VIC: Vic’s Swinburne Uni to close campus

Eds: Updates student numbers at Lilydale, on advice from Swinburne
By Melissa Jenkins

MELBOURNE, July 6 AAP - Swinburne University of Technology will close its Lilydale campus in Melbourne’s outer east, home to 3000 students, and up to 240 staff will lose their jobs.

TAFE courses in areas such as hospitality, leisure, recreation and tourism will no longer be offered, and courses in low demand will also be dumped.

The decision comes after the Victorian government slashed $290 million from TAFE funding in the 2012/13 budget.

Swinburne had $35 million of its TAFE budget, about one quarter, cut for this financial year.

Vice-chancellor Linda Kristjanson said with fewer viable TAFE courses and a drop in demand for higher education at Lilydale, the campus would no longer offer courses from July 1 next year.

Students in the middle of higher education courses at Lilydale will have their programs rolled into courses at the Hawthorn campus from January, while those working towards a TAFE qualification may continue their courses at the nearby Croydon or Wantirna campuses.

"We expect that there will be no impact on the students themselves," Prof Kristjanson told reporters.

"Geography is important when students make the choice about their programs, but moreover they are making choices about quality programs."

The future of the Prahran campus will be decided after 2014, with TAFE courses there to be moved to other campuses and the Faculty of Design to go to Hawthorn.

There will be 120 voluntary redundancies offered to Swinburne TAFE teachers and the same number available to general staff across the university.

Prof Kristjanson said sackings would be a last resort, and in her experience voluntary redundancy programs were often over-subscribed.

Higher Education Minister Peter Hall acknowledged the TAFE funding cuts had helped drive the closures.

"There is no doubt that some of the changes for vocational training and funding have led them to some of those decisions in part," he told reporters.

"But essentially the main reason for these changes is a decision taken by the university council which reflects the priorities that they have towards program delivery into the future."

Opposition education spokesman James Merlino said the closure of the Lilydale campus would have wide-ranging implications across Melbourne’s outer east.

"This is the reality of $290 million being ripped out of TAFE," he told reporters.

"Kids from regional Victoria travelling to Lilydale will no longer have the opportunity of a TAFE course."

No decision has been made about the future of the campus building at Lilydale.

AAP mj/mn/jl/wjf
VIC: Vic's Swinburne to close campus, cut jobs

By Melissa Jenkins

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Swinburne had $35 million cut from its budget for this financial year.

Vice-chancellor Linda Kristjanson said with fewer viable TAFE courses and a drop in demand for higher education at Lilydale, the campus would close on July 1 next year.

A question mark also hangs over the future of the university's Prahran campus, with TAFE courses there to be moved to other campuses and the Faculty of Design to go to the Hawthorn campus.

Professor Kristjanson said up to 240 staff across the university would be offered voluntary redundancies as a result of the reshaping of the TAFE course portfolio, she said.

Half would be teaching staff, and the rest general staff.

"Our need to refocus what we do means that we have needed to make difficult decisions across the board," Professor Kristjanson said in a statement on Friday.

"Ceasing operations at Lilydale is certainly the hardest decision of all."

Swinburne TAFE courses that will be closed include cookery, floristry, local government, automotive studies and recreation and tourism.

There are 2500 students at the Lilydale campus, of those more than 900 are enrolled in TAFE courses.

Swinburne says the higher education courses offered at Lilydale would be integrated into other campuses ahead of the closure.

Opposition education spokesman James Merlino said the closure of the Lilydale campus would have wide-ranging effects across Melbourne's outer east.

"This is the reality of $290 million being ripped out of TAFE," he told reporters.

"Kids from regional Victoria travelling to Lilydale will no longer have the opportunity of a TAFE course."

Australian Education Union Victorian branch vice president Meredith Peace called on the state government to reverse the TAFE funding cuts.

"We have already seen massive devastation across Victoria as a result of these cuts," she said in a statement.

