Same, same but different

Jennifer Hewett

There are no easy excuses for anyone in Australia's angst over boat arrivals. Just as there are no easy answers.

It took much longer than it should have for Julia Gillard to realise she had no political choice but to concede the key element of the opposition's policy.

The Prime Minister won't admit this, of course, and instead try to sell the differences. In reality, Labor will be hoping that it was wrong in previously insisting the Coalition's approach would be ineffective.

That's because this Prime Minister now has even more personal capital invested than Tony Abbott in promoting the idea of Nauru and Papua New Guinea as a deterrent. After all, people who end up there will now wait their turn in a long queue for many, many years.

A Gillard Labor government will preside over a policy that is in many ways tougher than John Howard's.

The Houston report offers a useful if transparent rationale for this sudden reversal. The government's "Malaysian Solution" is now put on hold — pending negotiations, naturally — in favour of the old "Pacific Solution".

Wanna bet those protracted talks with regional neighbours will still be going on beyond the election?

In terms of self-serving claims to moral superiority, we can dispense with the Greens' version most easily.

They insist processing should be quickly completed elsewhere to avoid people getting on boats in the first place. They just don't concede what a relatively open access policy would mean to the numbers of people trying to come to Australia — an exponential increase in asylum seekers accepted. (Whatever happened to the Greens' passion for limiting immigration on environmental grounds?)

That huge potential increase is an arguable if unpopular political position. The number of people trying to get to Australia, even much multiplied, remain modest compared with the massed numbers stuck indefinitely in refugee camps in many countries. Yet the Greens don't even bother to argue this because they happily refuse to accept the logical consequences of their "humanity".

Back in the real world, quickly processing people waiting in other countries, but not accepting most of them, would produce exactly the same rationale for desperate asylum seekers to bypass a clogged system via dangerous attempts on rickety boats.

The change in the Houston formula is that people will be put off this by the fact they get no advantage from doing so. Nauru or bust — indefinitely — doesn't have the same appeal as the prospect of getting into Australia relatively quickly.

But that will require any government and the Australian population to accept inevitable stories of misery, self-harm and possibly violent protest in Australian-supervised camps over years. That tends to undermine that comfortable sense of moral compassion.

Many Liberals also have their own doubts about the effectiveness of a return to the policies of the Howard era, albeit toughened up.

The increased sophistication of people-smuggling rings, the willingness to take risks with people's lives and the ferocious...
demand for places suggest the threat of Nauru or even an occasional boat turned around would not produce instant results.

But Labor has given the Coalition a free pass on this for years. The Liberals in opposition have never had their claims about what would work put to the test.

Faced with an increase in the number of boats, the former Rudd government initially declared people in places such as Sri Lanka and Afghanistan would be unaware of what then immigration minister Chris Evans called “the minutiae of changes in Australia”.

The government upped the tough talk about the evil people-smugglers but no longer put women and children behind bars. Male asylum seekers not considered a threat were released into the community while temporary protection visas, with their restrictions on family reunion, had been ditched.

As it turned out, people-smugglers were keenly aware of the minutiae of changes in Australian government policy. The number of boats kept rising as a result, badly fraying the public’s patience.

By the end of last year, a bemused Abbott couldn’t comprehend why Gillard was reinforcing Coalition arguments and popularity by refusing to trial the alternative policy. After all, the government could blame the Liberals if it didn’t work. Some of her colleagues, including Immigration Minister Chris Bowen, felt the same way. (At least Gillard and then foreign minister Kevin Rudd could agree on something in cabinet).

But it took more months, more deaths and many, many more arrivals before Labor tried another manoeuvre to escape the dilemma it had created — an expert panel.

The aim now is to try to get legislation passed with the backing of the opposition and then try to change the subject as soon as possible. The idea will be to sell Julia Gillard as a person willing to compromise in the national interest and move on to other issues.

If only … jhewett@afir.com.au
Skills needed

AUSTRALIANS should consider learning a new skill to improve their chances in life, federal Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations Minister Chris Evans says.

Senator Evans said an apprenticeship or a traineeship could improve a person's income and lifestyle.

“The reality is there's very little unskilled work left in society,” Senator Evans said at a launch for National Skills Week in Sydney yesterday.

“Increasingly people will need skills to get well-paying, rewarding jobs.”
TAFE protesters vent anger

ABOUT 100 Chisholm Institute staff and students huddled outside Frankston MP Geoff Shaw’s office last Tuesday to protest state government cuts to the TAFE system.

Australian Education Union and National Tertiary Education Union representatives led the rally to Mr Shaw’s Young Street electorate office after gathering at the Frankston campus for a sausage sizzle.

Restricted for space by roadwork barriers, the protesters posted an open letter on the front window demanding the Frankston MP “stop the cuts and support Chisholm”.

Subsidies to Victoria’s 18 TAFE institutes — including Chisholm campuses at Frankston and Rosebud — were slashed by almost $300 million in the May state budget.

Premier Ted Baillieu said at the time the cuts were necessary because enrolments in the uncapped vocational education and training system had exploded from 350,000 to 550,000 in just two years — “an unsustainable growth rate”.

