NSW:TAFE students and staff to fight fund cuts

SYDNEY, Nov 21 AAP - A union has called for TAFE students and staff to stand up against NSW government plans to cut funding for tertiary education, warning it could harm a generation.

The Save Our TAFE campaign, launched by the Public Sector Association (PSA) on Wednesday, is calling on the community to "mobilise" and oppose the government's planned $1.7 billion cut to education spending.

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

Steve Turner, assistant general secretary of the NSW PSA, says the report will let the community have an informed discussion about the proposed cuts.

"We'll be using the report and working with the community to get a debate going about whether they're stupid cuts or whether they're the correct way to change TAFE," Mr Turner told AAP.

The study, commissioned by the PSA and carried out by the Centre for Policy Development, has found that people who complete TAFE qualifications increase their lifetime earnings by nearly $325,000.

The report of 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 qualifications 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.

Mr Turner said the report demonstrated that TAFE delivered social and economic benefits to the state, in addition to the educational positives.

Launching the report at NSW Parliament House on Wednesday, its author Christopher Stone said any decrease in government funding should be delivered with a clear explanation of how it would deliver increased efficiencies to the sector.

Mr Turner said the PSA was open to discussing the proposed cuts with the government, provided they could be justified.

AAP af/jl/wjf
STUMBLING ON A STORY

Our ABC has belatedly discovered the rapidly unfolding story of the fraudulent AWU Reform Association after months of wilfully ignoring a narrative involving Julia Gillard. According to 7.30 on Wednesday night: “Former Australian Worker’s Union official Ralph Blewitt’s return to Australia has put the slush fund scandal around Prime Minister Julia Gillard back on centre stage, and we hear from him why he thinks it should be there.”

Back on centre stage? Whoever wrote that script must have thought they were introducing the Christmas pantomime. In fact, going back over 1200 segments aired over a year to August, 2011, 7.30 covered the AWU scandal just once. That was the day Gillard chose to stage a media conference to catch Canberra press gallery unprepared and 7.30 deemed she had given “one of her best performances”.

Until this week the ABC was reporting the AWU Reform Association scandal with a performance which would make Marcel Marceau look like a blabbermouth. The only time presenters have mentioned the slowly building volcano is when its regular and seemingly Labor-friendly commentators like The Age’s Michelle Grattan or the Ten Network’s Paul Bongiorno have poured scorn on stories published in The Australian, The Daily Telegraph, The Financial Review and even The Age.

The return of Blewitt (who is due to meet with police in Victoria today) from Malaysia, has ratcheted up the pressure on the ABC. Just last month the ABC’s Canberra news editor John Mulhall brushed off an inquiry from viewer Bill Parker, who asked why the ABC had not covered statements by Blewitt, who has apologised to members of the AWU for his role in the affair with his former friend and fellow AWU figure Bruce Wilson, Gillard’s former boyfriend, who allegedly used the slush fund to misappropriate hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Mulhall told Parker: “The ABC is aware of these statements (by Blewitt) but we do not at this stage believe it warrants the attention of our news coverage. “To the extent it may touch tangentially on a former role of the Prime Minister, we know The Australian maintains an abiding interest in events 17 years ago at the law firm Slater & Gordon, but the ABC is unaware of any allegation in the public domain which goes to the Prime Minister’s integrity.

“If, indeed, Ms Gillard has had questions to answer, ABC News reported those answers from her lengthy media conference of 24/8/12 in which she exhausted all questions on the issue.”

Others in the ABC have had a radical change of heart. Blewitt was not only featured on 7.30, he was interviewed on PM on Wednesday and AM yesterday. And 7.30 again ran with the story last night.

There were also heated exchanges in the senate, where opposition legal affairs spokesman George Brandis wanted to grill Senator Chris Evans, the leader of the government in the Senate about his colleague Bill Shorten, the Minister for Workplace Relations, telling the ABC’s Lateline: “You cannot use members’ money for purposes other than what the members have paid their union dues for. What we also know is that you can’t have related party transactions.”

Will the ABC ever ask Gillard her views on the subject?
HELPING to create and promote the next generation of Australian scientists is a key focus area for Australia’s largest home-grown biopharmaceutical company, CSL, when it comes to community investment.

It makes perfect sense considering science is CSL’s core business and it also makes sense for Australia where science often gets pushed down the list of educational and governmental priorities.

The proof is plain to see with a recent study, Health of Australian Science, released by the Chief Scientist for Australia, reporting a persistent decline in the participation rate in science subjects by Year 12 students, raising challenging prospects for the future of Australia’s scientific workforce and its capacity to meet growing health demands.