"It is estimated that 2000 TAFE staff will be made redundant as a result of the funding cuts."

The union will rally against the TAFE cuts outside the State Library in Melbourne on August 16.

Comment was being sought from Higher Education Minister Peter Hall.

AAP mj/ce/jl/
Little to show for $154bn

Pip Freebairn and Mathew Dunckley

The number of students enrolled in training courses has failed to grow despite the injection of $15.4 billion of federal government funds into skills training over the past four years.

But industry and government said they still expected federal and state governments to achieve a Council of Australia Government national agreement goal to halve the number of Australians without qualifications by 2020.

The number of students studying in vocational training courses rose to 1.9 million in 2011, an annual rise of 4.6 per cent, data from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research shows.

But most of the growth was recorded in Victoria, which grew by 14.8 per cent, with the other states’ enrolments growing by 0.5 per cent.

Skills Minister Chris Evans told the Weekend Financial Review that there was more work to do.

"But the signs are there, we are definitely moving in the right direction and I am encouraged by the reforms we are seeing in other states," Senator Evans said.

"We will need an additional 2.4 million people in the workforce with qualifications at Certificate III or higher by 2015."

Despite the growth in Victoria, the state’s training system was criticised this past week by Premier Ted Baillieu as leading to a $500 million blowout in the budget.

He pointed the finger at the federal government for its role in changes made to the state’s VET sector that were introduced by the former Labor state government in 2009. Not enough checks were put in place to monitor the quality of the courses being offered and course numbers were uncapped.

But the NCVER data released on Friday showed the surge in enrolments in the state had taken place once the Baillieu government took power in late 2010. Minister Evans said he had repeatedly warned the Baillieu government it needed to more tightly regulate the course quality to address the spike.

Australian Council of Private Education Providers chief executive Claire Field said she thought the goals were achievable. “The problem is how Baillieu has responded is also going to cause problems.” Ms Field said.

Swinburne University of Technology in Melbourne announced on Friday it would shed 240 jobs as a result of funding cuts from the Victorian government.

Swinburne vice-chancellor Linda Kristjanson said the changes to vocational funding meant the faculty would have to cut back its TAFE courses and close its campus at Lilydale. “Our need to refocus what we do means that we have needed to make difficult decisions across the board,” Professor Kristjanson said.

South Australia is the only other state to have introduced the reforms to its training system, which began on July 1.

Other states are expected to address the weaknesses of the Victorian system by imposing stronger quality control, allowing course numbers to be capped and a differential subsidy heavily favouring TAFEs.

Key points

- Number of students in vocational courses rose 4.6pc in 2011.
- Growth in Victoria was 14.8pc and only 0.5pc in other states.
- Vic Premier Ted Baillieu says course quality was not monitored and numbers were uncapped.
Too spoilt to get our hands dirty

Everyone agrees there is a mismatch between the jobs we need filled and what our training system delivers. How do we fix it? Mathew Dunckley and Lucille Keen

Here's a snapshot of a nation. In Perth on Thursday, the streets were full of angry demonstrators protesting against the use of foreign workers on resources projects. Just up the road at Bunbury, where the unemployment rate is 6.3 per cent, there are jobs going wanting at the V&V Walsh abattoir. Locals may want work, but not that bloody work.

Over in Victoria, students have piled into personal training courses in record numbers. Yet the big gyms charge spiralling rents to use their premises and the burnout rate for graduates is high. However, there's definitely a shortage of garbage collectors in the state - hard, body-building work in the outdoors.

Has the nation built on a fair dinkum day's work become a country of shirkers?

Peter Walsh thinks so. He has to use temporary foreign workers at his Bunbury abattoir because the locals are not up to the task. "Australians love sick days. Foreign workers are not cheaper [but] they are more reliable, they don't miss as many days of work," he says.

It certainly does seem strange that, at a time when there have never been more people on the skills production line, industries still complain about a lack of qualified employees. This mismatch is profound and some argue that the reasons include a cultural aversion to dirty work.