However, unions say that funding should instead have been taken from vocational education and training courses offered by private providers and which are mostly funded by the government.

There are about 350,000 students enrolled in TAFE colleges throughout the state, but these are far outnumbered by those doing courses with private providers.

President of the AEU’s Chisholm branch Peter Malone told the throng to expect the worst.

“We don’t know what’s going to happen, or when it will happen, but we do know that 2012 won’t be good,” he said.

NTEU Victorian state secretary Colin Long said it was not only teaching staff that would be affected, but also associated industries including contract and short-term workers.

“Chisholm TAFE is a vital part of the Frankston community,” Dr Long said.

“It is one of the largest vocational education providers in Victoria, with a large contingent of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. These students cannot afford the big fee increases that Premier Baillieu wants to inflict on Victorians, or the loss of courses and support services caused by the government’s cuts.”

In a statement to the Weekly, Mr Shaw said: “The fact is the Victorian government has announced an extra $1 billion over the next four years for the training system. We have committed a record level of public investment in training — $1.2 billion this year.

“Much of this money will help to improve courses that provide higher level training such as apprenticeships, particularly in areas of skills shortages. The government is increasing subsidies in these important areas, while reducing subsidies in areas of over-supply or that don’t necessarily lead to positive employment outcomes.”
Focus on skills for careers

Opportunities, achievements and the excellence of our country's Vocational Education & Training (VET) sector will be highlighted during National Skills Week, from August 27 to September 2.

Given the job losses across various industries, the effort to raise the profile of skilled careers could not be more timely.

Now in its second year, National Skills Week was officially launched by Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, Chris Evans, on Monday in Sydney.

MC for the night was SkillsOne chief executive Brian Wexham, who said VET had been the foundation of Australia's strong and vibrant economy.

“It has produced industry leaders, it offers great diversity, new and exciting career paths, supports our resources boom, builds our cities, our monuments, our heritage,” he said.

Next week: Celebrating skills and vocational learning.
League luminaries make smart moves

SHARKS hooker John Morris has been recognised by the NRL and the Rugby League Players Association for his dedication to further education by being named in the 2012 Academic Team of the Year.

Morris, whose list of achievements away from the field include completing a bachelor of education/ PDHPE at the University of Newcastle, is also studying a masters of coaching at the University of Sydney.

Morris, Matt Scott (Cowboys), Ashley Harrison (Titans), David Simmons (Panthers), Michael Luck (Warriors) and Luke Burt (Eels) were among the new faces to earn selection in the second NRL-RLPA Academic Team of the Year — a group featuring players from 14 clubs who between them have played 2667 NRL matches, 30 Tests and 26 State of Origins.

Sutherland Shire referee Tony Archer was honoured for his work in studying for a bachelor of commerce (sport management) from Curtin University in Western Australia.

Federal Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Science and Research, Senator Chris Evans, unveiled a team which showcased studies in pharmacy, theology, commerce, education and small business.

- 84 per cent of NRL players have completed or are engaged in further education or workplace training;
- 60 per cent of NRL and Toyota Cup players attend university, the first in their families to do so;
- 68 NRL players (15 per cent) are enrolled or have completed a university degree; a further 109 Toyota Cup players (23 per cent) are enrolled in a university degree;
- 264 NRL players (58 per cent) are enrolled or have completed a Vocational Education Training (certificate II to diploma); another 146 Toyota Cup players (29 per cent) are also enrolled or have completed a VET program;
- 52 NRL players (11 per cent) have completed at least two years of a trade apprenticeship, and 68 per cent Toyota Cup players (15 per cent) are working as an apprentice.
- More than 345 education grants have been provided by the NRL-RLPA for NRL and Toyota Cup players in 2012;
- 25 per cent of indigenous players in the Toyota Cup are attending university;
- The inaugural under 20s State of Origin teams included eight players studying at university, five doing apprenticeships and another 16 in studies ranging from certificate II to diploma level;
- 17 members of the Brisbane Broncos' Toyota Cup squad are studying at university.

ACADEMIC TEAM OF THE YEAR

1 Luke Burt (Parramatta Eels), 2 David Simmons (Penrith Panthers), 3 Ashley Graham (North Qld Cowboys), 4 Chris Lawrence (Wests Tigers), 5 Dale Copley (Brisbane Broncos), 6 Ashley Harrison (Gold Coast Titans), 7 John Morris (Cronulla Sharks), 8 Scott Geddes (South Sydney Rabbitohs), 9 Matt Ballin (Manly Sea Eagles), 10 Matt Scott (North Qld Cowboys), 11 Ben Creagh (St George Illawarra Dragons), 12 Corey Payne (Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs), 13 Michael Luck (Warriors), 14 Ryan James (Gold Coast Titans), 15 Anthony Quinn (Melbourne Storm), 16 Joel Reddy (Wests Tigers), 17 Bronson Harrison (Canberra Raiders).
Expert panel busts myths of border protection issue

Mainstream concerns have been well founded all along

THE expert panel on asylum-seekers has injected an antidote of reality into the poisonous border protection debate. The Australian does not pretend this is an easy issue, yet many people have been open-minded enough to wrestle with their conscience and weigh the evidence while others have refused to listen or yield. This week’s events signify the government’s final surrender to the facts, and an implicit admission of the role its actions have played. Labor has taken too long to realise its culpability — denying reality for five years then outsourcing its policy to the panel — and now it faces the challenge of putting the irregular maritime arrivals genie back in the bottle. For the public, including activists and commentators who have played a prominent role in this debate, the report and Labor’s acquiescence to its commonsense findings represent the dispelling of persistent myths that have stubbornly obscured the practical realities of border protection.

