A picture might be worth a thousand words, but often counts for a lot more in the news business.

A strong image has the ability to speak volumes about the world around us – often more powerfully than a journalist’s well-crafted words.

The University of Melbourne has now launched the first comprehensive study of the history and significance of press photography in Australia, across all states and territories.

Lead researcher and prominent journalist Michael Gawenda, from the Centre for Advanced Journalism, says he was thrilled to have secured a $200,000 Australian Research Council grant to fund the study – A History Of Press Photography in Australia.

“This project will enable us to look at an area of journalism that is often neglected: the place of photography in Australian journalism and the way photography has recorded major events in Australian history,” he says.

“It will look at how the photograph – and now video – has been used in journalism to record social and political change.”

The project attracted $203,627 from the ARC, and will also receive support from the National Library of Australia and the Australian Walkley Foundation.

The project will also explore the history, ethics and editorial prominence of press photography, as well as issues of censorship.

The professionalisation of press photographers and the shifting role of amateur and citizen photographers will also be scrutinised.

“This is a wonderful project at a time when journalism is in a great period of change and the use of photography and video is increasingly important in the digital age,” Mr Gawenda says.

In a journalism career spanning more than three decades, Mr Gawenda has been a political reporter, foreign correspondent, columnist and was Editor-in-Chief of *The Age* from 1997 to 2004.
Associate Professor Sally Young from the University’s School of Social and Political Sciences and Dr Fay Anderson and Professor Kate Darian-Smith, both from the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, will also work on the research project.

“The whole research team and our partners will be thrilled as well and eager to get on with this exciting project,” Mr Gawenda said.

Another 14 University of Melbourne projects will share in a further $4.3m from the latest round of ARC funding, announced by the Science and Research Minister, Senator Chris Evans, earlier in July.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Professor Jim McCluskey, says the awards were recognition of the University's status as a leading research body.

“It’s really a testament to the depth, quality and range of research at the University of Melbourne.

“I warmly congratulate all our grant recipients on their achievements and commend their hard work to date.”

www.arts.unimelb.edu.au
www.research.unimelb.edu.au
Get rid of bad training shops, Victoria told

Pip Freebairn

Federal Skills Minister Chris Evans has told the Victorian government to sign up to the national regulator to eliminate low-quality training operators offering “soft” subjects such as aromatherapy and personal fitness.

Senator Evans also rejected Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu’s criticism that the federal government was to blame for the design of the state’s training system, which contributed to a $500 million state budget blowout.

“States are responsible for training, and it is states that are responsible for their design,” Senator Evans said.

Neither Victoria nor Western Australia have joined a national regulator, the Australian Skills Quality Authority.

“The Victorian auditor’s report of that system’s regulator was scathing so it is very surprising why the Victorians haven’t signed up, given the obvious failings,” Senator Evans said.

He defended the federal government’s overhaul of the system, the Gillard government’s centrepiece policy, saying it was on to track to tackle skill shortages and halve the number of people without qualifications by 2020. Some 48 per cent of people lacked a basic-level qualification in 2010. “We have more work to do but we are moving in the right direction,” he said.

Victoria was the first state to introduce reforms pushed by then deputy prime minister Julia Gillard in 2009 that introduced a voucher system so that taxpayer funding followed students wherever they chose to undertake study in the public or private sectors.

Senator Evans said he warned the Baillieu government when it took office in 2010 that its system was encouraging enrolments in low-quality institutes offering qualifications in things like aromatherapy and personal training. “This is not something that wasn’t widely known ... certainly, quality providers and TAFEs were raising concerns about how the system was developing.

“In my meetings with the Victorian government we expressed concerns [about] how the system was developing. They [the Baillieu government] made some changes but they were slow to move and you could still argue they haven’t gone far enough to deal with the number of institutions offering low-quality courses.”

A $9 billion agreement brokered between states and the federal government at the March Council of Australian Governments meeting will impose stricter quality control, Senator Evans said.

He acknowledged industry criticism that the Australian Skills Quality Authority had yet to display any muscle in cracking down on shonky industry providers.

But he said it was a new body taking over from a system of disparate providers and he would consider giving it further enforcement powers if necessary.

Since it was launched last July, the authority has prevented 184 providers from operating courses or did not renew their licences.

The minister said he was confident that reforms in other states set to take place in the next year would deliver more appropriate training for the needs of the economy. He pointed to a new system introduced by South Australia on July 1.

“The problem in the past has been that VET has been driven by training providers and not by industry. We have to put the focus back on the connection with industry.

“What the Victorians did was allow the supply side to run out of control. Training providers were generating courses and enrolling students without any direct connection to industry or to employment prospects.

“South Australia has put price signals and incentives in their system, but say they will provide funding for courses that we know industry wants and will lead to jobs in the economy. And they won't provide funding for courses that don’t lead to jobs.”