"There are probably lots of negative stereotypes about the types of workers they want in the Pilbara at the moment," Griffith University professor of adult and vocational education Stephen Billett says.

"It is seen as being dirty work, dangerous work, when it is probably very safe work. Anything associated with menial work or dirty work is seen as less desirable than being a journalist or an academic."

Billett says stereotypes and perceptions are reinforced at the family dinner table, in the schooling system and in popular culture.

"They are powerful. This comes from our traditions that work that is clean, work where you use your mind and not your hands, is preferable over work which is seen as menial," he says.

He points to other countries: the Swiss villages whose local newspapers report local people attaining craft "meister" status, where an MBA would be of little note. Or when he was chastised by a German waitress for asking what she really wanted to do.

But experts, including Billett, say there are many other problems - government funding signals, poor career guidance and systems built on the less than perfect decision-making capabilities of students, particularly young students.

Billett hears complaints from high school students that they will not get a taste of the job until they have invested significant time and money in a course. "We don't do a good job of assisting people to try to identify the occupations that are suited to them," he says.

"We have a schooling system geared towards getting people into universities and a lesser emphasis on vocational training."

University entrance score requirements are a way of identifying popular preferences where, for example, journalism requires a much higher entry score than civil engineering. Which would you rather your child pursued?

When vocational students in Victoria were given carte blanche to select courses and course providers, they flocked to generic business courses, retail, hospitality and lifestyle courses. (Engineering, too, stayed relatively popular.)

It is widely acknowledged that the Victorian experiment, built by then premier John Brumby and Julia Gillard as federal education minister.
became a funding Frankenstein. Student numbers headed for the stratosphere, particularly in lifestyle courses, which were cheap for the private sector to provide and attractive to students. Toss in some fairly blatant rorting, such as free iPads for graduates and an almost $500 million blowout in the budget, and action was needed.

Fixing the problem is imperative as all states are on a similar path, albeit with strict budget constraints and efforts to cap some of the more egregious lifestyle courses.

Billett wants better efforts to push students to courses whose skills are needed while keeping enough breadth to offer some personal choice. Then, to better inform the choice, there needs to be practical exposure to the jobs on offer.

“They make these choices that have huge implications,” he says.

“It is a very important decision, not only for the individual but for the state – in terms of the funding that goes into vocational education and training.”

He is right. Governments spend about $5.5 billion on vocational education and training every year.

The Grattan Institute predicts getting training right could add $10 billion to gross domestic product by 2022. To get there, the system will need to churn out 1.5 million people more than if it stays on the past decade’s trend.

National Centre for Vocational Education Research managing director Tom Karmel says students will always pick courses that don’t necessarily serve up what the market needs or at least says it needs.

Yes, people just want to be an aromatherapist, or fitness trainer, or hairdresser. And it’s probably not this author's most economically rational decision to be penning articles such as this one to win his wage.

“The whole notion of the classic rational economic self-maximiser is flawed,” says Melbourne University's Leesa Wheelahan.

"People choose to go into areas for a whole lot of reasons and one of the reasons might be because they are very interested in that area."

So is it sensible to allow choice? Karmel argues strongly that missteps are worth bearing compared with the alternative.

“You would have somebody sitting in an office on the sixth floor in Canberra or in the Melbourne CBD saying 'you need so many hairdressers,’” he says.

“You can’t force people to do things they do not want to do.”

It should also be remembered that chance plays a role and people “fall into jobs” rather than consciously choose them.

Industry associations are no better at setting limits than government because of their vested interests, he says. “What the industry associations want to do, is they essentially want an oversupply of labour because that keeps wages down. Everybody has a vested interest in this game.”

So if choice is the idea, then those choices need to be informed. Almost everyone agrees the nation does a bad job of explaining what the jobs on offer are really like.

