FED: Unis asked if funds needed for large halls

CANBERRA, Oct 10 AAP - Universities are being asked if Commonwealth funds are still necessary to build large lecture halls and other buildings as teaching moves online.

“What should the federal government be supporting in the way of capital if we are not delivering large audience lectures anymore?” Higher Education Minister Chris Evans told ABC Television on Wednesday.

“What should we be supporting the universities to build?”

Many universities around the world, including US giants Harvard, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford and Princeton have begun offering some courses and subjects online.

Senator Evans said the move to online tertiary education was not the end of face-to-face teaching but it would change how courses were offered and the learning by students.

“This doesn’t mean the death of campuses or your traditional contact between teaching staff and students,” he said.

“But it does mean the way we teach and the way students learn may change quite dramatically.”

AAP el/alm/jfm
CANBERRA, Oct 10 AAP - Legislation allowing the federal government to disclose information it holds about university staff and students passed the lower house on Wednesday.

The bill, once made law, will let the federal education department to disclose personal information for a range of regulatory, quality assurance and planning purposes to a limited number of bodies.

Bodies that would be able to receive the information includes the Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Authority, the Australian Skills Quality Authority, tertiary admission centres and peak bodies representing higher and vocational education and training providers.

The Higher Education Support Amendment (Maximum Payment Amounts and Other Measures) Bill 2012 now passes to the Senate.

AAP klc/lk/wf
FED: Charities to be inundated at Xmas: Greens

CANBERRA, Oct 10 AAP - Charities and emergency relief centres will be inundated with pleas for help from struggling single parents when parenting welfare cuts hit in January, the Australian Greens have warned.

During Senate question time on Wednesday, Greens senator Rachel Siewert asked the government whether it would provide welfare organisations with any additional money to deal with expected increased demand for emergency relief.

Single mothers could face welfare cuts of up to $140 a week after Christmas, after legislation passed parliament on Tuesday shifting them onto the dole once their youngest child turns eight.

The federal government wants single parents, mostly mothers, moved onto the Newstart allowance under the plan that would save $728 million over four years.

The changes come into effect on January 1.

Welfare groups are concerned families could be at greater risk of homelessness because they would be financially worse off.

Senator Siewert told the chamber the cuts would hurt families suffering a post Christmas and back-to-school financial strain and asked whether the government planned to monitor the use of charity and welfare emergency relief when the cuts begin.

Leader of the Senate, Chris Evans said the government was trying to do something about cycles of disadvantage by encouraging parents into the workforce.

"This is a serious attempt ... to improve the outcomes of women and children," he said.

He reminded the chamber that there were already tens of thousands of people living under the new arrangements.

"The drama about this is a little overstated," Senator Evans said.

He promised to seek further information from Families Minister Jenny Macklin.

AAP lpm/lk/jel
FED: Unis asked if funds needed for large halls

Universities are being asked if large commonwealth funds are still necessary to build large lecture halls and other buildings, as teachings move online.

Higher Education Minister CHRIS EVANS posed the question on ABC Television last night, saying what should the federal government be supporting in the way of capital if we're not delivering large audience lectures anymore?

Many universities around the world, including US giants Harvard, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford, and Princeton have begun offering some courses and subjects online.

Senator EVANS says the move to online tertiary education wasn't the end of face-to-face teaching, but it would change how courses were offered, as well as student learning.

He says that doesn't mean the death of campuses or your traditional contact between teaching staff and students, but it does mean the way we teach and the way students learn may change quite dramatically.

AAP RTV el/ohs
Federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott provoked a storm of political criticism yesterday by saying Canberra did well under the Howard government, despite conceding the city “did it tough” after the job cuts of 1996 and 1997.

Mr Abbott also pledged yesterday that there would be no forced redundancies in the federal public service under a government he led – a departure from the previous stance of the shadow treasurer, Joe Hockey.

Mr Abbott spoke to The Canberra Times yesterday morning as he ran on the shores of Lake Walter Burley Griffin with Canberra Liberals leader Zed Seselja and a group of Liberal supporters in what is likely to be the federal leader’s only local campaign appearance.

Mr Seselja had been under fire for two days, accused by his Labor opponents of “hiding” Mr Abbott’s involvement in the local campaign while using the federal leader to raise campaign money at “private” party fund-raisers.

But Mr Abbott yesterday said he was keen to show his support for Mr Seselja’s bid for power on October 20.

“Well, here I am,” Mr Abbott said. “It’s great to be out with Zed, he’s doing a great job, and I think, a serious chance to be our first coalition chief minister in the ACT since Gary Humphries in 2001.”

He said the 12,000 job cuts for the capital’s public servants, repeatedly threatened by Mr Hockey, could be achieved without any sackings and that Labor had “dudged” Canberra by cutting jobs without being upfront about it with voters.

“The Commonwealth public sector payroll is 20,000 greater now than at the end of 2007, so a reduction by natural attrition of 12,000 would still leave the Commonwealth public sector payroll bigger than it was when the Howard government left office,” Mr Abbott said. “I really want to stress that we are not talking about forced redundancies. We are talking about not replacing everyone who leaves. “The people of Canberra shouldn’t be dudged by Labor again because Julia Gillard explicitly said before the 2010 campaign that there would be no efficiency dividends, no cuts to the public service. Since then, we’ve had efficiency dividend after efficiency dividend and 3000 job cuts, so really and truly Labor dudged the people of Canberra.”

Mr Abbott conceded the job cuts of the first year of the Howard government had hurt Canberra.

“I accept that Canberra did it tough for a year or so, but if you look at the totality of the Howard government, Canberra did very well under the Howard government, Australia did very well under the Howard government,” he said.

“There will always be more jobs under the Coalition because there will always be a stronger economy under the Coalition.

Continued Page 2
Canberra did well in Howard years, says Abbott

“What Zed wants to do is to take the cost of living pressure off families and the best way you can do that is by not going ahead with the massive rate rises that the ACT Labor government has planned.”

Chief Minister Katy Gallagher leapt upon Mr Abbott's comments, alleging that the federal leader was now Mr Seselja's “running mate”. “Tony Abbott has said that he will cut 12,000 jobs in Canberra, Joe Hockey has said he will cut 20,000, [Finance spokesman] Andrew Robb wants to decentralise the public service and the federal Liberals want to cut 130,000 places out of tertiary education.”

Canberra’s federal Labor members also lined up to take a swing, with member for Fraser Andrew Leigh, member for Canberra Gai Brodtmann and Senator Kate Lundy saying the territory was plunged into recession in 1996 after the Howard government slashed 30,000 public service jobs.

“In 1996-97, the impact of the Howard government’s job cuts was to slash $25,000 from the price of the average Canberra home, in an era when house prices were much lower than they are today, increase the ACT unemployment rate by 1 percentage point and increase personal bankruptcies in the ACT by around 100 bankruptcies per year,” they said in a joint statement.