AN Illawarra organisation is training trainers around the nation as part of the federal government’s push to strengthen adult literacy.

Parliamentary secretary for higher education and skills Sharon Bird on Thursday visited WEA Illawarra which has delivered 32 workshops to language, literacy and numeracy specialists and trainers around Australia since November 2011.

Ms Bird said the government had provided $600,000 to the regional organisation as part of its efforts to strengthen these skills within the national training system.

“One of the government’s key priorities is improving foundation skills, and the workshops run by WEA Illawarra introduce more trainers to the Australian Core Skills Framework which supports adult language, literacy and numeracy skills,” she said.

“The trainers can then better assist their students with these skills which can help get them work-ready.”

Ms Bird said WEA Illawarra had a long history of providing quality programs, and the workshops - which have been extended until June 2013 - had received excellent feedback.

“Here is a local provider which has been recognised nationally - and is delivering programs nationally to others - as a leading example of good practice.”

WEA Illawarra CEO Greg Fisher said 836 trainers had so far received face-to-face training, while online training sessions had started for participants in rural and remote areas.

“We’ve had great feedback from participants not only for the content, but for the delivery, of the workshops,” he said.

“It’s very exciting for the Illawarra that an educational provider from the region is training trainers all over the country in these core skills.”
Uni fees will soar

LAURA SPERANZA
EDUCATION REPORTER

STUDENTS enrolled in law, medicine and engineering will be slugged with higher university fees in a controversial new plan to combine education costs with predicted career earnings.

Along with business and accounting, student fees will rise by as much as $12,000 a year — up to 25 per cent extra in tuition costs under a revenue-raising proposal by Australia’s most powerful universities.

In a move that could derail national targets for 40 per cent of young Australians to be university-educated by 2020, the Group of Eight coalition of leading Australian universities is calling on the federal government to urgently deregulate university fees.

Coalition chair Professor Fred Hilmer said students would not feel the impact of the fee increases because they would defer the cost through HECS.

But universities would reap the benefits with a 25 per cent increase in student fees at the University of NSW resulting in an additional $30 million in revenue.

“The HECS system — one of our greatest innovations — allows the impact on students to be deferred to a time when they have the capacity to pay,” Professor Hilmer said. “Given the budget situation and substantial increases in cost to the Commonwealth from higher participation, a significant increase in government funding is unlikely.

“It’s time to take the next step — fee deregulation.”

The National Union of Students president Donherra Walmsley said charging students higher fees just because they had the potential to earn more money was a flawed plan that would ultimately turn students away from higher education.

“Many jobs in those fields are not actually very high-paying,” Ms Walmsley said. “Australian student fees are already amongst the highest in the OECD, while the level of government funding is amongst the lowest.”

Ms Walmsley said students from low socio-economic backgrounds and rural and regional areas would be discouraged from going to university.
STUDENTS enrolled in law, medicine, engineering, business and accounting will be slugged with higher university fees in a controversial new plan to link education costs with predicted career earnings. Student fees will rise by as much as $12,000 a year – up to 25 per cent extra in tuition costs – under a revenue-raising proposal by Australia’s most powerful universities.

In a move that could derail national targets for 40 per cent of young Australians to be university-educated by 2020, the Group of Eight coalition of leading Australian universities – which include UWA – is calling on the Federal Government to urgently deregulate fees. Coalition chairman Fred Hilmer said students would not feel the impact of the fee increases because they would defer the cost through HECS.

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“Australian student fees are already among the highest in the OECD, while the level of government funding is among the lowest.” She said that students from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from rural and regional areas would be discouraged from going to university.

Opposition tertiary education spokesman Senator Brett Mason said he would consider the proposal under a Liberal government. “What policy mix will be necessary to achieve this objective will depend on many factors, including the commonwealth’s fiscal position if and when the Coalition is elected,” Senator Mason said.

Student fees were partially deregulated in 2004 under the Howard government, and all universities moved to charging the highest fee within two years.

The Australian Taxation Office said the total figure for HECS debt in Australia was $20.5 billion at the end of the February.
Fastest brain in the west dwarfs office computers

Michelle Wheeler

It is big enough to store 2000 years of iTunes music and is 10,000 times faster than an office computer.

Launched yesterday, the new $1 million supercomputer Fornax takes up a 67sqm office at the University of WA. It can perform up to 62 trillion operations a second and ranks as one of the most powerful supercomputers in the country.

Fornax, Latin for furnace, is named after a southern hemisphere constellation known as the birthplace for stars. It was built by iVEC, a partnership between WA’s four public universities and CSIRO.

It has about 7000 gigabytes of RAM and over half a million gigabytes of storage. But even this giant is soon to be eclipsed by its bigger sibling the Pawsey Centre, a game-changing supercomputer being built in Kensington and set to make Perth a top supercomputing hub.

The director of iVEC at UWA, Paul Bourke, said Fornax was most suited to processing astronomy and geoscience data, but researchers from all disciplines could apply for time on the machine.

Science and Innovation Minister John Day said Fornax ranked highly in the top 500 global supercomputing centres and would benefit a range of data-intensive research.

Federal Science and Research Minister Chris Evans said Fornax gave Australian researchers access to computing power critical to the astronomy signal processing needed for the Square Kilometre Array being built in the Mid-West.