Australian Industry Group chief executive Innes Willox said the federal government had to impose tighter conditions on states to avoid “the unfettered approach that has led to excessive enrolments in some programs, without regard to employment prospects.”
Testing times for vocational training

Private provision of training requires scrutiny to protect public funding, writes Peter Dawkins.

Australia needs to expand its tertiary education substantially to meet the skills needs of a dynamic economy. Consequently, federal and state governments have adopted “learning entitlements” with guaranteed government funding attached. It is a good idea but faces significant design challenges.

The federal government uncapped the number of places universities can offer to students for higher education, through the Bradley reforms. This followed the more radical Victorian reforms to vocational education which not only uncapped funding but also gave large numbers of private training organisations access to the system.

The relative ease of entry into the market in Victoria has been in contrast to the Commonwealth’s approach, where funded higher education places are still essentially restricted to universities. This has had some unintended consequences in Victoria, highlighted recently by Premier Ted Baillieu. For example, free iPads and cash to sporting clubs have been used as enticements by some low-cost providers to attract students and skim profits.

Rising demand in these uncapped systems has led governments to look for ways to control expenditure. The Commonwealth imposed caps on sub-degree programs as well as postgraduate programs, but has not cut the subsidies for undergraduate places. Indeed, they are indexed. Victoria has cut the subsidies to training places for both public and private providers and abolished public provider block funding.

The challenge for public providers is their higher cost structure, for example, due to different enterprise agreements that have hitherto been government subsidised. For courses that public TAFE providers in Victoria are now vacating because they are uneconomic, the question is whether private providers will fill the gaps with appropriate quality.

Further, some courses that support social inclusion and students with special needs may not be possible because of the abolition of the public-provider block funding to TAFE institutes.

The overall outcome in Victoria will be a substantial increase in state funding for vocational education, but also a substantial reduction in the size of the public TAFE sector. Is the large increase in private provision increasing skills development in Victoria or diluting it? The answer is mixed. In some areas, private providers are doing a good job. In others, their performance is questionable.

Good regulation and good information are important priorities in this freer market environment. On quality, the standards required for organisations to enter the market and receive public funding needs to be a main focus. Potential students being well informed about employment prospects and the quality of the providers will also help the market to work well.

Another design issue for learning entitlement systems is how to set the public subsidies. In the past, the Commonwealth has been influenced by the costs of delivery and by the private benefit to students. For example, business and law courses receive low public subsidies because the government considered that they are relatively low cost and graduates have relatively high earnings potential.

A recent review, however, recommended that a fixed proportion of the costs should be paid by government. In vocational education, Victoria has decided to reduce subsidies where it sees labour surpluses and increase them where it sees shortages.

Whether such attempts at fine tuning will work is an open question. It is true some private providers are showing agility in responding to incentives, but whether their change of focus will be followed by a quality product, and by changes in student demand, is an important question.

A further design issue is how much fee deregulation to undertake to supplement government funds. In Victoria, fees for diplomas have been deregulated and public providers have had to increase student fees substantially. Income-contingent loans are available, but there is concern that demand for vocational education may fall away much more than it did in higher education when prices increased.

These are turbulent times in tertiary education. Time will tell whether the Victorian reform agenda turns out to be in the public interest.

For this to be the case, it will require strong regulation of provider access to government subsidies, and possibly the restoration of public subsidies in some areas of market failure.

Peter Dawkins is vice-chancellor and president of Victoria University.

Good regulation and good information are important in this freer market.
Colleges cry foul on emergency fund

Joanna Mather

The peak body for private providers has accused the government of breaching its own competitive neutrality policies by forcing colleges to pay heftier fees than universities into an emergency fund for international students.

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) will complain to the Productivity Commission after universities, TAFEs and schools were exempted from paying fees based on risk assessment.

“This decision to privilege public institutions in the new arrangements is of grave concern to ACPET,” the group’s chief executive, Claire Field, said.

Following a spate of college collapses in recent years, the federal government is setting up a universal tuition protection scheme, amalgamating a number of government and industry-run funds.

The scheme will pay refunds or cover the cost of students needing to transfer to a new course if a provider goes broke.

While publicly funded providers will have to contribute base and administrative fees, they will not be charged risk-based levies “because they are effectively underwritten by government and present a negligible risk” of collapse.

All providers will be charged base and administration fees amounting to $300 per provider plus $7 per student enrolled.

Privately owned providers will also have to chip in a yet-to-be-determined amount based on the likelihood that they will have to call on the fund in the future.

ACPET had lobbied to have its best-quality members, such as Australian Securities Exchange-listed Navitas, made exempt from risk-related fees in the same way as public providers.

But a determination by federal Education Minister Chris Evans has quashed those hopes.

Ms Field said the largest among her members would probably pay $50,000 a year in base and administrative fees alone.

“The ministerial determination does not allow for any private provider to ever operate their business in a manner which poses no risk to the tuition protection scheme,” she said.

“This decision is clearly not competitively neutral. As such ACPET will lodge a complaint with the Productivity Commission.”