Realising the need to inspire younger people and ensure the inspired continue into science and research is something CSL and its partners are determined to support. For CSL, the key is to engage young Australians early; and part of its program is through a partnership with the CSIRO’s Scientists in Schools initiative, in which scientists are matched with their local schools.

According to CSL’s senior director of public affairs, Sharon McHale, the program is about getting scientific mentors to engage with schools either by email, phone or in the classroom and hopefully stimulate an interest in science among primary school students.

CSL is also involved with the very popular National Youth Science Forum, which is run by Rotary International. The forum brings together young Australians in their final years of school who are interested in science.

McHale says these students aren’t just young boffins. “We’re looking for well-rounded kids and the idea of the forum is to get them excited about science before they get to university,” she says. “The forum involves students participating in a residential program where they experience a series of presentations from academia, industry and government.”

Once students enter university, CSL is a principal sponsor of the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program — an employment scheme that provides high-achieving and motivated undergraduates with the opportunity to work on real research projects in some of Victoria’s prestigious and world-renowned research institutes. Since 2004, UROP has created more than 350 casual jobs and helped inspire many students to pursue further research and education.

A further step up the ladder is CSL’s partnership with the National Health and Medical Research Council, co-funding six prestigious Gustav Nossal Research Scholarships, which are aimed at encouraging the most promising students into higher education and ultimately careers in the biosciences.

And well beyond university is the prestigious CSL Florey Medal, a partnership with the Australian Institute of Policy and Science. The medal recognises excellence in biomedical research and aims to create role models for the younger generation such as last year’s medallist, bionic ear pioneer Graeme Clark.

Besides trying to foster the nation’s future scientists, CSL is heavily involved in a number of other community-driven initiatives. The company’s core business is plasma therapy so it works...
CSL puts sizzle in study of science

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closely with the World Federation of Haemophilia through the supply of products, care and financial support.

As Australia’s supplier of anti-venom, CSL works with the Papua New Guinea government to improve access to anti-venoms. PNG shares many of the poisonous snakes that exist in Australia.

“We provide product at below cost and assist with distribution throughout PNG, as well as provide infrastructure and significant levels of medical training to local communities,” McHale says. “We’re also involved with the cervical cancer drug Gardasil, and by waiving our royalty rights in developing nations we were able to ensure the drug would be distributed in these countries by our international partner.”

These programs make up the second key pillar of CSL’s community investment strategy. The third involves supporting communities in Australia. Staff members are involved in community initiatives ranging from Foodbank to Landcare. The company also is heavily involved in disaster relief and in matched charity giving with staff.

It also encourages managers to organise volunteering days with staff as part of the Givingforgood program.

According to CSL’s latest global sustainability report, last financial year its global community contributions reached $35.4 million: 58 per cent allocated to patient communities, 40 per cent to supporting the biomedical community (including fostering the next generation of researchers) and 2 per cent to supporting local communities.

“All of our community investments are a way of sharing our values with staff, stakeholders and the community in general — it’s all about collaboration,” McHale says.
Students get hands-on experience of research in CSU's R&D laboratory in northwest Sydney
ENOUGH is enough, it is time to return the illegal asylum seekers to their own countries.

By permitting them temporary entry on bridging visas in this country, they receive all the benefits that should be given to our own Australian people.

On bridging visas they are not able to work for five years so what do they do during this time?

This action that the Gillard Government is taking is ludicrous. What happened to looking after our own first?

D. Neumann, Forest Lake

THE mark of a good immigration minister is how well he would be regarded by the people smugglers’ chamber of commerce. Chris Evans, who removed temporary protection visas and granted permanent residence to thousands who arrived by boats and planes, would certainly have been given the honour of a small bust to sit in the chamber’s meeting room.

David Edwards, Salisbury

ASYLUM seekers in Australian detention camps are not being physically threatened by war or authorities, nor being persecuted, so presumably they should be relieved, if not ecstatic.

Rod Matthews, Fairfield

THERE have been 30,000 illegal arrivals in Australia since the Milky Bar Kid had a brain explosion and disbanded the Pacific Solution, and still the boats pour in. The border protection policy is in complete meltdown and unless this Government puts an immediate end to this farce then this country, without doubt, will eventually encounter the same problems now facing Britain and large parts of Europe.

Don McNaught, Imbil

OPPOSITION Leader Tony Abbott says the Government has lost control of our borders and therefore should not be running the country.

Since he lost the last election, he has been spitting the dummy and will do anything to destroy the Government.