There are enough aged care nurses churned out in colleges but not in the workforce. And what about the fashion courses filled with hopelessly naive clothes-keen young women?

“Students have only a vague idea of the relationship between a qualification and what it gives them,” says Wheelahan.

“When they are doing a certificate III in business, where is that going to get them?”

Many experts say part of the mismatch is because there are no strong bonds forged between qualifications and a job afterwards.

In northern Europe, for example, there are clear paths from particular qualifications into particular jobs. That bond is formed in part by industries which know the workers will have the necessary skills and will stick around because they have some vision of the job they will be doing.

The attrition rate for apprentices in Europe is much lower than here. But, of course, Europe’s current economic crisis has created high unemployment.

“Industries have got to be prepared to invest in this themselves,” says Wheelahan.

“They rely on the government to produce the workforce they need. Where you have strong occupational pathways you will get strong flows of students into those programs.”

There is also a persistent complaint that not enough is done before people choose a course.

Roger Leeming, a former chief executive at Pilkington Glass and a member of the recently disbanded Victorian Skills Commission, (who fiercely rejects the claim that that state's system has failed) agrees that better information needs to be provided to would-be students.

Caution should be used in simply reading numbers. The decline in apprentices in trades whose skills are so desired by mining is linked to the economic cycle's huge pressure on construction and manufacturing – traditional apprentice nurseries.

When those companies face pressure, axing the apprentice is one of the first decisions.

Others would argue that about 50 per cent of apprentices fail to finish their three- or four-year stint, making them a risky proposition even in good times.

There is a seductive simplicity in the arguments: just get the kids interested in the professions that we’ll need in five years and then train them well. But each one of those elements is fraught with difficulty.

Looking at the whole issue another way, Karmel argues that if people have to be paid well to do tough jobs, that is much better for society than an alternative where high unemployment drives low wages for even unpopular occupations.

“This ‘first world malaise’ is a first world triumph,” he says.
The whole notion of the classic rational economic self-maximiser is flawed — people choose areas for a lot of reasons.

Leesa Wheelahan,
Melbourne University
Locals don’t like this bloody work

For V&V Walsh meat processors chief executive Peter Walsh, it’s not that he wants to choose to employ foreign workers over locals. It is simply a case of that he cannot get enough staff.

“If we did not have imported labour, we would not be able to operate,” Walsh says.

“It is an important backbone of our company.

“Without them we would be operating at half the capacity.”

His abattoir in Bunbury, about 170 kilometres south of Perth, employs about 800 staff. Of these, Walsh says that about one third were foreign workers on 457 visas or working holiday visas.

It doesn’t help that the nearest TAFE which offers certificates in Meat Processing is 170 kilometres away in Perth.

An average meat processor earns $51,300 a year before tax.

In the last financial year V&V Walsh had a 40 per cent turnover of staff, which was an increase from other years.

“We’ve been continually advertising for staff for the last five years,” Walsh says.

“It’s our number one headache. And the unreliability of Australian workers is hard. You can waste a month training and then they up and leave. The turnover is enormous.”

Walsh says he understands that working in an abattoir was not the most desirable job to have, but without the overseas workers he believes the Australian meat industry would be left to “tumble down”.

“They’re [foreign workers] not cheaper; we still have to pay the standard award wage” he says.

“Don’t get me wrong; we have a good crew who are locally based but it is hard to get enough Australians who want to do the work.”

Walsh says there also needs to be more flexibility in working arrangements from semi-skilled workers such as packers.

“We can’t get enough locals to pack so we have to use Taiwanese and Koreans on working holiday visas,” he says.

“They come for six months at a time, if they dried up we’d be gone.”

And Walsh is not alone in his dilemma.

In South Australia, Jim Cunningham, director of Caledonian Scaffolding, says he needs 457 visa workers from the United Kingdom to help mentor local staff.

“The training and experience of scaffolders in the UK is better than here,” he says.