According to the Productivity Commission, competitive neutrality policies seek to ensure that government businesses do not enjoy competitive advantages over their private sector competitors simply by virtue of their public sector ownership.

Professional services firm PwC has been appointed administrator of the scheme.

ACPET had asked Senator Evans to accept a trust fund arrangement as proof of financial sustainability and low risk, and therefore waive additional fees and assessments for a select group of its best established and quality members.

Ms Field said although Senator Evans had agreed to reconsider the proposal in 2013, once the existing system was bedded down, “this is not good enough”.

A spokesman for Senator Evans said two parliamentary committees had examined the tuition protection scheme legislation and neither recommended the exempting of providers other than universities, TAFEs and schools.

KEY POINTS

- Private providers will be forced to pay into a fund that protects students from college collapses.
- The providers are taking a complaint to the Productivity Commission.
Region to work together

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans has announced Australian support for two regional projects following the inaugural East Asia Summit education ministers meeting that was held in Indonesia from July 3 to 5. The first project, to be carried out in partnership with Korea, is to establish a regional network of technical and vocational education and training providers to exchange ideas, share expertise and form commercial partnerships. The second will involve the University of Melbourne co-ordinating the delivery of quality assurance training for higher education officials from across the region. “Education co-operation between EAS members will lead to harmonised education systems in the areas of training, skills and qualification recognition,” Senator Evans said.

Joanna Mather
Wanted: Asia-literate graduates to talk turkey

There is a strong view that more Australians must study the languages and cultures of our influential neighbours, writes Joanna Mather.

Business leaders say the single biggest challenge for engaging more fully in Asia is attracting and retaining “Asia-capable” talent. Educators and policy makers tend to use the term “Asia literate”.

However you describe it, there is a clear need for Australia to become better rehearsed in the languages and cultures of its nearest neighbours.

As former Treasury boss Ken Henry prepares a white paper on Australia in the Asian Century, much of the focus has been on schools.

Labor's language policies have mostly been schools-based. Similarly, the opposition has promised to lift the number of Year 12 students learning a second language to 40 per cent within a decade.

For many of those already at university, the language initiatives will come too late. Accountants, lawyers and doctors studying now need to find other, quicker ways to become familiar with Asia.

Academic leaders such as Kent Anderson, the pro vice-chancellor (international) at the University of Adelaide, say short stints of study overseas are part of the solution and are valuable even if the teaching is done in English.

At Adelaide, architecture students with no language training have the opportunity every year to attend a “studio” in India.

Students spend two weeks in India working on projects with Indian architects and students. “You don’t have to be fluent in the language, just being exposed to the country is eye-opening and transformative for those students,” says Anderson, a lawyer whose expertise is in Asia. “It’s two weeks so it’s not like you have to quit your job or take out a mortgage.”

Another program caters for trainee lawyers. Each year around 55 students from several Australian universities travel to Kyoto for a short course on Japanese law, delivered in English.

“In the past we’d teach lawyers all about NSW property law and then suddenly they’d go into a firm and they would be asked to write a contract to buy a plane in, say, Indonesia,” Anderson says.

“So this kind of exposure in Japan sets them up for the reality of careers nowadays,” he says.

Adelaide is not alone in recognising the need to provide opportunities for students beyond those who are in language classes or studying international relations. Many universities are incorporating study abroad experiences into mainstream degrees, either as one-off subjects or longer semester abroad experiences.

At the University of Technology in Sydney, for example, students can combine almost any undergraduate degree — ranging from property economics to business, engineering and biotechnology — with a two-year international studies course. Students specialise in a particular country, China for example, and spend their fourth year studying in that country.

Both sides of politics are making the right noises about preparing young Australians for contemporary careers.

The federal government has asked Henry to consider the “likely economic and strategic changes in the region and what more can be done to position Australia for the Asian Century”. The opposition, meanwhile, has announced a reverse Colombo Plan, which was a 1950s scheme that supported foreign students to study here following World War II.

The opposition’s deputy leader and foreign affairs spokeswoman, Julie Bishop, says more Australian students should go on exchange to Asia. But details of how the scheme would work have not been released, nor has it been costed.

Rates of outbound mobility — that is, Australians going overseas to study — are on the rise and scholarships funded by universities and the Prime Minister’s Australia Asia Awards are available to encourage Australian students to study in other countries.

Austalian students also have access to income-contingent loans of up to $5824 to help finance their overseas studies. The total amount accessed through the scheme is expected to reach $39 million this year.

But federal funding for scholarship programs for outbound student mobility was stable at $6.3 million in 2009 and 2010, according to an Australian Universities International Directors Forum study, the results of which were released earlier this year.

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans acknowledges there is more to be done. “At the end of 2011, more than 97,000 Chinese students were enrolled in higher education courses in Australia,” he said in February.

“At the same time, it is estimated more than 3000 Australian students were studying in China.”

The need for graduates willing and able to work in Asia is high on the list of priorities for business too.