The most obvious myth is Labor’s argument against the success of Nauru as a deterrent. For the past two years, since the government accepted the need for offshore processing, first in East Timor then in Malaysia, it has rejected reopening a detention centre on Nauru. As recently as June, Julia Gillard said: “The government has been consistently advised by the experts who advised this government and former governments that Nauru by itself will not work.” Statistics were released by former immigration minister Chris Evans in 2008 in a deliberate attempt to falsely convey the impression that Nauru failed. Ms Gillard and her ministers have continued this obvious deception, yet much of the commentariat has accepted it. Their favoured formulation that 90 per cent of those sent to Nauru and found to be refugees were resettled in Australian or New Zealand was strictly correct, but created the misleading impression that Nauru provided no disincentive. The relevant statistic is the percentage of all asylum-seeker arrivals on Nauru under the Pacific Solution who ended up in Australia: that was just over 40 per cent — well under half — because about 30 per cent were rejected as refugees and sent to their countries of origin and another 30 per cent were resettled elsewhere. Given those numbers and the way the boat arrivals stopped, it is clear, as the panel has deduced, that Nauru played a crucial role and can again. Yet Labor’s deliberate talking down of Nauru’s success will make it more difficult to restore the perception.

Another central myth has been the argument that pull factors do not exist and Australia’s policies are irrelevant to the people-smuggling trade. This is what Ms Gillard and her team argued daily as the boat arrivals increased; they instead blamed international push factors. The panel’s report explains...
there are 15 million refugees globally and describes how those numbers fluctuate, but remain high. It bases its recommended policies on the clear conclusion that domestic policy matters. "Australian policy settings do influence the flows of irregular migration to Australia," the report says. "Circuit-breakers are needed to reduce the attractiveness of Australia as a destination point for irregular migration." So after years of denial the push factor myth is busted — pull factors are, in fact, strong.

Perhaps the most insulting exploded myth is that strong border protection policies demonstrate a heartless nation. This malicious untruth has been wielded as a weapon in place of facts, used repeatedly against fellow Australians by activists such as former prime minister Malcolm Fraser and barrister Julian Burnside. The truth is that irregular boat arrivals push further back in the queue other refugees waiting on their orderly applications to join our humanitarian intake. Yes, Julian, there is a queue, and denying its existence is the biggest myth of all. The panel explains it this way: "Those who continue to choose irregular maritime voyages to Australia to claim asylum should not be advantaged for doing so over those who pursue regular mechanisms." This is an approach to fairness strongly held by many refugees themselves, as has been recognised previously, if belatedly, by Immigration Minister Chris Bowen in our pages. "In the most multicultural area of Australia, where many refugees have made their home," he wrote of his electorate, "there is very strong support for policies that deter boat journeys and give more places to people sitting in desperate and prolonged circumstances around the world." This self-selection increasingly has sidelined our immigration officers from choosing which refugees are most deserving.

During the years of the Pacific Solution, 90 per cent or more of our refugee places went to overseas refugees, but last year, as boat arrivals increased, that dropped to less than half. This year looks even less prospective for those who cannot buy a seat on a boat.

Not addressed in the report, but crucial none the less, is the importance of security vigilance. All asylum-seekers are required to undergo checks by our agencies, and without identification documents these are fraught. It is not an act of demonisation to point out agencies have blocked more than a handful of arrivals based on disturbing links. Governments must never be complacent in such matters. After a decade, perhaps those with legitimate mainstream concerns about people risking lives, jumping the queue or bypassing processes will no longer be howled down as gullible vessels for xenophobic fear-mongering.
Study in excellence as unis close on world’s elite

**EXCLUSIVE**

**JULIE HARE**  
HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

AUSTRALIA is on the way to having a world-class university system after five years of increased investment, says Glyn Davis, vice-chancellor of the country’s top-ranked university.

Melbourne is the highest-ranked Australian university in the latest Academic Ranking of World Universities, released today, which for the first time put five Australian institutions in the top 100. With 19 of its 39 universities in the top 500, Australia has the fourth most successful higher education system globally.

The University of Melbourne came in at 57, rising 22 places in five years to knock the Australian National University (64) from top spot. The University of Western Australia made its debut in the top 100 at 96, behind the University of Queensland (90) and Sydney (93).

“We are well on our way to becoming a world-class system,” Professor Davis said.

