Thanks, Gough, for giving us all a chance

Gough Whitlam’s visionary tertiary education scheme opened up doors for many writes Geoff Cooper.

Next week on the 11th of July Gough Whitlam will celebrate his 96th birthday, his first without his beloved wife, Margaret.

Many thousands, no millions, of baby boomers should join in a very loud chorus to sing the praises of this much maligned but incredible Australian.

Newspapers around Australia will probably acknowledge this milestone but to really appreciate what he did for this country, a perspective of his impact on “ordinary” Australians needs to be expressed.

Officially I am two years too old to be classed as a member of the baby boomer generation but I was one of the many fortunate people whose life was absolutely changed through the policies of former prime minister Gough Whitlam, Australia’s greatest ever visionary.

As a working-class kid from the then very poor working-class suburb of Yarraville, it was beyond my wildest dreams to even consider having a tertiary education.

Even completing secondary education to sixth form (year 12) was not on my radar.

My old alma mater, Footscray Tech, only went to year 10 and if you lived anywhere west of the Yarra, your biggest decision after completing secondary school was to join the laudable but limited careers of carpentry, plumbing or other of the building trades. Whitlam changed all that.

Never has one man had such an impact on our nation in such a short time. No-fault divorce, universal health insurance, the first real recognition of indigenous people, a major step towards equal rights for women and access to justice for all, to list just a few of his major achievements.

But for me and many thousands like me, it was his creation of TEAS, the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme, that changed my life and I believe allowed many of us to add so much more to our communities because of it.

At the ripe old age of 31 I was able to undertake what previously had been denied me; I gained entrance to Monash University. The rush of mature-age students into tertiary education in the late ’70s indicated just how many of us had missed out on an education during the previous 23 years of conservative rule.

The consequence of Whiteman’s education policy went well beyond just personal improvement.

Higher education also gave me the confidence and knowledge to participate in local government and play roles in other community activities throughout my life.

Forget the Khelemi affair and Rex Connor’s delusional plans to run a gas pipeline across Australia, the fact that our country was dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century is something that all Australians should be grateful for.

Thirty-seven years on, today’s modern Australia is a direct result of the Whiteman years.

Happy birthday, Gough, and so many thanks for giving me and many of my generation a chance at life that previously had only been the realm of the rich.

Geoff Cooper is a freelance writer.
Parents’ impact less on pupils

By KIM ARLINGTON

PARENTAL occupation and education levels have less influence on whether students finish year 12 than factors such as being suspended, repeating a grade or risky behaviour, a new study has found.

While previous research has identified a strong link between students completing year 12 and measures of their parents’ education or occupational status, a report from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, released today, found that the main predictors of year 12 completion were factors such as poor school experiences, low aspirations, smoking and consumption of alcohol.

Researchers at the Social Policy Evaluation, Analysis and Research Centre at the Australian National University examined the relationship between disadvantage and educational outcomes in their report, *School Completion: What We Learn from Different Measures of Family Background*.

The study combined data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, which tracks people aged 15 to 25, and the Youth in Focus survey, which collates information from young people, their parents and Centrelink records.

The data provided a broad set of measures of disadvantage, including family characteristics and income, welfare history, students’ early school experiences and their participation in antisocial behaviour, said Tom Karmel, the managing director of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research.

“The inclusion of these broader measures shows that commonly used indicators of disadvantage, including parental education and occupational status, are less significant than previously indicated,” Dr Karmel said.

Family income had only a small effect on whether students finished year 12, he added.

“School completion is not really about parental resources; it’s about aspirations and behaviours,” he said.

“The classic example here is some migrant groups that put huge store on the value of education for their children. This drive means that the kids, on the whole, will succeed.”

The report found that students’ plans to go on to year 12 and then university increased their probability of doing so by 24 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively.