In a submission to the white paper consultations, a group of top-level businesses representatives say the “single most pressing challenge for organisations wishing to engage in Asia is attracting, retaining and leveraging Asia capable talent”.

Asialink, based at the University of Melbourne, has established an Asia Capable Workplace Task Force chaired by ANZ chief executive Mike Smith to report on Australia’s readiness for the Asian century.

Asialink spokesman Will McCallum says the report will be released in August to coincide with the anticipated launch of the Henry white paper.

“Despite our geographic proximity, Australia’s engagement with Asia threatens to decline while other countries enhance educational, business and people-to-people links,” he says.

“By 2030 China and India will be the dominant global economies as power and influence shifts overwhelmingly to Australia’s doorstep.”

Research by Asialink and the Australian Industry Group has found that businesses rate having senior staff capable of working cross-culturally in Asia very highly. They also rate having a strategy for Asian operations, strong local partnerships in Asia and knowledge of Asian business operations.

In its submission, law firm King & Wood Mallesons says a national policy directed at promoting and supporting people-to-people exchanges in education and the professions should be created.

It says businesses operating in the Asian region should be encouraged to create employment opportunities for
Asian literacy as an important criterion in overall candidate selection, management promotion and executive assessment processes. There are two schools of thought on what Asian literacy means.

In its purest sense, Asian literacy is knowledge of at least one Asian language. But there is another camp that uses "literacy" in a broader sense to mean the culture, art and sociology of another county.

As valuable as short-term exposure is, The University of Adelaide's Anderson, like many involved in the Asian literacy debate, believes the long-term imperative is to encourage language learning across the educational spectrum, as well as to "mainstream" Asian perspectives and knowledge in schools, vocational education and degrees.

"I'm of the belief that language is important because learning a foreign language teaches you empathy that is almost impossible to learn any other way," he says.

In its submission to the white paper consultations, the Australia-China Council talks about Asian "cultural literacy", noting it should be a key requirement for all university graduates in the future.

"Asian cultural literacy should be a key component of not only international business courses but be embedded in the undergraduate and postgraduate programs in humanities and social sciences, particularly economics, law, creative industries, science and engineering and education," its submission says.

Several submissions cite the Australian Consortium for In-Country Indonesian Study (ACICIS) as an exemplar for exposing university students and other young professionals to Asia. Since 1995 more than 1300 students from 33 universities have studied in Indonesia with ACICIS. Among the program's alumni is Jennifer Robinson, who went on to become Julian Assange's legal adviser in 2010.

Some students who take part in the program are already learning Indonesian at their home university in Australia and go there to spend a full semester, others do a shorter stint over summer.

The program's founder and director, David Hill, a professor of south-east Asian Studies at Murdoch University, says about 45 students a year do the semester program, while 60 to 80 take part in the summer offering.

The Asian Studies Association of Australia, which is holding its biannual conference in Sydney this week, has recommended that the ACICIS model be adopted for other countries.

ACICIS summer students go to learn about international relations, international development or journalism. Language lessons happen in the mornings; seminars in English occur in the afternoons.

The program's business model is a simple one. Member universities pay an annual membership levy of $900, which entitles students from that university to a $1000 discount on tuition fees. But Hill wants federal government support to significantly scale up the program.

"We believe we should be getting hundreds each semester," he says.

Hill isn't a purist when it comes to language learning. ACICIS graduates may or may not end up being fluent in Indonesian, he says. But what they will have for the rest of their lives is an understanding and appreciation of what Indonesia is beyond drug offences, terrorism and cheap holidays.

"Whether they become an accountant or zoologist, the experience is going to see them well into the Asian century."

Language is important as learning a foreign language teaches you empathy that is almost impossible to learn any other way.

Kent Anderson, University of Adelaide
Closures after Victorian TAFEs face big cuts

Joanna Mather

The pain keeps coming for TAFE students, with Swinburne University the latest to dump courses and axe jobs as a result of the Victorian government's cost cutting measures.

A “reshaping” of the university's TAFE operations will mean the closure of the Lilydale campus in July next year, the offering of 240 voluntary redundancies and the shutdown of courses in hospitality, leisure, recreation and tourism.

Announcing the changes last Friday, vice-chancellor Linda Kristjanson said Swinburne's future was as “Australia’s leading university in science, technology and innovation”. As such, new degrees would include a bachelor of health sciences with specialisations in sports science, nutrition and psychology. Swinburne is one of five dual-sector universities in Australia. That is, it offers both vocational courses and degrees.

Others, including Victoria University and the University of Ballarat, have also been forced to make changes following the Victorian government’s decision to remove $290 million in TAFE funding in the 2012-14 state budget.

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

The effects of the budget cuts have also hit stand-alone TAFE colleges hard, and will flow through the system for years to come, jeopardising the government's targets for a better educated population, GippsTAFE chief executive Peter Whitley has warned.

At the college in regional Victoria, where Dr Whitley has already let go 32 teaching and administrative staff, a dozen or more courses guaranteeing entry into Monash University will be shut down.

