UNIVERSITY RESTRUCTURE

VICTORIA University will be broken into eight colleges and a specialised TAFE facility in its biggest restructure since the university opened 22 years ago.

The structural change to VU means that the faculty model will be replaced with eight colleges in line with the university's distinctive specialisations – business; creative industries and creative arts; education and early childhood; engineering, science and the built environment; health; law, justice and government; social science and communities; and sport science.

Courses will be structured to encourage seamless pathways from TAFE to Higher Education and all courses will be reviewed in line with the new structure.

Meanwhile, a Victoria University Trades Academy will be established at the new training centre at Sunshine to focus on the delivery of apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships and VCAL.

A target has been set for VU to be world renowned in Sport, Exercise and Active Living by 2016, world renowned in at least another three areas and a national leader in at least five industry clusters by 2020.

The restructure will be implemented by 1 January 2013.
Young scientists can put on their thinking caps for award

Children fascinated by science have the chance to share in thousands of dollars for their school as part of the young scientists of the year award.

Federal Science and Research Minister Senator Chris Evans said Australia’s young scientists were vital to the future prosperity of the nation.

“Our young scientists could one day help perfect the use of solar energy, cure diseases or even find ways to help protect our communities,” he said.

“The future of Australia’s world-class reputation in science depends on finding opportunities to spark the interest of this new generation.”

Students from schools across the country were invited to submit reports of science projects relating to this year’s theme, which recognises that 2012 is the international year of sustainable energy.

Senator Evans said the competition was a great opportunity for young minds to explore and share the excitement of science and research.

“We want more students taking up science at university but we need to foster that engagement early on,” he said.

“Opening the maths and science door to today’s students early in their education will help us meet the growing demand for skills in the changing economy.”

The award is open to three primary school age groups including seven to eight years, nine to 10 years and 11 to 12 years.

The winner’s school in each age group will receive a $3000 donation, with an extra $500 cash prize for each winning student or group.

Invitations have been sent to all primary schools in Australia.

Entries must be received by September 21 and will be judged by a team of NATA (national association of testing authorities) scientists, with the winners announced in mid-October.

COASTWIDE

Rising uni numbers a success, says MP

Denice Barnes

THE number of Central Coast students studying at a higher education institution has jumped by 50 per cent since the federal government removed the limit on university places.

According to the latest census information, the number of Central Coast students in higher education study rose from 5541 in 2006 to 8303 in 2011.

“Being a teacher for most of my working life, these are figures I am very excited about,” Robertson federal Labor MP Deb O’Neill said.

She said the statistics proved young people on the Central Coast were taking advantage of expanded higher education facilities.

“By lifting the limit, and investing in new and upgraded facilities at university campuses such as Ourimbah, more local people are seizing the opportunity to undertake higher education,” she said.

“Our reforms mean more coasties are getting the skills they need to access the high paying jobs of the future.

“Young people on the Central Coast who were missing out now have the opportunity to realise their full potential, whether it be locally at Ourimbah or at universities in Sydney and Newcastle.”
Student support changes

Former Loxton High School students may benefit from Youth Allowance changes in the new financial year made by the Federal Government.

Changes to the student income support system mean students will be able to earn $400 a fortnight from part-time or casual work, up from the current threshold of $236, before there is any impact on their student payments.

Federal Education Minister Chris Evans said the government is making it easier for students to supplement their income support payment with earnings from employment.

In an addition change, the Federal Government has raised the student income bank from $6000 to $10,000, as a way for students to ‘bank’ any unused part of their fortnightly income to be used at a later stage.

The Federal Government is also delivering extra assistance to students through the household assistance package.

Payments of up to $190 for eligible students were made this month ahead of the introduction of the carbon tax.
Uni swings axe

By KATH GANNAWAY

A FOG of anger, frustration, confusion and devastation greeted the axing of Swinburne’s Lilydale Campus on Friday.

News that the campus would close in July next year came in a podcast from Vice-chancellor Linda Kristjanson, during the semester break.

With everyone from Swinburne students and staff to business, community and political leaders saying they were unaware of the blow that was about to be dealt, much of the anger was directed at Swinburne management.

One staff member who contacted the Mail described the timing of the announcement during semester break as calculating and heartless.

The Mail was told staff were advised of the decision, which includes the axing of 240 jobs across the Swinburne network, by podcast around noon on Friday.

However, the first many staff members and students heard of the decision was through the media.

The closure will affect both TAFE and higher education courses offered at Lilydale. Among the TAFE courses which will go are hospitality, recreation and tourism and leisure, a move industry leaders say will have a huge impact on the tourism industry in Yarra Ranges.