It also found that students who repeated a year were 30 per cent less likely to finish year 12, while those who were suspended were 19 per cent less likely to complete their final year.
Push begins to promote study in Asia

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans will use a meeting of education ministers in the East Asia Summit organisation in Jogjakarta today to boost the number of Australians studying in Asia, now a tiny fraction of those from Asia studying in Australia.

The move to increase exchanges with Asian universities comes a few days after Opposition Leader Tony Abbott told a Liberal Party national conference he would fund scholarships for study in Asia if he won government.

Mr Abbott said it would be a reverse version of the Colombo Plan, which paid for thousands of Commonwealth students to come to Australia in the 1960s and '70s.

Senator Evans, who met a group of Australians studying in Jakarta last night, said his focus at the EAS meeting would be on cutting bureaucratic obstacles to student exchanges, especially the lack of recognition by Australian universities of the courses undertaken in Asian universities by Australian students.

“We are trying to remove some of the structural barriers to those interchanges,” Senator Evans told The Australian Financial Review.

Despite having 600,000 foreign students in Australia, in 2009 there were only about 10,000 Australians studying overseas and less than 1000 studying in Asia.

Senator Evans said there was a tendency for Australians to study overseas in Britain and the US rather than Asia. “I think language is a barrier,” he said. “The fact that many of China’s best universities are now teaching in English as well is helping to break down some of those barriers.”

The EAS ministerial meeting, the first of its type, will include education ministers from Australia, China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and the US.

Senator Evans has said he expects the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at Melbourne University, said sending more university students to study in Asia was a lot more cost-effective in expanding ties than Mr Abbott’s pledge in his budget reply speech to double to 40 per cent by 2020 the share of high school students studying a foreign language in year 12.

But he said the idea of a reverse Colombo Plan was a good one, although Australia would have to target its scholarships and exchange programs at Asian countries because most Australian university students wanted to study in Europe and the US.

Professor Marginson said a smaller share of Australian university students studied overseas than for any other country in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

“We are trying to remove some of the structural barriers to interchanges.”

Minister Chris Evans
Year 12s shape own destiny, study says

By Kim Arlington

Parental occupation and education levels have less influence on whether students finish year 12 than factors such as being suspended, repeating a grade or risky behaviour, a new study has found.

While previous research has identified a strong link between students completing year 12 and measures of their parents' education or occupational status, a report from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, released today, found the main predictors of year 12 completion were factors like poor school experiences, low aspirations, and smoking and consumption of alcohol.

Researchers at the Social Policy Evaluation, Analysis and Research Centre at the Australian National University examined the relationship between disadvantage and educational outcomes in their report, School Completion: What We Learn from Different Measures of Family Background.

The study combined data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, which tracks people aged 15 to 25, and the Youth in Focus survey, which collates information from young people, their parents and Centrelink records.

The data provided a broad set of measures of disadvantage, including family characteristics and income, welfare history, students' early school experiences and their participation in antisocial behaviour, the head of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Tom Karmel, said.

"The inclusion of these broader measures shows that commonly used indicators of disadvantage, including parental education and occupational status, are less significant than previously indicated," Dr Karmel said.

Family income had only a small effect on whether students finished year 12, he added.

“School completion is not really about parental resources; it’s about aspirations and behaviours,” he said. “The classic example here is some migrant groups that put huge store on the value of education for their children. This drive means that the kids, on the whole, will succeed.”

The report found that students' plans to go on to year 12 and university increased their probability of doing so by 24 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively. It also found students who repeated a school year were 30 per cent less likely to finish year 12, while those who were suspended were 19 per cent less likely to complete their final year. "Risky activities such as smoking and alcohol consumption are also a marker of a lower chance of completing year 12," Dr Karmel said. The probability of finishing year 12 was reduced by 8 per cent for those who smoked and 7 per cent who drank alcohol.
Sydney the new home of clean energy financing

The office of the $10 billion Clean Energy Finance Corporation will be established in Sydney, New South Wales, the Federal Government has said.