Dr Whitley said a third of the 30 or so diploma courses offered by GippsTAFE would fold. He said the state budget cuts meant some diplomas would be funded at such a low rate GippsTAFE could not afford to offer them; others would close because student fees would become too high, eroding demand.

The federal government wants 40 per cent of the population to have a bachelor degree or above by 2025. It also has targets for disadvantaged students, many of whom come through TAFE. Students who complete a diploma or advanced diploma program at the vocational level are often given credit towards a university degree. For example, a student who completes an advanced diploma in business administration could go straight into the second year of a commerce degree at university.

Because of the changes, students who previously paid around $2000 would now have to pay as much as $6000 for a diploma, a cost Dr Whitley said many in his community would find prohibitive.

“The stepping stone is gone and their chance of getting directly into Monash is reduced,” he said. “It means they need a high tertiary entrance score on leaving school. But the outcome is more likely to be that the student doesn't participate in higher education.”
Uni closes campus as cuts bite

MELBOURNE – 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 that 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, and those working towards a TAFE qualification may continue their courses at the Croydon or Wantirna campuses.
Focused on the job at hand

It's a more intimate feel within the Senate chamber, Bridget McKenzie sits in the back row, at the end of the Coalition benches.

She rises to her feat to quiz Senator Chris Evans about power generation in the La Trobe Valley and follows with supplementary questions that relate to the impending carbon tax.

It's the final days of parliament and the Coalition is keen to ramp up pressure on the government about the then looming tax.

Earlier, McKenzie sat in the chamber with an open folder in front of her, writing away in a notebook, barely looking up to take in her surrounds.

Politicians are rostered to sit in the chamber during the day to allow the parliament to function throughout the day.

Chamber duty offers a busy backbencher with a full work load an hour to catch up on work with minimal interruptions.

She paints a stark contrast to the senior Labor and Liberal senators who also occupy the chamber.

The only visual similarity she has with these grey-haired, overweight men are the black jackets they sport.

The two gents have relaxed in the chamber with an open folder in front of her, writing away in a notebook, rarely looking up to take in her surrounds.

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The tall, athletic McKenzie, who has her long blonde hair tied back, works away tirelessly.

The two gents have relaxed in their seats and sparingly pick up a pen.

Visually, she shares more in common with the six-strong Greens, who are also present in the chamber.

With little warning, the bells sound and the doors to the chamber fly open – prompting McKenzie to look up from her work for the first time in what feels like ages.

The sound of pounding footsteps grows and drowns out the bells that incessantly chime for four minutes.

The sound of footsteps disappears as the senators stride from the floorboards halls onto the carpet-clad red chamber.

Steadily the seats start to fill as visitors that the elevators are restricted to politicians when the bells chime.

Gibbons rocks back in his swivel chair, inadvertently revealing the word Loddon on his tie. Just a day earlier he had hosted representatives of the Loddon Shire Council.

He has a smile that lights up his face and stretches almost from ear to ear and happily chats about humorous encounters within the chamber.

“I like a good line,” he laughs.

“It doesn’t matter what side it is from, just as long as it is funny.”

It is a minimal fuss office for the Bendigo MP.

His second-floor House of Representatives suite has room for three staffs yet he travels alone, without the entourage other backbenchers keep in tow.

Guitars and amps are stored in cupboards of this avid musician. Volumes and volumes of legislation line the length of Gibbons’ office.

Three images occupy a constant reminder about where this MP is from.

A Bendigo Advertiser front page from July 1998, the year Gibbons was first elected, features him holding a phone towards the camera. The heading on the page, related to a separate story, reads “SEX PREDATOR”.

Below is a picture of Gibbons with Defense Minister Stephen Smith, Defence Materiel Minister Jason Clare and Thales chief Chris Jenkins standing in front of a Bushmaster in Bendigo.

The subtlest reminder of home comes in the form of a photo of former prime minister Paul Keating.

Keating is delivering a speech and in the background the head of a Chinese dragon appears to be eating him. Closer inspection reveals the dragon is Bendigo icon Sun Loong, the world’s oldest imperial dragon.

Bendigo tourism brochures greet guests as they arrive at McKenzie’s first-floor Senate suite.

Her office has items that represent the vast land she represents – the Victorian flag, a surf lifesaving hat, and paintings of inland and coastal locations.

A small water tank sculpture with sheep sits on top of a shelf. It’s among her favourite items in her office and offers a constant reminder about the impact drought has had on Victorian farmers.

Family photos litter the office.

The aroma of fresh flowers, which sit on the corner of her desk, wafts through the air.

The complete set of the 2012/13 budget papers, an object of scrutiny for the opposition, line a wall next to her desk.

It has been a long week and McKenzie finally has a break in her otherwise packed schedule.

She relaxes into an arm chair and chats about life in the nation’s capital.

She chats about adjusting to the Canberra lifestyle, a lifestyle that’s so dominated by meal meetings and back meetings and commitments and the tricks she’s learned to stay focused.