He wants the boats to keep coming so he can criticise the Government for the issue. If he really wanted the boats to stop he would work with the Government to do this.

He might actually get political points for that, but first he must stop his dummy spit. The election loss was two years ago so it really is time.

Brian Dart, Cleveland
A profound theological shift is necessary, writes Gerard Windsor.

what was happening was ecclesia semper reformanda – the church always in need of reform.

In the intervening years the phrase has rather fallen into disuse but it has now punched its way back with a disconcerting new twist to its meaning. A church in need of reform, not just self-administered, but reform forced on it from outside.

Catholicism's wrongdoing has been twofold — the sexual abuse itself and then the failure to deal with it justly and effectively. Each of these failures is intricately tangled up with defining characteristics of Catholic culture. Perhaps there's

The royal commission into child abuse will investigate the failure of all institutions. At the beginning of last week this was far from clear; on ABC TV's 7.30 Leigh Sales pugnaciously (or was she just throwing a well-disguised Dorothy Dixer?) asked Labor senator Chris Evans, “Why shouldn't the Royal Commission be restricted to the Catholic Church?”

Certainly it was the crimes of Catholics that brought the commission into being, and at least one priest has claimed that his church has been the main offender.

That, of course, remains to be seen. There is a suspicion that this grim honour might go to indigenous communities. Possibly the commission will not go there; if it does it will be treading on eggshells.

For the moment Catholics are the main persons of interest. If the commission is to be not merely retributive, its shaking up and improvement of Australian society will also have to make Catholicism a better institution. At the time of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, a buzz phrase to describe some visibility through the murk if we understand these contexts. The first is the Church's attitude to sexuality. All human beings can be presumed to have problems with sex, but Catholicism's are particularly knotty. For two millennia the model has been virginity, whereas sexuality and its expression is a degradation of the human ideal. If you can emancipate yourself from sex, the thinking goes, you've distanced yourself from the animals, and you've moved that much closer to the angels, a superior species. This is not hyperbole. The evidence stretches all the way back to Paul's Epistles, and a rethinking of the theology of it all would require a massive shift.

Given this outlook, of course celibacy becomes the rule for the church's officials. Their authority and their power derive not just from their hierarchical position, but from their apparent transcendence of sex. Celibacy per se engenders respect. Awed admiration for men who had renounced sex gave priests enormous prestige. All the more frightening the power then when an apparently sexless, but in fact

“The royal commission . . . will have to make Catholicism a better institution.”
Reformation needed

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sexually highly troubled man, begins to groom a child.

One imagines that many clerical abusers have had a torrid time with their consciences. Largely, however, because sexual transgression was always seen as such a gross fall from the ideal. The church's minimal accommodation with sexuality is summed up in its simple doctrine that "sex is only permitted in a marital context and even then must be open to procreation". All other sexual expressions are mortally sinful — that is, they deprive a person of God's presence. There is no gradation in the level of mortal sin. Therefore, there is a moral equivalence between masturbation and sodomising a child. And equally both could be forgiven in confession as long as there was "a firm purpose of amendment". End of story. It was an evil that could be contained and in fact would leave no stain or trace on the soul. The other aspect of the evil, that some sexual activity could be a crime, was never adverted to, never discussed.

Secondly, there has been the church's reflex closing of its ranks. Catholicism, not least in Australia, is a particularly communal faith. Where Protestantism is a religion of the individual before God, Catholicism works through tribal affiliation and mediators and networks (the saints and Sussex Street, for example). Originally a minority religion and of a subject people, the Irish, Catholicism easily developed a beleaguered mentality. The old hymnody was rich as an epic, romantic rendition of this — "And the tempest-tossed Church, All her eyes are on thee, And they look to thy shining, Sweet Star of the Sea." The exotic and suffusing culture was a source of both delight and strength to Catholics, and seems to have led to some instinct for bonding. In earlier generations the vocational destinations of Irish Catholics were the four p's — police, publicans, public servants and priests — but all applicers of a social glue. And not professions that in themselves delivered the big money. It is also a culture, it has to be admitted, that has plenty of potential for corruption, cover-up, inside jobs, whitewash ... "Dark night has come down on us," the same old hymn says, but the darkness envisaged was outside attacks, not some internal cancer. The instinctive reaction of the church has been to protect its sacred self at all costs.