"Sydney has been selected because it has a strong clean energy sector and a network of financial, legal and professional services that will ensure the smooth set-up and operation of the Corporation," the Government said, adding that its location in the city's financial sector will also facilitate partnerships with lenders and investors.

The Corporation is set to draw on Sydney's higher education and research and development facilities, including the CSIRO Energy Centre and the University of New South Wales' School of Photovoltaic and Renewable Energy Engineering.
School factors counted

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The study combined data from the Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth, which tracks people aged 15 to 25, and the Youth in Focus survey, which collates information from young people, their parents and Centrelink records.
SEVERAL new reports and initiatives looking to address the dire workforce shortages facing Australian agriculture indicate there’s palpable energy and momentum to act on the issue, according to Federal Parliamentary Agriculture Secretary Sid Sidebottom.

But Mr Sidebottom said the agricultural industry must unite to devise a clear pathway forward to solve the crisis.

The Senate’s education, employment and workplace relations references committee recently completed its report on agricultural skills shortages, making 11 key recommendations.

The leading recommendation was for government to help facilitate the development of a national peak industry representative body for the agricultural production and agribusiness sectors and to engage with it.

The recommendation has strong opposition from the National Farmers’ Federation, and Mr Sidebottom said while the government would consider all recommendations, it was “up to industry” to decide on their representative structures.

The issue of skills shortages was also placed under the microscope when AgriFood Skills Australia released its 2012 environmental scan.

That report identified four areas for priority action on the issue, including the attraction of new workers, increasing skills levels across the workforce and improving the retention of the existing workforce.

A business roundtable meeting and a youth roundtable forum were also held in Canberra recently, organised by Agrifood Skills Australia, the AgriBusiness Council of Australia (ACA), the Business/Higher Education Roundtable (B-HERT) and the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE).

In saying agriculture has the potential to become Australia’s new “boom” industry, the business roundtable called for government to support the formation of a new industry council to overhaul the way industry attracts, educates and retains talent.

The new council would take responsibility for overhauling agricultural education delivery and launch a major marketing campaign to change public perceptions about agriculture.

Among the flurry of activity, the NFF is conducting public consultations to help devise its Blueprint for Australian Agriculture, while the government’s National Food Plan is expected to come online soon and is also looking at agricultural workforce shortages.

Delegates at the youth roundtable agreed the negative perception of agriculture was the greatest barrier to more young people choosing a career in the industry.

PICSE national director Professor David Russell said it was important to continue building networks linking students, universities and teachers through the PICSE.

“Agriculture has the potential to be the next boom industry if the right approach to engagement, training and recruitment is adopted,” he said.
Mr Sidebottom said everyone was starting to repeat common messages on agricultural workforce shortages and it was for industry to get organised and present a "coherent package" of solutions to government.

Mr Sidebottom said the agricultural had an exciting future and messaging across all sectors needed to reflect that vibrancy and an optimistic outlook.

"The task for us is to show just how rewarding and varied the career opportunities [are] at all levels in agriculture, to ensure we continue to attract the best and brightest into the industry and deliver them the skills and training they'll need to succeed."
Students can earn an extra $164 a week before their allowance is affected.

**Study struggle lessened**

STUDENTS on youth allowance in Roma and the surrounds can now work more without it affecting their payments. Students can now earn up to $400 a fortnight without payment changes.

This is a massive step up from the previous arrangement, where students could only earn up to $236 before it affected their income.

Minister for Tertiary Education Senator Chris Evans said the Australian Government is making it easier for students to supplement their income with part-time or casual employment.

“We know the cost of living can be a barrier for students, and this change to the income will allow students to earn more each week before their payments are reduced,” he said.

“Having more students with the qualifications they need for tomorrow’s jobs will be of huge benefit to regional businesses, industry and the economy.”

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**Senator Chris Evans**

Minister for Tertiary Education

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