“Clearly it’s a result of the investment over the past five years. The test is not just Melbourne’s performance, although I’m immensely thrilled, but universities like Griffith which are doing so well. That is being fostered by investment, facilities and people.”

Professor Davis yesterday confirmed his contract at Melbourne had been extended to 2017.

Simon Marginson, a professor of higher education at the University of Melbourne and a world authority on university league tables, said the same Australian universities made the 2012 list as last year, but nine improved their position. Only UQ went backwards, by four places.

The ARWU rankings are considered the most robust and reliable of the dozens of international university league tables. But their focus on research performance gave little insight into teaching and the student experience, said Professor Marginson.

Tony Sheil, deputy director of research policy at Griffith University, noted that when the ARWU first ran a decade ago,

Continued on Page 2

**THE TOP UNIS**

1. Harvard University (US)  
2. Stanford University (US)  
3. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (US)  
4. University of California, Berkeley (US)  
5. University of Cambridge (Britain)  
6. University of Melbourne  
7. University of California, Berkeley (US)  
8. University of Cambridge (Britain)  
9. University of Melbourne

Vice-chancellor Glyn Davies, at the University of Melbourne yesterday, says Australian tertiary education depends on investment, facilities and people
Our unis on course to be world-beaters

Continued from Page 1

Australia had 13 universities in the top 500 and two in the top 100. During that time, national expenditure on research and development as a percentage of GDP had increased from 1.69 per cent to 2.21 per cent.

“It’s not all about money, but such results would not have occurred without a major injection of funding over a sustained period,” Mr Sheil said.

He said the seven universities in the 301-400 range were “poised to become truly world-class, and should be supported to do so”.

“Likewise, we have a couple of universities that are capable of making the transition to become world leaders in the global top 50,” he said.

The US again dominated the rankings, with 17 of the top 20 institutions, 53 in the top 100 and 150 in the top 500. Harvard again topped the list, followed by Stanford, MIT, University of California, Berkeley, and Cambridge.

The University of Tokyo was the only non-US or British institution to make the top 20.

Professor Marginson said the international story was the continuing rise of Asian institutions, particularly in China, which now has 42 universities in the top 500, but none in the top 100.

The ARWU rankings come as vice-chancellors have called for additional government funding for teaching.

Professor Marginson said the growth in research in recent years had a direct effect on teaching budgets. Universities used funding intended for teaching to cross-subsidise research to improve performance in league tables.

He said the economic crisis in Europe, Britain and the US would not yet have affected rankings, although the number of world-class US institutions was slipping.

An analysis of Australia’s performance against nations with similar higher education systems shows that with 50 per cent of its institutions in the ARWU 500, we have a broad equitable system that allows excellence to flourish.

Canada has 87 universities, with 22 in the list. But Canada’s highest-ranking institution, the University of Toronto, comes in at 26. Britain, with 115 universities, has 38 in the top 100, including two in the top 10. New Zealand has five of its eight universities in the top 500, but none above the 200-300 category.

The US has 4495 universities and 150 (3.3 per cent) in the top 500, including 17 in the top 20.

“It’s nice we live in a country that can do so well in the Olympics and in university rankings,” Professor Davis said. “It says something nice about Australia.”

Loretta Li and Yan-Lin Lee celebrate graduating from Melbourne University yesterday.
## CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

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### AUSTRALIAN UNIS IN THE TOP 500

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Rudd policies ‘history’, says PM

JULIA Gillard dismissed Labor’s Rudd-era asylum-seeker policies as “history” yesterday, but fears remain that rhetoric from the time has destroyed the deterrent effect of re-establishing offshore processing on Nauru.

“That is a matter of history,” the Prime Minister said when asked in parliament about her past opposition to offshore processing by the Howard government immigration minister she once shadowed, Philip Ruddock.

But the leader of the government in the Senate, Chris Evans, who was Kevin Rudd’s immigration minister, declined to distance himself from the dismantling of the Howard government’s offshore processing regime.

“I did take great pleasure in abolishing the Pacific Solution,” he told the Senate yesterday. “It was a regime based on punishment and trying to convince people that if you hurt them, they will stop.”

Senator Evans described the recommendations of the expert panel led by former Defence chief Angus Houston and adopted by the government as “a very different approach”.

But fears remain in Canberra that the effectiveness of the measures has been reduced by Senator Evans’s rhetoric and a sleight of hand with data from his time as immigration minister. He said in a February 2008 media release marking the departure of the last asylum-seekers from Nauru that a “total of 1637 people were detained in the Nauru and Manus detention facilities, of whom 1153 (or 70 per cent) were ultimately resettled” in Australia or other countries.

“Of those who were resettled, around 61 per cent (705 people) were resettled in Australia.”

The Coalition has highlighted that this means only 43 per cent of the 1637 people detained on Nauru or Manus Island ended up in Australia.

Senator Evans’s 70 per cent has been amplified over the years and turned into a claim that virtually everyone detained on Nauru was resettled in Australia.
UWA ‘the quiet achiever’ in rankings

THE University of Western Australia is the star turn among Australian institutions in the Academic Ranking of World Universities released today, catapulting to 96 in the league table from last year’s spot in the top 150.