The bells ring and she spins to the clock behind her, soon discovering a green light flashing.

She immediately relaxes at the knowledge that she doesn’t have to rush away. But it would be a brief break, the red light would soon flash and she would again be off to the chamber.

Continued – Page 24
LEFT: Senator McKenzie at work in her Parliament House office.
ABOVE: Catching up with the local news from Bendigo.
INSET BELOW: One of the senator’s favourite pieces in her office it reminds her of the impact of the drought on Victorian farmers.
A day in the halls of government

From – Page 23

The Australian flag flaps wildly in the wind above the house, towering above the grass-topped roof.

Vast, open rooms and solid pillars feature throughout the rabbit warren building.

The house is constantly abuzz with people with mobiles glued to their ears. They scurry from one room to the next.

Staffers linger in open spaces chatting on their phone or huddled in tight groups quietly talking.

High-profile figures wander the halls without fuss or entourages.

Bells ringing, the “ding” from elevators and the tapping of heels on polished floorboards can continually be heard.

Light beams through the many windows. The carpet matches whatever chamber you are near, with white walls, wood trimmings and art a common theme throughout the building.

Light-filled walkways connect the four wings and overlook manicured courtyards and offer a view of the hills that surround the city in the distance.

The press quarter, which overlooks the Senate, comes to life around 10am, with a steady stampede to a coffee cart.

“It is a shame Gillard isn’t here, it’s much more exciting when she is,” a gallery member says.

Gibbons has been a vocal critic of the press gallery during this term of parliament.

He offers praise for senior journalists that offer un-biased coverage. He is scathing of reporters that he believes are so desperate to make a name for themselves that they will say or do anything.

“They have just got feral,” Gibbons says.

“They are really aggressive. The ones that go the hardest at Gillard are some of the female journos.

“A bit of it is our own fault for letting it get to this.”

Gibbons is an avid tweeter and uses the social media platform both professionally and personally.

He receives most of his news from the site, constantly checking to make sure he is across the issues of the day.

“I find Twitter useful to get stuck into the media,” he says.

“It gives us the opportunity to have a go back if you don’t like what the media has done.

“But it is also a bit of fun. I’ve invented the Media Maggot Awards and tweet about gold maggot nominations. It’s just for a joke.

“I used to tweet about drinking scotch but I’ve stopped doing that. I have also stopped drinking as much scotch.”

IT’S 6am and Steve Gibbons has arrived at parliament.

While his gym-going colleagues capitalise on the house’s facilities, Gibbons sets about reading online news, checking emails and capitalising on interruption-free hours.

He is most productive in the mornings when he isn’t living at the whim of his parliamentary pager.

Gibbons quietly goes about his business, working from his second level office when he is not in meetings.

Later in the day, he spots Stephen Smith in the chamber and seizes on the moment to lobby for Bendigo manufacturing.

The topic naturally is Thales.

Gibbons is keen to use every opportunity to remind Smith of the importance of regional manufacturing, particularly defence work in Bendigo.

“It’s good news.

The government has decided it wants another contract from Thales – an announcement that would come two weeks later.

This is the Steve Gibbons few sees.

People too easily dismiss him as a curmudgeon who is buying time until his retirement.

But at his core he genuinely cares. He goes about securing contracts behind closed doors.

He is willing to forgo recognition and praise to ensure his electorate benefits.

A typical Canberra day for McKenzie starts at 6.30am in the house’s gym.

She emerges an hour later - having monitored morning television while working out - and prepares for the official duties that typically start at 8.30am and continue until almost 11pm.

Senators must remain in the house until the chamber shuts at 10.40pm.

“They are really constant days. That is why your staff are really important,” McKenzie says.

“They manage everything so well and right to go so I can do what I am here to do.

“This is a fantastic opportunity (being a senator) provided you do something with it.”

McKenzie laughs as she remembers her first week in the Senate.

She and new senators Larissa Waters (Greens), and Lisa Singh (Labor) were live to air on Triple
ABOVE: Senator McKenzie on the way to her office and opposite, the House of Representatives where Steve Gibbons sits on the backbench.

Pictures: BRETT WORTHINGTON/FAIRFAX
J when the Senate bells started to
ring.

The three women dropped their
headphones and immediately set
off for the chamber, fearing they
would arrive late and miss a vote.

As they charged down the halls
to the chamber, a veteran of the
Senate quipped: “don’t you love
the fear in the new senators’ run.”
It’s a line that has stuck with her
ever since.

After being a senator for a year
she has developed parliamentary
confidence and habits to ensure
she arrives in time to vote - tricks
that only time and incumbency can
teach.

She sports her pager at the back
of her waistband, guaranteeing she
won’t miss an alert.

“You think you know how it
works and then you get here,”
McKenzie says.

“I now know where the stairs are,
where the toilets are, I understand
how this place works and I am really
looking forward to now putting that
to use for regional Victoria.

“I think new senators come in
here wanting to do so much, you
go to all the breakfasts, lunches and
dinner functions and that can be
really tiring.

