slightly above the OECD average. In primary schools there are, on average, 23.8

students per class, above the OECD average of 21.4. In secondary schools, however, there are, on average, 23.8 students per class, slightly below the OECD average of 23.9. There are, on average, 15.9 primary school students to each teacher, just below the OECD average of 16, and 12.1 secondary school students to each teacher, well below the OECD average of 13.

Starting salaries for graduate teachers, based on 2007 figures, were, on average, between \$32,259 and \$32,406, well above OECD averages between \$28,687 and \$32,183. Salaries for graduate teachers after 15 years topped out at \$44,942, similar to the OECD average of \$44,782 but well below the OECD average for teachers at the top of the scale of between \$47,747 and \$54,440.

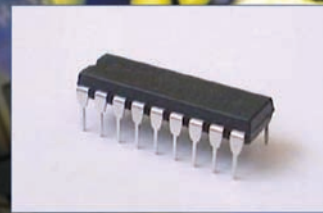
On 2006 figures, Australia spends 4.6 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) on all levels of education, including higher education, below the OECD average of 5.3 per cent. Denmark spends the most, at eight per cent of GDP.

While Australia did not provide figures on teacher population, OECD figures indicate that for the OECD as a whole 15.5 per cent of primary school teachers are aged below 30 years, 26.6 per cent are aged between 30 and 39, 29.1 per cent are between 40 and 49, 25 per cent are between 50 and 59, and 3.7 per cent are above 60.

In lower secondary, 12.2 per cent are aged below 30 years, 26.4 per cent are between 30 and 39, 29.4 per cent are between 40 and 49, 27.1 per cent are between 50 and 59, and 4.9 per cent are above 60.

In upper secondary, 10.4 per cent are aged below 30 years, 23.9 per cent are between 30 and 39, 30 per cent are between 40 and 49, 29.2 per cent are between 50 and 59, and 6.5 per cent are above 60.

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