It is the second year running that a new Australian institution has been promoted to the upper echelons of the prestigious research index.

Last year, Queensland made the top 100 for the first time, entering the list at 96. This year it slid to 90.

The local pecking order remained unchanged at the top this year, led by Melbourne, up three at 57, from the Australian National University, up six at 64, then Queensland.

The University of Sydney was up three places at 93, with newcomer UWA nipping at its heels.

Monash University and the University of NSW leapt into the top 150 from the top 200, but still share the sixth spot in Australia, and Macquarie and Adelaide remained in the top 300, sharing eighth place locally.

Flinders University, Griffith, James Cook University, Swinburne University, University of Newcastle, University of Tasmania and the University of Wollongong were all in the top 400, with Curtin University of Technology, La Trobe University and the University of Technology, Sydney in the top 500.

Griffith, Swinburne and Wollongong were all promoted from last year’s top 500.

Professor of higher education at Melbourne Simon Marginson said UWA, with “the most remote location of all the world’s top 100 universities, has long been the quiet achiever of Australian higher education, with “superb research strengths in life sciences”.

“Now it will get the recognition it deserves,” he said.

Professor Marginson predicted that UNSW was most likely to be the next Australian into the top 100, “given its solid research performance in all five disciplinary fields”.

He said Monash was on the rise and credited a strong performance in recent research funding rounds under the leadership of deputy vice-chancellor (research) and provost Edwina Cornish.

Griffith was another “notable improver”, having entered the top 500 last year for the first time and now moving into the top 400. It was a similar situation with Swinburne, which entered the top 500 two years ago.

Rankings analyst and Griffith deputy director of research policy Tony Sheil said the Australian results were remarkable. “(They) demonstrate that the additional research funding provided by successive governments since 2001 has paid off handsomely.”

Mr Sheil gave a warning, however: “There is no looking back and no minister responsible for higher education would wish to be at the helm should these results decline.”

Results by disciplinary fields were also impressive. Both Melbourne and Queensland were ranked in the top 100 in three fields: engineering, life sciences and medicine.

Top-50 finishers were led by UWA at 26 in life sciences, while Melbourne was 35 in medicine and ANU 37 in science.

ANU was the highest scorer in the subject rankings, at 30 for physics.

Others in the top 100 for subject areas included Monash in chemistry and computer science, Melbourne in physics and economics and UNSW in mathematics.

The ARWU, formerly known as the Shanghai Jiao Tong index, is the most watched of the global rankings. Its publication marks the start of rankings season.

Rivals Times Higher Education and QS are expected to publish in the coming weeks.

Mr Sheil said that given it was the 10th edition of the ARWU rankings, universities should be viewing it as “more than a list”.

“There is enough rankings data in circulation that universities can use this information strategically, for benchmarking and planning,” he said.

“The Chinese universities are very adept at this using the data to set strategic targets.

“As a result, greater China now has 42 universities on the top 500, up from 19 in 2003, becoming the second-rank nation ahead of the UK.”

But he said it was a zero-sum game. Some of the national declines in 10 years mirrored the world’s economic fortunes: in 2003, the US had 161 universities in the top 500, but now only 150.

Japan, which had 36 in the top 500 in 2003, was reduced to 21, while Germany, which had 42 in 2003, has 37.
### World top 100: Academic Ranking of World Universities 2012

#### Disciplines

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<thead>
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Collaborative research brings threefold return

EXCLUSIVE

JILL ROWBOTHAM

Co-operative Research Centres are estimated to have an economic impact worth $5.9 billion in the next five years. This is in addition to an $8.6bn contribution over the 21-year life of the program, according to an Allen Consulting Group study to be launched tonight by Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans as part of National Science Week. It represents a $3.10 return for every taxpayer dollar invested.

“The only way to reap the benefits of our substantial investment is by translating research into commercial reality,” he says.

Examples in the report include royalties from patent sales by the Vision CRC of $90 million, and $120m from the CRC for Biomarker Translation in licences granted and the value of a spin-off company. Although it notes the social and environmental benefits of CRCs, they are not monetised.

The study demonstrated that the 37 CRCs had “the critical mass of resources to create new industries and improve Australia’s competitive advantage”.

It is an economic imperative that Australia cultivate its science and research for future decades to show “that not only are we a mining nation but a smart nation”.

The government planned to double the level of collaboration between business, universities and publicly funded research agencies in the next decade. CRCs would receive $625m in the next four years.

Jane Burns leads the Young and Well CRC, which in December 2010 was allocated $27.5m over five years and now has 12 major projects running with the aim of finding a “game-changer” in alleviating misery among young people. It is estimated that mental illness suffered by Australians costs $48.6bn each year, of which untreated mental illness among young people accounts for $10.6bn, gauged via measures such as unemployment and absenteeism costs.

“Mental health service delivery isn’t meeting the needs of young people,” Dr Burns said. “Of those who are experiencing a mental health difficulty, 70 per cent of them aren’t getting any help.”