“They have longer training periods, up to five years, where as here you can be qualified within a month. We use the 457 visa holders to train the locals and this has meant higher retention among local workers.”

Cunningham says this knowledge and experience is vital in his industry to ensure safety, particularly given the company is working on some of the largest infrastructure projects in Australia.

Lucille Keen
Taking flight

The ins and outs of mining's growing lifestyle. Cara Jenkin reports
Living the high life

Now boarding for a mine far, far away. Cara Jenkin reports

PLANES are taking over from trains and automobiles in the mining worker’s commute as employers search far and wide for suitable staff.

The number of staff on fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) rosters has rapidly increased in the past five years and is tipped to skyrocket this decade.

One in four mining workers in Australia now flies into their workplace and lives on-site for an extended period, rather than live there permanently.

In Western Australia’s Pilbara region, 15,464 workers had FIFO conditions in 2010, compared to 6734 in 2008 and a predicted 33,685 by 2020.

Local residents made up 13,257 of workers in 2008, 15,930 in 2010 and are forecast to number 20,967 by the end of the decade.

Similar growth is occurring in Queensland, with 54 per cent of all workers in the Bowen Basin now on FIFO arrangements, up from 46 per cent last year.

WA’s Chamber of Minerals and Energy says the increase in FIFO employment is driven by a tighter and more competitive labour market and disparity between the large construction and smaller operational workforces.

The remote location of new mines, where there is a lack of local services, also means most cannot or do not want to live in the area.

In the past, workers have moved home to live near their work. Broken Hill in NSW, Reddy Downs in SA, Kalgoorlie in WA and Mt Isa in Queensland are all remote towns born of mining booms.

But modern-day demand for workers to live in big cities means companies are going to greater lengths to secure a workforce.

Recruitment firm Hays says there are some direct flights from cities and major towns to mining sites but there are more job opportunities out of Perth.

“Workers have got the skills, tickets, experience and things like that, then employers absolutely don’t mind where the worker lives,” he says.

“It’s certainly happening quite prolifically.”

In 2011, Ox Minerals was one of the first companies to specifically target Victorians with direct flights so they could remain living in Melbourne and fly straight to Prominent Hill in Outback SA.

NSW, Cairns in Queensland and southwest districts of Western Australia also have regular flights to mining centres of Australia.

Linking more workers, including those now in declining industries, to FIFO mining jobs is the focus of a new Federal Government project.

Skills Minister Senator Chris Evans says fly-in, fly-out coordinators are being placed in four regions, with the first already working in Cairns, to “connect the dots between the workforce and projects with strong job opportunities”.

Winfield says most mining growth is occurring in the northwest of WA but Perth’s population is a small pool to draw from.

“There’s not enough people in these regional areas to satisfy demand,” he says.

“(FIFO’s) not the preferred option, it’s the only option.”

Winfield says there is demand for FIFO workers with mining-specific skills, such as exploration geologists and mining engineers.

But specialised trades, such as boilermakers, and domestic staff, such as cleaners and cooks, are needed to work on FIFO conditions. “You can earn a good salary,” he says.
BENEFITS OF FIFO

Improved finances because of high wages and lower living costs.
Cheap housing for FIFO workers on site.
More lifestyle choices for workers and families.
Uninterrupted blocks of time at home to pursue personal goals.
Partners of employees have a heightened sense of empowerment.

Source: The Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government

50,000 workers, or one in four mining employees, are estimated to work on fly-in, fly-out rosters.
92 per cent of miners working in Western Australia work on a FIFO roster.
The average salary of a FIFO worker is $90,000 a year.
92 per cent of mine construction workers are employed on a FIFO roster.