“You learn how to pace yourself
and find the issues that matter and
how to be efficient with your
time.”

PARLIAMENT sits for 17 weeks
a year. But committees draw
politicians back to Canberra and
see them travelling across Australia
and around the globe in the pursuit
of policy development.

Gibbons toured marine bases in
America for a defence committee,
more recently visiting outback
Australia assessing the impact that
fly-in, fly-out employment is having
on regional communities.

Committee work involves months
of tours, public hearings, meetings,
report writing and discussions.

Gibbons is the deputy chair of the
Regional Australia committee. He
has served on arts, water, transport
and trade committees.

Producing a report that investi-
gated fatigue in the trucking
industry is among Gibbons’
proudest achievements.

McKenzie is an eager first term
senator, keen to get to work and
make a difference.

She sits on three committees –
environment and communications;
community affairs; education,
employment and workplace. It’s
an unenviable workload on top of
representing the whole state.

“There has been so much more
scope and the committee work has
been fantastic,” McKenzie says.

“I have been able to do more than
I expected in terms of arousing
issues.

“As a backbencher in opposition,
it is about influencing the debate
and saying these are the issues that
are affecting people.” Friendships
across the political divide are
inevitable given how much time
politicians spend together.

“Gibbons lists Coalition friends he
has made but speaks most fondly
of former Liberal Corangamite MP
Stewart McArthur, who he regards
as a good friend.

He speaks highly of federal
Independent Tony Windsor, who
he has worked closely with on the
Regional Australia committee,
which the New England MP
chairs.

“What people don’t see are the
menasnips,” Gibbons says.

“I compare it to a football match.
When the siren goes you try and
kick the crap out of your opponent
but at the end of the match
(question time) people go back to
being friends.

“I have got and had some great
friends on the other side that will
be friends long after I go.”

GIBBONS, 62, knew it was time to
call an end to his political career.

He will depart on his terms at the
next election, content with what he
has achieved for his electorate.

He will disappear quietly into
the night, vowing to remain a party
member always but adamant it’s
time the next generation took
charge.

“My retirement will be absolute,
there will be a new era,” Gibbons
says. “I will be happy to provide
advice if asked, but you don’t need
old MPs hanging around.

“I will always be a party member,
just not actively involved.”

McKenzie, 42, has just arrived in
the nation’s capital and is on the
rise.

She has timed her arrival in
Canberra with the youngest of her
four children a teenager.

This smart, humorous and affable
representative is determined to
bring about change for regional
Victoria.

It will be a matter of watch this
space to see what she can achieve.

“For me, the timing with my
family was crucial and it has
worked,” McKenzie says.

“It has all arrived at the right
time.”
How our universities are failing

EDUCATION

WHACKADEMIA: An Insider’s Account of the Troubled University. By Richard Hill. NewSouth. 238pp. $34.99.
Reviewer: RICHARD THWAITES

Outrage in Canberra over the ANU’s cuts to the School of Music remind us that the relations between a university and its host community cannot be taken for granted.

Where universities are funded by taxation, the priorities of the university can reflect the politics of the state. We have a colonial heritage of state monopoly of everything. Our major political parties offer a restricted choice between egalitarian or “aspirational” agenda. In these circumstances, it is hard to sustain the idea of an academic community detached from politics.

Academics are assumed to enjoy an enviable lifestyle, and do not usually attract sympathy. But Richard Hill is no silver-spoon elitist bemoaning loss of privilege in the groves of Academe. He comes from a working-class English background, didn’t shine at his local school, but later surprised family and peers by clambering into a 25-year career teaching and researching sociology in British and Australian universities. He makes a compelling case that the intrusive administrative demands of today’s universities drive highly motivated academics to despair, resignation or mute repression, in a “Whackademia” dominated by glib managerialism.

Tax-funded budgets, nominally for teaching, are leeched away into burgeoning university bureaucracies obsessed with marketing, grant-hunting and incessant rounds of accountability process.

Of course, accountability is necessary when significant public funds are being spent. But is it efficient use of such funds to make salaried academics devote 30 per cent of their time to writing applications (mostly unsuccessful) for research grants, and countless more hours filling in university-generated forms and sitting in committees for dubious “performance management” schemes that purport to measure the immeasurable?

Hill and his many interviewees describe levels of reporting and scrutiny that oblige academics to bend their expensively trained minds to gaming the system for sheer personal survival, rather than to the high-level education and research for which they are employed. This syndrome may ring a bell with senior public servants.

Few of Hill’s interviewees had any faith in the accuracy of the bureaucratic measures by which their careers and future opportunities were being determined. Patronage, favouritism, rivalry and revenge were assumed to be at least as significant for a person’s rating as any documented criteria.

Academic politics has been well recorded since at least Socrates. Formalised assessment processes have introduced a semblance of transparency that is often illusory, but at a huge fiscal and personal detriment to the academics themselves, to their students, and ultimately to the nation’s intellectual capital.