In fact, however, the church is individual believers. For all its being founded on a rock, it is not a monolith. The power struggle in the aftermath of the Vatican Council has been settled, for the foreseeable future, in favour of the conservative wing, and that means that in Australia the dominant if not exclusive face of Catholicism is George Pell. It's a face that represents so much more than the church's response to the abuse of children — climate change denial, hostility to gays, oversight of the controversial St John's College, in Sydney — an unholy procession of red rags. It's a grief to liberal Catholics, still plentiful if defeated, that they are all presumed to march under these banners. But the red rags have proven too much of a goad to what would once have been described as "the enemies of the church". We're back in another age. The virulence of some of the commentary suggests sectarianism in a modern secular form. Fifty years ago the Fairfax press was perceived as bigotedly anti-Catholic. It represented the Protestant Establishment against Irish Catholicism. Now it appears to some people as if the old animosity has been revived; the abuse scandal has given new respectability to antiquated, anti-clerical tirades. Some commentators have launched themselves into a viscerally bitter crusade against the whole box and dice of Catholicism/Christianity/Religion. Naked hostility is not going to lever the church out of its defensiveness.

A year ago I was asked to introduce a 78-year-old priest to a group of screenwriters. I thought it best to tell him only two had any experience of Catholicism and that three of the group were gay. He spoke with us for more than two hours. The following day, two television executives came in. One of the gay men, a very distinguished Australian filmmaker, told the executives, "We had a priest in here yesterday, and by the time he left half the people in the room wanted to be priests." This had nothing to do with the priest's power or glamour or exoticness. It was his honesty, his hard-won personal philosophy, his dedication, his enthusiasm for Christ's message. There are so many priests like him, selfless and alone, and these are grim times for them.

Gerard Windsor is a literary critic and the author of, most recently, All Day Long the Noise of Battle: an Australian Attack in Vietnam, Pier 9, 2011. He trained as a Jesuit priest.
Communal... Catholicism ‘works through tribal affiliation’.

Photo GETTY IMAGES
Got $5 million to invest? Welcome to Australia

By Melissa Fyfe and Royce Millar

Wealthy Asian business people are lining up for the federal government’s new “golden visa”, which waives the usual criteria for skilled migrants – such as the ability to speak English – in exchange for a $5 million investment in Australia.

The federal government is rolling out the welcome mat for a new class of migrant: it expects 700 wealthy new residents annually under its Significant Investor Visa, which opens for expressions of interest on Saturday.

For permanent residency, migrants must have $5 million and live in Australia 40 days a year for four years.

With their eyes on a bucket of funds worth potentially $3.5 billion a year, big investment banks and consultancy firms have been busy spruiking the new visa.

Migration agents say that while most potential applicants are China’s newly-rich, millionaires across south-east Asia, India, South America, Russia and Taiwan are also keen.

Under the federal government’s broad criteria, each state can stipulate where the $5 million is to be spent.

NSW is aggressively competing for the wealthy investors and has already said it wants $1.5 million of each new migrant’s money invested in a state infrastructure fund. In Victoria, migration agents are waiting on the Baillieu government to issue guidelines.

Long-term Sydney Swans chairman Bob Birrell said. "[This visa] treats Australian residents as a commodity.

Richard Colless is one of the business people who, behind the scenes, pushed for the visa, arguing his case in the offices of Immigration Minister Chris Bowen, and with federal and state bureaucrats.

"We would be one of many to say this is a great opportunity to attract long-term capital," Mr Colless said on Thursday.

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P-PARL: Senate Business for Thursday, November 22

CANBERRA, Nov 22 AAP - The Senate carried out the following business on Thursday:
Prayers and acknowledgement of country
General business orders of the day relating to private senators bills
- Low Aromatic Fuel Bill 2012 Resumption of second reading debate. Debate interrupted
Petitions
Notices of Motion
Placing of business
Discovery of formal business
Order of business
- Senator Hanson-Young Disallowance of the Migration Amendment Regulation. Postponed to February 6, 2012 (No. 5).
Government business orders of the day
1400 Question time
Motions to take note of answers
Any proposal pursuant to standing order 75
Ministerial statements
Government responses to parliamentary committee reports
Tabling of documents
Committee membership
Messages from Her Excellency the Governor-General were reported, informing the Senate that she had assented to the following laws:
- Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Further 2012 Budget and Other Measures) Act 2012.
- Higher Education Support Amendment (Maximum Payment Amounts and Other Measures) Act 2012.
General business notice of motion
- Senator Fifield Australian Labor Party and trade union.
Dinner break 1800 - 1900
Government business continued
- Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012 Resumption of second reading debate. Debate interrupted.
Adjournment debate 2200
Adjournment debate 2235
AAP lpm/evt