FLEXIBLE: Surveyor Ben Kennett has been flying between Adelaide and Moomba for about 17 years in his work for FYFE, a contractor at the gas field. He now has a two-weeks-on/two-weeks-off roster and enjoys the autonomy of working away from the office. “You build up a rapport with your clientele more so than city-based work,” he says. Picture: Calum Robertson
Taking flight

The ins and outs of mining’s growing lifestyle. Cara Jenkin reports

FLEXIBLE: Surveyor Ben Kennett, above, is one of the many Australians to adopt the fly-in, fly-out lifestyle. STORY: PAGE 90
Miners take flight

PLANES are taking over from trains and automobiles in the mining worker’s commute as employers search far and wide for suitable staff.

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The remote location of new mines, where there is a lack of local services, also means most cannot or do not want to live in the area.

In the past, workers have moved home to live near their work. Broken Hill in NSW, Roxby Downs in SA, Kalgoorlie in WA and Mt Isa in Queensland are all remote towns born of mining booms.

But modern-day demand for workers to live in big cities means companies go to greater lengths to secure a workforce.

Recruitment firm Hays says there are some direct flights from cities and major towns to mine sites but there are many more job opportunities out of Perth. Resources and Mining senior regional director Simon Winfield says anyone “willing to fly themselves to Perth” can do FIFO.

“If workers have got the skills, tickets, experience and things like that, then (employers) absolutely don’t (mind where they live),” he says. “It’s certainly happening quite prolifically.”

In 2011, Oz Minerals was one of the first companies to specifically target Victorians with direct flights so they could remain living in Melbourne and fly straight to Prominent Hill in Outback SA.

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Winfield says most mining growth is occurring in the northwest of WA but Perth’s population is a small pool to draw from. “There’s not enough people in these regional areas to satisfy demand,” he says. “(FIFO’s) not the preferred option, it’s the only option.”

92 per cent of mine construction workers are employed on a FIFO roster
OLDER workers must research training options and be prepared to persuade their bosses of the need to upskill.

It is illegal to deny workers training based on their age but Council on the Ageing chief executive officer Ian Yates says discrimination is widespread and mature-age workers must be ready to argue their case.

“It’s tricky,” Yates says. “You don’t want to tell bosses they’re discriminating because some bosses will react badly to that sort of thing.

“So maybe it’s better to use persuasion rather than threats.

“Work out what is out there - get on the web, look at the (Federal Government’s) Experience+ package, ask your local MP about (initiatives to train mature workers).

“Explore every option there is for training. Even apprentices have no particular age limit – about a quarter of current apprentices aren’t young workers.

“Find out about the schemes your boss can access and then go to them with all the information.”

Experience+ is a range of services for job seekers and workers aged 45 years or older, and their employers.

It includes free career planning sessions, free training for workers wanting to move to a less demanding role or whose job is at risk because of a health condition. It also has training grants for employers to support older workers.

Yates says many bosses still believe it is not worth training older workers.

“But one of the things bosses forget is they train up young workers and then those workers look for opportunities elsewhere,” he says.

“Older workers tend to stay with their employer. Bosses also think older people don’t want to learn but the evidence is to the contrary. There’s no evidence that older people can’t adapt to technology.”

Robert Norris, 52, is in the first year of a four-year plumbing apprenticeship and is training with Adelaide-based registered training organisation Training Prospects.

He has worked in vineyards and as a tiler. He approached his current employer, Ward Plumbers, after working for them several years ago.

“I guess, having worked for them in the past, it was a lot easier than for other people who might be my age,” Norris says. “I’m getting older and wanted to secure more work, so said I’m interested in coming back and they said yes.”

Norris says a month after resuming work, it was decided he should formalise his skills through an apprenticeship.

He believes government incentives available for training mature-age staff have made older workers more attractive to companies. “I think because of the assistance (companies) get, most people are happy to put you on.”

- Lauren Ahwan

MATURE AGED IN DEMAND

Workers aged over 45 years make up 20 per cent of vocational education and training students but account for 33 per cent of the workforce.

Research finds mature-aged workers initially take longer to learn new skills but they learn them more thoroughly than younger workers.

