P-EDUC:Higher education loan bill clears Senate

CANBERRA, Nov 21 AAP - Legislation strengthening the administration of the Commonwealth's higher education loan programs has passed the Senate.

Labor's bill aims to improve the integrity of the loans system, make it easier to share information and prevent risks to either student or taxpayer money.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (Streamlining and Other Measures) Bill 2012 was approved on Wednesday with government amendments.

Nationals senator Fiona Nash said the coalition would not be opposing the bill because it supported any measure to boost the level of education for vocational and education training.

But she is concerned students in rural and remote areas are not accessing FEE-HELP for vocational and educational training because of administrative hurdles.

There was evidence parents of rural and remote communities were not able to afford the $30,000 it cost annually to send their children to the city for courses, Senator Nash said.

Parliamentary secretary for education Jacinta Collins said the changes would make the higher education system more responsive.

The amended bill now returns to the lower house for approval.

AAP lpm/rl/arb
SYDNEY, Nov 21 AAP - A generation will miss out on tertiary education and have reduced earning power if NSW cuts TAFE funding, a new study warns.

The study, commissioned by NSW Public Service Association (PSA) and carried out by the Centre for Policy Development (CPD), shows those who complete TAFE qualifications increase lifetime earnings by nearly $325,000.

The report from the study says men who achieve an advanced diploma, diploma or certificate III or IV earn an average of 13.8 per cent more than those with Year 11 education, while women with those TAFE qualifications will earn 11.4 per cent more.

Vocational education and training (VET) is particularly important for people with disabilities or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, according to the report Valuing Skills: Why Vocational Training Matters.

The PSA is warning that those benefits could be lost after the NSW government's $1.7 billion cut to education spending, affecting TAFE colleges along with state and private schools.

"At a time when the state government has embarked on short-sighted cuts to TAFE, including fee increases and 800 job losses, today we've seen the immense value generated by VET for individuals, our society and our economy," PSA general secretary Anne Gardiner said.

She said the NSW government had no clear plan for TAFE, which was both underfunded and undervalued.

"If you cut jobs and working conditions for TAFE staff, you will get worse education outcomes and a generation of young people could miss out altogether on tertiary studies," Ms Gardiner said.

Report author Christopher Stone, research director of CPD's public service research program, said the decrease in government funding came at a time there was concern over skills shortages.

"If funding is to be reduced it needs to be done with a clear public explanation of either how the sector can achieve increased efficiencies, or what services are no longer to be provided," he said.

AAP It/tr/arb/wjf
SOME of the harshest critics of John Howard’s border protection regime have attacked Labor’s decision to put asylum-seekers into the community on bridging visas with limited financial help and no right to work as more brutal than past policies.

Immigration Minister Chris Bowen yesterday announced the government would enforce its “no-advantage test” onshore, applying the same processing delays to those asylum-seekers not sent to Nauru or Manus Island.

But he said the asylum-seekers allowed to live in the community while their claims were processed would not be allowed to work and would receive “only basic accommodation assistance, and limited financial support”.

Refugee lawyer Marion Le said the bridging visa policy was “worse than anything” she had seen.

“I don’t know what the minister or the government think they are unleashing on Australia, giving them no work rights,” Ms Le said.

“I believe that these so-called bridging visas are just temporary protection visas by another name, or if anything they are worse because there is no end time.”

The Howard government’s temporary protection visas were introduced in 1999 and gave asylum-seekers protection and work rights for three years before they had to re-apply for visas.

When Labor’s then immigration minister Chris Evans scrapped TPVs in 2008, he called them “one of the worst aspects of the Howard government’s punitive treatment of refugees”.

David Manne, the lawyer behind the successful High Court challenge to the Malaysia Solution, said Mr Bowen’s bridging visa policy could well be worse than the TPVs Labor MPs have long argued against.

“It appears to consign people to even greater uncertainty and harm than under the TPVs, because it is based on a benchmark that doesn’t exist,” Mr Manne said of the no-advantage test.

“The real problem is that it will punish the very people we should be protecting by consigning thousands of asylum-seekers and refugees to discrimination, and a real risk of destitution.”

Fellow refugee lawyer Julian Burnside said he had grave concerns about asylum-seekers being prevented from working.

“I don’t approve of the idea of denying the right to work because frankly you just make their life miserable,” Mr Burnside said.

“I think the government should stand back and look at the revised Pacific Solution and say it isn’t working.”
“It’s taken us a while, but we’re getting there as our kids get educated. If you have an education, you have a voice. If you don’t, you have anger and attitude.”

A Victoria Park restaurateur and Aboriginal elder Benyl Van-Oploo (pictured).

“So far, the two worst affected areas are the School of Business, where 29 academics will lose their jobs, and the School of Humanities and Communication Arts, where 25 staff will go.”