Hill traces the rot back to the Dawkins reforms to Australian higher education in the 1980s. A massive increase in the number and scope of universities changed both the nature and the economics of tertiary education. Full state funding was not sustainable, and market-based business models became inevitable. Students who are accumulating large HECS debts, or paying full fees, have become anxious “customers” who demand the marks they think they have paid for. Where universities are obliged to seek student feedback on individual academic teachers, the customer-students do not hesitate to complain that a course, or a teacher, is “too hard”.

Standards suffer, and reputations decline.

University leaders, from vice-chancellors down, have been forced to become brand managers focused on competitive ratings and arcane measures of research performance, because these dubious criteria determine the flow of funds to their institution.

Increased automation of clerical work has actually shifted the load to academics, who are now expected to complete many teaching-related administrative tasks themselves, and in their own time because their contracted “workload- does not reflect actual time needed. At the same time, administrative staff and senior executive numbers have increased enormously and in some institutions outnumber the academics. As Hill sees it, the expanded roles have less to do with supporting the
academics and more to do with hounding them with endless surveys, forms and demands for data.

In the research domain, there is a cycle that ought to be virtuous but for most academics is more often vicious. To be promoted, you must publish. To publish, you must research. But as a junior academic, your time for research may be limited. A standard “workload formula” is supposed to allow 30 per cent of a salaried lecturer’s time for research outside teaching-related duties, but Hil’s sources say it is usually less than half that.

The government-sponsored system for evaluating research gives different weights to publications in journals that are considered more or less prestigious. As a result, the handful of top-rated journals in any field are overwhelmed with submissions. Even excellent work may take years to find a publication, by which time the author may have missed several promotion opportunities or abandoned the profession.

National schemes for “rewarding excellence” in either teaching or research make good photo-opportunities for ministers, but are regarded with a certain cynicism by the mass of academics. Barely keeping up with their teaching load, they consider themselves to live in a parallel universe to the picture of university excellence publicised from the top.

According to Hil’s research, casual lecturers on short-term contracts provide more than half of all teaching hours in Australian universities. Most of these are women in their 30s with doctoral degrees and no job security.

It’s apparent that Richard Hil could have been a thorn in the side of his university administrators and academic superiors. He tries to suggest positive action that academics might take to recover their ideals, but most of his dot-points amount to forms of sardonic passive resistance. He who pays the piper calls the tune. But for Hil, the neo-liberal managerialist economic project is a disaster for all of society, not just Whackademia.

We are left pondering how the global demand for vocational credentials, at competitive market rates, can be met by the same institutions that we might fund to foster thoughtful, long-term contributors to our national cultural and scientific capital, with no immediately measurable market value. This used to be the ideal of the University.

Richard Thwaites has observed the torment of senior academics begging for research funds, and the dilemmas of committed young academics living on the smell of hope.
Cuts close Swinburne campus

MELISSA JENKINS

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 State 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.”

— AAP
WHILE much has been written and said about changes to funding for the state's vocational education and training (VET) system, the one fact that has been missed is that the Victorian Coalition government has actually committed more, not less, funding for training over the next four years.

When the former Labor government introduced the current uncapped demand-driven system in 2008, with full implementation beginning in 2011, little did they imagine the massive cost blowout they would trigger and the proliferation in training providers competing with TAFE institutes for government funding. Labor, in its budget calculations, forecast the cost of funding training would reach $855 million in the 2011-2012 financial year.

The fact is this figure blew out to more than $1.3 billion — a $400 million black hole. This cost was unfunded and unexpected and largely due to an explosion in courses with low job outcomes. For example, since 2008, enrolments in courses like fitness trainers grew by 1955 per cent and customer contact by 2354 per cent, while apprenticeships have only increased by 10 per cent.

Anyone who has had to run a household budget, especially during difficult financial times, knows you have to live within your means. And importantly you have to direct your resources to where they are most needed and do the greatest good.

As a consequence, this government has locked in over the next four years around $1.2 billion in annual funding to support Victorians accessing vocational education and training. This is an extra $1 billion over the next four years.

The changes the government announced in May provide increased hourly subsidies for training in areas of skill shortages and high value to the Victorian economy. Every apprenticeship course will receive increased funding. At the same time, lower subsidies will be provided for courses that have shown disproportionate increases in enrolments, such as many lifestyle courses including fitness training, customer contact and management, and for courses where there is a comparatively lower return to the Victorian economy, or little likelihood of meaningful long-term employment.

From next year, all providers will receive the same amount for training, whether they be TAFE, Adult Community Education (ACE), or private providers. TAFEs have significant advantages with their exclusive right to the TAFE brand, their long-established reputation and their significant asset base that has been paid for by the government and the Victorian taxpayer.

TAFE currently delivers 82 per cent of the highest subsidised courses. With its established industry links from which to promote "preferred provider" type arrangements, I believe our TAFE institutes have a strong and positive future ahead of them.

The Hon. Peter Hall, MLC, Minister for Higher Education and Skills.