Employers get more value from training mature-aged workers, who tend to stay longer in jobs.

Sources: Canberra Institute of Technology, Victorian Equal Opportunity, Human Rights Commission
FRESH START: Robert Norris is an apprentice plumber and gas fitter. Picture: Brenton Edwards
Vocational training is efficient and relevant

I am writing to explain elements of the Victorian Government’s position on Vocational Training which appears to have been omitted from widespread reporting.

It is important to understand that there will be ample opportunity for all Victorians to undergo training as this Government remains committed to vocational training and continues to provide high levels of investment.

The Coalition Government aims to strengthen the training system in Victoria and improve the quality of training provided, at the same time ensuring the system is financially sustainable.

In the May State Budget, the Coalition committed an additional $1 billion in training for the next four-year period. As a result, taxpayers will spend around $1.2 billion each year on training subsidies. This is $300 million more than the previous Government budgeted to be spent on training this year.

In just three years the cost of training blew out from $800 million in 2008 to $1.3 billion in 2011-12, well above the forecast cost of around $900 million — creating a $400 million black hole.

Over the same period the number of providers delivering government subsidised training grew from 561 to 758. Under Labor’s arrangements the system was exposed to over-servicing and corner cutting in the quest for a greater share of guaranteed government income.

Our commitment to address quality training will see the introduction of higher standards imposed on those seeking a contract to deliver government subsidised training.

This year alone around 100 providers have been removed from the government subsidised provider list.

There will be changes and it is expected many TAFEs will see benefits in greater levels of collaboration with other providers to share services and program delivery.

Delivery modes may change and some providers may choose to align more closely with higher education providers.

I would also expect industry to take a stronger responsibility for workforce development and to form partnerships with training providers.

Victoria leads the country in establishing a market driven training system.

Under agreements recently signed at COAG, every other state is heading down the same path.

Victoria has been a leading reformer in vocational education and will continue to do so, creating an efficient, relevant and quality driven system.

— Cindy McLeish
State Member for Seymour
TAFE BLOW ‘It’s a second home to most of the students’

Lilydale campus closure shocks students

BY BENJAMIN PREISS AND TOM ARUP

AMIE Watson had hoped to continue studying next year but fears she will have to abandon her plans. Ms Watson is a TAFE student studying liberal arts at Swinburne University's Lilydale campus. The university announced yesterday it would close the Lilydale campus next year.

From July 1 it will stop offering courses there. The closure is part of a broader restructure at Swinburne that will claim up to 240 jobs.

Ms Watson, 19, said she was angry the university failed to give any warning of the closure. She said she was trying to decide between doing an arts degree or a TAFE hospitality course. But Swinburne is cutting a broad range of TAFE courses, including cookery, hospitality, local government, floristry, recreation and tourism.

Swinburne offers TAFE and university streams at the Lilydale campus, which has more than 3000 students.

Ms Watson, who lives in Healesville, said many students would refuse to travel to Swinburne's main campus in Hawthorn. "I think it's extremely unfair. No one asked us what we want."

The university is also moving its faculty of design from Prahran to Hawthorn.

Swinburne TAFE teacher George Ulehla said staff were yet to be briefed about the changes. He said the campus closure would hurt Lilydale's economy.

Swinburne will lose $35 million after the state government slashed TAFE funding by about $290 million earlier this year.

The Victorian secretary of the National Tertiary Education Union, Colin Long, said the union would continue talks with the university next week. "We do have a sense they are trying to minimise the damage but the extent of the cuts is so substantial they've been forced..."
Communications student Melissa Ong said she found out her campus would close through Facebook.

Ms Ong said the university should have been more open about its plans before announcing it would close the campus. She has studied at Lilydale since 2009 and has several years to go before completing her degree.

Ms Ong said the Lilydale campus offered a much warmer and more personal atmosphere than other university campuses.

“We all became family because we’re all from the local area,” she said. “It’s a second home to most of the students.”