Professor Kristjanson said closing Lilydale was one of the hardest decisions, but the right one for the organisation.

She said the changes were about turning Swinburne into a leading university for science, technology and innovation, but also stated the recent State Government $290 million TAFE funding cuts would impact Swinburne by about $35 million next year.

Staff who contacted the Mail over the week-end have questioned the motives behind the TAFE closure, saying some TAFE and VCAL courses were well supported and growing and that it was the higher education sector that was not paying its way.

“This campus is being sacrificed, for what many of us believe is more about the value of the land, to prop up non-performing higher education campuses,” one staff member said.

Another said talk of students being moved to Croydon or Wantirna ignored the reality of students from areas around the Yarra Valley and Ranges who didn’t have transport, and that those campuses were “bursting at the seams”.

“All that will lead to is students opting out of courses, further course cuts and further job losses.”

Healesville mother of four Jacinta Graham will have one subject to complete in her four-year psychology degree when Swinburne closes next year.

She is facing a semester at Hawthorn campus.

“A lot of mature-age students like me have waited to return to study until the kids could cope and then you work around study, work and family.

She said she felt some students might not have started their courses had they known the campus was to close.

“Some of the mums on campus, doing nursing and other courses, as they get their kids out of school have realised with Swinburne so accessible they can improve their lives and still do the school run.

“To go further afield … it’s just too much.”

For more on the closure, see page 2.
A staff member from Swinburne in Lilydale walks into the building for talks on the future of the university and the fate of staff members at the campus. Picture: EMMA SUN
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UNE paves the way for Iraqi students

AGRICULTURE courses are highly sought after by Iraqi students at the University of New England (UNE) – and a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed yesterday should see many more of these nationals on campus.

The MOU, signed between UNE and the Republic of Iraq, paves the way for students to study at UNE under an Iraqi government-funded international scholarship program for PhD candidates.

At the signing ceremony for the agreement yesterday in Sydney, parliamentary secretary for Higher Education and Skills, Sharon Bird, said she looked forward to productive work coming from increased collaboration between Australian institutions and the Republic of Iraq.

UNE chancellor Richard Torbay, vice-chancellor Jim Barber and pro vice-chancellor, Educational Innovation and International, Dr Michael Crock attended the ceremony with the Iraqi director general of Scholarships and Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Scholarships, Dr Bahaa Kazem.

Mr Torbay said the agreement further enhanced opportunities for Iraqi students to study at UNE.

“We currently have 11 students from Iraq on campus and we look forward to welcoming more students from Iraq under this agreement,” he said.

“To date, there has been a strong interest in agriculture courses from Iraqi students and we expect that to continue.”

Vice-chancellor Jim Barber said international students brought a richness and diversity to campus which enhanced the experience for all students.

“UNE is going against the trend of other universities, with our international enrolments continuing to increase year on year,” Professor Barber said.

The University of Wollongong also signed an agreement with the Republic of Iraq at the ceremony.

Upgrade your skills

More than 7400 training places will be made available through a $3.25 million State Government Adult Community Education (ACE) initiative.

Employment, Higher Education and Skills Minister, Tom Kenyon said the funding would be used to improve the skill levels of adults who face economic and social barriers preventing them from moving to higher level training and improving their prospects of finding a job.

“The funding will see 7443 training places offered by 60 community-based, not-for-profit training providers,” Mr Kenyon said.

“78 projects will be delivered at more than 90 sites across the State.

“The ACE sector is an important starting point for people who may consider vocational education and training and university study to be initially out of their reach.

“The successful applicants of this latest round of funding though the Foundations Skills Grants Program will provide accredited and non-accredited training, in partnership with registered training providers, including TAFE SA, so adults can improve their skills leading to better prospects of further training and finding a job.”

ACE providers offer programs to help adults get basic workplace skills, such as reading, writing, numeracy and computer skills, in small friendly groups, or even in one-on-one coaching situations.

Training programs funded through the program include:

- Renmark Paringa Council provides basic keyboarding skills and teaches learners an understanding of how to use the internet and foundation level computer skills.
- Advancing Whyalla - a project to help adults improve their English oral, reading and writing skills, provides assistance in using the internet, applying for jobs and time management.
- ac.care Mount Gambier - a project including Pathways to Employment and IT Skills for Employment courses to help people who may be dealing with issues of poverty, unemployment, substance addiction and recovery, homelessness and mental health.
- Eyre Futures Incorporated - The Ready Steady Job Ready program supports young people, aged 17-25 to develop literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills to a point where they can successfully look for work or progress to Certificate II level training.
The government is building on Hawke-era reforms to boost competitiveness

CRAIG EMERSON

THREE days ago the silver anniversary of an event of monumental significance to Australia’s modern prosperity slipped quietly by. The re-election of the Hawke government on July 11, 1987, empowered it to press ahead with the transformation of the Australian economy from one shrunk in on itself by decades of heavy protectionism to an economy facing the world and the opportunities this, the Asian century, would offer.