On Monday, the Young and Well CRC began a landmark survey of 2000 people aged 16 to 25 to determine how they were using technology and how it influenced their wellbeing.

“We are conducting computer-aided telephone interviews but at the same time we are doing a trial on Facebook,” Dr Burns said.

“Because the majority of young people use Facebook, the capacity for us to get a genuinely representative sample of young people is probably higher than it is via a telephone interview.”

It also means more detailed research can be conducted on groups, such as young men, young people with disabilities and those identifying as same-sex attracted.

“You could target your questions specifically, so that you give young people far more (of a) voice, shifting from a very traditional research method.”

CRC Association chief executive Tony Peacock said the “pleasing part about this study is the sheer volume of the impacts: better than three-to-one return to taxpayers and an ongoing boost to productivity and GDP”.

“The long-term nature of CRC collaboration is a key factor in achieving such good impacts.”
Jane Burns, chief executive of Young and Well CRC, is seeking a ‘game-changer’ for young people...
UNIVERSITIES are in a dilemma in the lead-up to the next federal election: should they maintain their academic idealism or adopt pragmatic politics?

They generally argue for funding increases from principle and evidence: the Bradley and Lomax-Smith reviews recommended an increase in base funding. OECD comparisons show that Australia has one of the lowest levels of public funding of higher education (and a corresponding unusually high level of private funding from tuition fees), a study commissioned by Universities Australia demonstrated high economic returns from investment in higher education, and so on.

The academic instinct is to insist on principle though it might not be expedient.

Many vice-chancellors are attracted to this position despite claims they’ve crossed over to the dark side of managerialism and economic rationalism if they seek modest rationalisations and small efficiencies.

However, there is no prospect of Labor further increasing university funding and every prospect that the Coalition will be elected.

The Coalition will seek big savings in higher education expenditure to pay for promised tax cuts and benefit increases. Holding out for a 10 per cent increase in base funding would confirm others’ worst impressions of universities as ivory-tower mendicants.

It has been suggested universities should campaign for funding in the way that the mining industry campaigned against the minerals resource rent tax. But that would just be bad in principle, bad policy and bad politics.

Universities are public bodies and so should not campaign against governments or for the opposition. The miners campaigned on false and misleading assertions and some of the more strident claims for increased university funding are similarly deceptive. Universities would breach fundamental academic principles of truth, evidence and rational argument by following the miners’ example.

Adopting their campaign tactics would be bad policy because it would further degrade the public policy process and principles.

And it would be dreadful politics. While funding per student hasn’t returned to its peak of 1994, it has recovered substantially from the trough of 2003.

Labor has restored reasonable funding indexation and is increasing block research grants substantially with its sustainable research excellence funding.

Elementary political tactics should support the government that provides these increases, not attack it.

It makes universities vulnerable to retaliation by ministers and other politicians highlighting universities’ inefficiencies, failings and other weaknesses, and to governments cutting their funding.

If universities are to conduct a political campaign, it should be informed by realism and pragmatism. The Coalition took to the last federal election no substantial policy aside from cutting equity funding but it seems to have dropped even that from its speakers’ notes of July 1 this year. The Coalition might be likely to look to the British coalition government for ideas. Universities’ first aim should be to forestall the dreadful mess that is current in British higher education policy and financing.

An obvious option for a new government would be to cut government expenditure by further transferring higher education funding from the government to students, as the Howard government did in 1997.

Students pay on average about 40 per cent of the total funding of their program.

This could probably be increased further before students wouldn’t repay most of their debt.

But if this is as objectionable as many claim, where would they prefer a new Coalition government to cut funding? Do they really think universities would escape cuts that have been foreshadowed?

Such an approach has been criticised as a pre-emptive knee buckle. But surely it’s more astute than anticipating no budget cut and merely reacting when it comes.

Such are the difficulties of universities moving beyond their core strengths of scholarly investigation and argument, as Universities Australia is finding.

Gavin Moodie is a tertiary education policy analyst at RMIT University.
Fee increase of 25pc will do nicely: Dawkins

ANDREW TROUNSON

VICTORIA University vice-chancellor Peter Dawkins has joined the chorus of calls for an increase in student contributions, saying an increase of 25 per cent can be justified because it would be just enough to tackle current underfunding.

Professor Dawkins was speaking at a seminar on Monday to discuss a report by the Grattan Institute’s Andrew Norton that advocates significant cuts to government subsidies.

Mr Norton says the private benefits of higher education largely outweigh public benefits, so students should pay more and government less.

‘The private benefits largely outweigh public benefits, so students should pay more’

ANDREW NORTON
GRATTAN INSTITUTE

However, Professor Dawkins said the report failed to take full account of the public benefit from productivity gains and high-level skills stemming from a university education. He added there were also social benefits as a result of increasing the participation of disadvantaged students.

“The report points out that when fees have been raised students haven’t in general reduced their level of participation very much,” he said.

“But that has been for modest increases in fees.”

He said despite the security net provided by the HECS system, disadvantaged students could still be expected to resist big fee increases. But Mr Norton said that apart from some specific areas in health and engineering there had generally been a surplus of graduates for the economy.