The state’s Minister for Higher Education and Skills, Peter Hall, said the government’s cuts to TAFE subsidies had not directly resulted in the closure of Swinburne’s Lilydale campus, which he said housed higher education courses, not vocational training.

“The prime reason for these changes … is the refocus the university has taken to strengthen their delivery in the areas of science, technology and innovation,” he said.

“They [Swinburne] continue to be a strong deliverer of vocational training and consequently in receipt of government subsidy for training. So yes, with the changes in subsidies that does have an impact on the university, but overwhelmingly the reason why they have made the changes is that they are refocusing on their areas of strength.”

Labor deputy leader James Merlino said the Swinburne campus closure and job losses was the reality of the government’s cuts to TAFE.

Swinburne’s student union condemned the closure. President Mark Briers said the union was concerned that the university had not consulted students before announcing it would close the campus.
TAFE funding cuts put 340 jobs on the line

JOHN ROSS

SWINBURNE University will shed up to 340 staff and may close two campuses in the most dramatic response yet to the Baillieu government’s $300 million TAFE budget cuts.

The Melbourne institution, which has both university and TAFE divisions, plans to close its Lilydale and Prahran campuses next year. The sites may be sold to finance upgrades at its other three campuses. Courses will be scrapped in at least 13 disciplines including automotive training, even though automotive specialties are reportedly among Victoria’s worst areas of skill shortage.

Voluntary redundancies are being offered to 120 TAFE teachers and 120 administrative staff. and 100 contractors will also go, according to the Australian Education Union.

Swinburne said the changes were driven by its new focus on science, technology and innovation. New majors and degrees would be offered in maths, physics and sportscience.

However, the union said the university was switching from TAFE to the “better income streams” from higher education. “Dual-sector universities get about $15 an hour for a commonwealth-supported university place,” deputy TAFE vice-president Greg Barclay said. “Diploma-level programs (are) down to $5 an hour and less.”

Caps on university places were removed this year, enabling Swinburne to recruit as many higher education students as it likes. While TAFE places are also uncapped in Victoria, the state government has slashed funding in some areas — including hospitality, recreation and tourism — to as little as $1.50 an hour.

RMIT University policy analyst Gavin Moodie said the Swinburne changes were inevitable and mirrored developments at other universities.

Federal Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans said the Baillieu government was “slashing funding and denying young Victorians the opportunity to get a qualification”.

The 240 redundancies at Swinburne come on top of 290 so far at seven other TAFEs. However most are expected to make further cuts, with 2000 TAFE job losses anticipated. Private colleges could shed up to 4800 jobs.

Swinburne has not yet named the specific courses to be cut but said it has quarantined “pathway” courses to higher education.

A fifth of Swinburne’s higher education students come through TAFEs, including through a program that guarantees diploma students entry to the corresponding bachelor degrees. It is not clear how many of the diplomas will go.

University of Melbourne tertiary education expert Leesa Wheelahan said dual-sector institutions were in decline. “The cuts are undermining TAFE in the dual-sectors and will result in TAFE becoming residual,” she said.

AEU federal TAFE secretary Pat Forward said the dual-sector universities “had effectively been one of the vehicles for engineering the end of TAFE”.

The University of Melbourne and Monash University have also made redundancies, but have not yet announced the extent of the cuts or the disciplines that will be affected.
More money for students

STUDENTS who receive Youth Allowance or Austudy will now be able to earn more from part-time and casual employment without impacting their payments.

The changes, which came into effect on July 1, allow students to earn an extra $164 per fortnight with the threshold now $400 per fortnight.

The threshold for the Student Income Bank, for students to bank their unused pay, is also being raised from $6000 to $10,000.

Eligible students have also received payments of up to $190 as part of the federal government's Household Assistance package.

“We know living costs can be a barrier for students and this change to the income threshold will allow students to earn more each week before their payments are reduced,” Minister for Tertiary Education Chris Evans said.