Jan Falloon, president of the University of Western Sydney’s National Tertiary Education Union branch, slams job cuts.

“I’d like to say I deeply regret and sincerely apologise to the membership of the Australian Workers Union for any harm or problems I’d have caused them throughout this whole, what would you call it, business.”

Former AWU official Ralph Blewitt returns to Australia from Malaysia to explain his role in a union slush fund scandal.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what’s going on in Julia Gillard’s head.”

Blewitt again, asked if the PM should be concerned over his potential testimony.

“Collaborators are a very serious issue in Palestinian society.”

Issam Yousef, director of the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, after the execution of six men in Gaza, one of whom was subsequently dragged through the streets behind a motorcycle.

“The commission takes very seriously any attempt to interfere with its witnesses.”

The Independent Commission Against Corruption’s David Ipp reveals an implied threat has been made against an unnamed ICAC witness.

“All of the people in the group arrived after August 13 and were therefore subject to transfer to a regional processing country.”

The Department of Immigration announces the first transfer of asylum seekers to Manus Island.

“The Greens are very pleased that council has backed away from prioritising concrete.”

Greens councillor Max Phillips, following Marrickville Council’s decision to delay the removal of 1600 trees.

“No amount of money can help a brand with a defective logo. A gang of hard-hitting and virile rugby players can’t conjure a war spirit and gain new supporters when their icon is a cute, fluffy, white bunny rabbit.”

Branding expert Paul Everest believes South Sydney’s lack of NRL success is due to its logo.

“We have a great relationship, firstly. I know there’s been talk of that being a little bit different, but Watto and I — our professional relationship when it comes to captain and his deputy is as close as I can certainly ask for.”

Australian cricket captain Michael Clarke is still tight with vice-captain Shane Watson.
Schools remove courses amid cuts
Survey reveals impact of withdrawn state funding

**By JEWEL TOPSFIELD**
**EDUCATION EDITOR**

EIGHTY per cent of state secondary schools have reduced the number of vocational subjects they offer due to TAFE funding cuts, according to a survey of 67 schools.

The study, conducted by the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals, reveals the impact of the Baillieu government’s cuts to education.

It found schools were being forced to cancel camps, increase fees and charge disadvantaged families for laptop lease, electives and uniforms due to budget cuts to take effect from next year.

The education maintenance allowance, which is available to poor families, was previously split equally between the school and the family.

But from next year schools will get nothing, resulting in a cut in funding to 70 per cent of the surveyed schools.

Thirty per cent of schools also lost more than $50,000 this year for the co-ordination of the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning, the vocational alternative to VCE.

The results of the survey come a week after the Victorian government announced increased curriculum options to specialise in areas such as vocational education.

Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals president Frank Sal said he supported the proposed changes but they were totally undermined by the funding cuts.

“Cuts, such as those to VCAL, reflect poorly on this government’s real commitment to expanding student pathways in government schools,” Mr Sal said.

“At the same time that this government has cut $12 million a year in VCAL funding and over $16 million in EMA support it has provided non-government schools with over $240 million extra each year without any real accountability requirements.”

A spokesman for Education Minister Martin Dixon said the funding changes brought VCAL in line with the VCE where there was no specific co-ordination funding.

He said the same level of funding for vocational education and training would continue next year.

While educational maintenance allowance payments would cease to schools from 2013, the amount of money going to parents would increase.

Extra funding would also go to public and private schools with high numbers of students from a lower socio-economic background.

Ballarat High, one of the largest secondary schools in regional Victoria, had $70,000 slashed from its VCAL budget this year. The school was forced to cut technology electives, including metalwork and woodwork, and use money put aside to repair its boundary fence to help 65 students do VCAL.

“We didn’t want to punish the kids so we’ve made sacrifices in other areas,” said principal Gary Palmer.

Ballarat High had to find alternative TAFEs and universities to support its vocational educational and training program after Ballarat University and RMIT pulled out due to government cuts.

The school will also miss out on $50,000 when the education maintenance allowance cuts come into effect next year. This means poor families will have to pay for music lessons, electives, camps and sport.

“We’ve had 100 per cent participation in year 7 camps but I suspect some kids won’t go now because they can’t afford to pay for it,” Mr Palmer said.

“The most disappointing thing is that the vulnerable are being made more vulnerable.”

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TAFE cuts branded a threat to earnings

A UNION has called for TAFE students and staff to challenge NSW government plans to cut funding for tertiary education.

The Save Our TAFE campaign, launched by the Public Sector Association on Wednesday, is calling on the community to “mobilise” and oppose the $1.7 billion cut to education.

The union cites a report that warns cutting TAFE funding may rob a generation of tertiary education and cut its earning power.

The assistant general secretary of the NSW PSA, Steve Turner, says the report will allow an informed discussion on the cuts.

AAP