A quarter century later the Gillard government is shaping Australia’s second great post-war economic transformation. Far from being complacent, as respected business leaders suggested mid-week, the government is implementing a comprehensive, productivity-raising reform program.

By 1987 the Hawke government had deregulated the currency and financial markets. But tariffs remained at historic highs, inefficient government enterprises were shielded from competition and the labour market was still heavily centralised.

In a speech at Ballarat during the election campaign, Bob Hawke laid out a program of further micro-economic reform he would implement if granted the historic third term he had wished for on a note he’d placed in a crevice in Jerusalem’s Western Wall six months earlier.

It came to pass and the rest, as they say, is history.

On the back of the Hawke-Keating reform program, productivity growth reached record highs in the second half of the 1990s and Australia has enjoyed more than 20 years of recession-free economic expansion. But it wasn’t growth for growth’s sake. Through education reforms that increased the proportion of students going on to Year 12 from one-third to more than two-thirds, it was inclusive growth.

Yet the engine of future prosperity, rising productivity, was allowed to slow from the late 1990s. Masked by a housing boom and a mining boom, Australia’s productivity growth slowed for the entire first decade of the 21st century. During the early part of that period there was no comprehensive micro-economic reform program. Australia slept through a Great Complacency.

Household wealth was inflated by a housing bubble blown larger by deliberate government policy. And from 2004 middle-class welfare was doled out to boost the
household incomes of a vital voting demographic group, funded by the company and capital gains tax proceeds of mining boom mark I.

Despite the trauma of the global financial crisis and the economic stimulus it demanded, the incoming Rudd government began assembling components of a new, productivity-raising reform program. The building blocks of a new reform program included moving Australia towards a seamless national economy, and developing a single national industrial relations system, a single national school curriculum and proper school transparency and accountability.

But now the program is wider and deeper. A training entitlement is engendering greater competition in the vocational education system. A revamped research and development support system is enabling small businesses to gain access to incentives early, instead of having to rely on earning sufficient taxable incomes later against which to claim deductions.

Incentives are being offered to universities to accept more disadvantaged young people. A trebling of the tax-free threshold to $18,200 is a fillip to workforce participation and productivity.

And the rollout of the National Broadband Network will be a game-changer in breathing life into improved company practices and innovation.

The government has committed to reducing unwarranted delays in major project approval processes and has improved the tax treatment of private investment in infrastructure.

After a decade of lethargy, the first tentative signs of a possible pick-up in productivity growth may be emerging. Businesses are beginning to abandon old models, responding to the new competition from the online economy. The book industry, for example, has voluntarily adopted the reforms that were mooted by the government a few years ago. Retail has gone from a sector fully insulated from international competition in 1987 to one heavily exposed to it now. Falling transport and communications costs are making every stage of production contestable, obliging businesses to be productive if they are to remain competitive.

The Gillard government’s productivity-raising reform program and the adjustments Australian companies are beginning to make to their business models are heralding the second great Australian post-war economic transformation, following the creation of our open, competitive economy by the Hawke and Keating governments.

Much work needs to be done in lifting productivity to give Australian businesses a competitive edge in Asia. By 2030, the middle classes of Asia will have swelled to an astronomical three billion people, more than 100 times the size of Australia’s domestic market.

By reconnecting with and building on the Hawke-Keating reform program of a quarter century ago, the Gillard government, far from being complacent, is locking Australia’s future into the Asian region in this, the Asian century.

Craig Emerson is the Minister for Trade and Competitiveness.
Swinburne’s rising star

A $3 MILLION super computer is set to place Swinburne University at the forefront of scientific research.

Launched last week by Federal Minister for Tertiary Education Senator Chris Evans, the GPU Supercomputer for Theoretical Astrophysics, also known as “gSTAR”, is among the top 200 in the world.

Swinburne Centre for Astrophysics and Supercomputing director Prof Warrick Couch said gSTAR was much faster than its predecessor.

“This means that the three years of data processing that culminated in early 2011 in the discovery of a diamond planet in the Milky Way galaxy could now potentially be done in one week.” he said.