At any time, about one-quarter of graduates are not working in jobs that need a degree.

This led to credentialism as employers opted for degree-holders for jobs not previously requiring them.

“Acquiring a degree is always good for the graduate but it could have negative consequences for people who are either forced out or are forced to acquire a degree they don’t actually need.”
VCs keep flexi-fees debate on the boil

JULIE HARE
HIGHER EDUCATION EDITOR

UNIVERSITIES that elected to introduce flexible student fees would be eligible for only a “modest base government grant” but could charge as much as they wanted under a radical new funding proposal.

Leftover funds would be redistributed among those that chose to maintain fee caps and the money used for access programs and social and economic development.

Writing in the HEStoday, Janice Reid, vice-chancellor of the University of Western Sydney, proposes a differentiated funding system “in which universities could choose either full fee flexibility or the current system of government funding and support for widening participation”.

“Price would be determined by reputation and performance. Unfettered and confident in their ability to attract large numbers of students willing to pay high fees, fee-flexible universities could then direct fee income as they wish, whether to research or teaching,” Professor Reid wrote.

“Government funding released from these universities would be then redirected to universities with the express mandate of education enfranchisement and social and economic development.”

Professor Reid’s proposal is just one that has emerged in the aftermath of a National Press Club speech by Fred Hilmer, head of the University of NSW.

In it, he said universities were broke and needed to find new revenue streams.

He said the removal of caps on student fees in high-demand courses would generate healthy amounts of additional funding, while correcting current markets in which supply (student places) was uncapped, but price (fees) was capped.

While reaction to Professor Hilmer’s speech continued to blaze, last week the Grattan Institute released a report, Graduate Winners, that added oxygen to the flames and turned the fee debate into a bushfire.

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans finally weighed in yesterday, telling The Australian that the government was totally opposed to fee deregulation.

Claims that universities were broke and needed higher fees to properly fund teaching and learning were “complete nonsense”, he said.

“We have been consistent in our commitment to higher education over five years and five budgets. This debate is being generated by some right-wing think tanks with a policy agenda that is being heavily encouraged by the Liberal Party.”

Peter Dawkins, vice-chancellor of Victoria University, also bought into the debate at a seminar with Graduate Winners author Andrew Norton in Melbourne this week.

VU is one of the institutions struggling to get a toehold in the student demand-driven system. VU has struggled with enrolments and falling Australian Tertiary Admission Rank scores.

As reported elsewhere, Professor Dawkins admitted that a gradual rise in fees up to 25 per cent might be necessary.
Commonwealth offers economy of knowledge

Universities promiscuously partner across language and colonial cultural boundaries

QUEEN Victoria’s diamond jubilee in 1897 was a celebration of empire. Troops and gifts flowed in from the furthest reaches of the world to celebrate the 60-year reign of the Queen Empress. Queen Elizabeth’s diamond jubilee and the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games struck quite a different note. The narrative of Danny Boyle’s ceremony took us from the shepherds of merry England, through the Industrial Revolution almost seamlessly to the Beatles and a multicultural modern day. Empire was elided, referenced only faintly in World War I, and by inference in the images of post-war migrants. Triumphalism had been replaced by the sly humour of Mr Bean and the absurd and rousing spectacle of National Health Service patients trampolining on their beds.

Last month, I attended a meeting of the Association of Commonwealth Universities. It was a somewhat stately affair, held in Woburn House and with its share of post-colonial overtones. Indian, West Indian, Canadian and African universities were represented. I noted only one from Australia — the University of Western Sydney represented, as it happens, by a British-born deputy vice-chancellor.

We were joined by some of the current crop of commonwealth scholars. There was excitement when I mentioned I, too, had been one, and was invited to sign against my name in one of the huge volumes registering all the past scholars. The number and reach of the commonwealth scholarships reminds us of an era of globalisation of education, when institutions from the mother country educated staff for the new institutions of the colonies.

Until the 1990s, commonwealth scholarships gave generous funding for undergraduates from across the commonwealth to study in Britain. The implicit assumption, held, too, in the Australian Colombo Plan, was that education followed the colonial linkages, and was best in the mother country or its most Westernised colonies.

Now the world of higher education is very different. Universities promiscuously partner across language and colonial cultural boundaries. Partnerships have become more strategic. Universities are looking for partners to be peers, at
least equally ranked on one or other measure of status. Partners should enhance reputation, add to research capacity and allow students to study and travel. Entire bureaucracies manage the relationships: to negotiate joint research bids and sign off on student credit transfers.

Yet empires and colonial relationships still play a role in the new knowledge economy. Over recent months here at Bath Spa University, we have been discussing a partnership with a private university in Catalonia. Its partners include a leading Portuguese private university, itself linked to a range of institutions in Brazil. Those relationships are based in ties of language and culture forged in the first great European seaborne empire. From Lagos in the Algarve, tiny caravels took Portuguese to Brazil, Goa, Macau, Mozambique and Timor. Those relationships survive even though Portugal is now a small and economically fragile member of the EU. The partnership offered by our Catalan and Portuguese friends is independent of government funding and of the public university systems in Iberia and Brazil.

The network of private universities is not of the type we find in the anglophone world, where groups such as Laureate or Kaplan are fast expanding and highly profitable. The style and models of education are locally inflected, based on strong family relationships. They are Iberian in origin with a clear eye to the international market. South American students see Spain and Portugal as a gateway to European education. What the new partnership offers is the Iberian experience combined with British quality control.

Such transnational offerings, often in partnership with local providers, have long been familiar in Australia. They are increasingly important in Britain, where the vagaries of immigration law have complicated the recruitment of international students. Indeed, over the past two years, more international students have been studying for British degrees outside Britain than inside. Connections forged by empires of the past provide a fertile ground for these new models. These are more symmetric relationships than in the past, with knowledge, funding and students no longer travelling only in one direction.

At the Association of Commonwealth Universities meeting, the question was raised of whether the powerful but quiescent relationships fostered through the commonwealth can be reignited for a new world of higher education. My suspicion is that private providers will be the first to find a way to light the flame.

Christina Slade is vice-chancellor of Bath Spa University.
VCs draw the lines for fight focused on the bottom line

Fee subsidies and fee deregulation are suddenly at the heart of the battle

FRED Hilmer is not one to mince his words. And when he fronted up at the National Press Club three weeks ago he had a simple message: universities are broke and strangled by red tape.

Since a funding increase from government seemed unlikely, students were going to have to stump up higher fees.

He might have a point. Last year, the University of NSW, which he heads, made an actual operating surplus of just $7.9 million from revenues of $1 billion. The University of Melbourne, arguably Australia's best university, posted a mere $2.7m surplus, while the University of Queensland was $38m in the red.

Hilmer told the Press Club he wasn't advocating a fee hike, but deregulation of fees, allowing universities to charge what they could. And a university with an international brand such as his, and his seven brethren from the Group of Eight, should be able to charge a premium.

Hilmer is a free-marketeer. And he's not alone, especially given the perversion thrown up in the present quasi-market. Since the beginning of this year universities have been able to enrol as many students as qualify — but government kept tight controls on student fees. That's an additional 155,000 enrolments in just four years, but what students pay has remained more or less the same.

HILMER's idea is not new. Economist Bruce Chapman wrote about fee deregulation in a paper for the Department of Education a decade ago. Vice-chancellors Glyn Davis and Greg Craven performed a pas de deux in the pages of The Australian this year, arguing the case for fee flexibility (which Craven insists is different from fee deregulation).

Then last week, Andrew Norton of the Grattan Institute went one step further. Instead of advocating fee deregulation, he said government should lower subsidies for the majority of disciplines by 50 per cent, arguing it would free $3bn over four years that could be much better spent elsewhere.

Norton's theory is that the private benefits of a university education far outweigh the public benefits. Subsidies, which vary between 16 per cent and 80 per cent depending on the discipline, serve to further privilege only the privileged.

"Graduates do well out of higher education. They have attractive jobs, above-average pay and status in society," Norton wrote in the report, Graduate Winners.

"In most cases students would take their courses irrespective of the size of the subsidy." Norton says his eye is on the $5.5bn, out of a total $23bn, higher education budget, the government will spend on teaching subsidies this year alone. He says the amount will skyrocket to $7bn by 2015 and keep going up.

Norton's basic argument is that students don't pay enough for their education and government pays too much.

"What the public gets for its investment is not clear," he says. "Tuition subsidies merely redistribute income to students and graduates. The general public, particularly those who do not go to university, are worse off."

Phil Lewis, director of the Centre for Labour Market Research at the University of Canberra, agrees.

"In a demand-driven system, students should pay the full cost of a place," he says. "Then it is purely their choice and if they make the wrong decision they bear all the cost."

"The situation becomes more complex when the student only pays part of the cost and the taxpayer pays the rest. If it is used to finance degrees that have low or negative return because salaries are low, unemployment high and cost of study high, then this spending fails the public interest test."

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RESPONSE to the Grattan report has largely fallen into two camps. First there are fellow economists, who praise the rigour of Norton’s argument and his clarity of thought. They say his plan might not be exactly workable, but it is a strong and important contribution to the debate of funding higher education.

Then there is everyone else - who hate it. They say access to low-cost higher education is a universal right, countries around the world are increasing their investment in universities, not decreasing it, that Australians carry the fifth-highest private burden of cost for higher education in the OECD and that escalating fees will deter debt-averse, mostly poor and disadvantaged students. They say Norton has taken a very narrow view of public good and failed to account for the 50 per cent of students entering university each year who are mature aged.

“I just don’t accept the idea that there is no public interest in having a country that is literate, trained and intellectually sophisticated even if it is the case that those people would want to study for themselves, because they can’t avoid confronting public benefits once they have done that,” says Greg Craven, vice-chancellor of ACU.

“It is a completely misconceived idea of the breadth of the public benefit of education.”

THE two ideas - Hilmer on fee deregulation and Norton on withdrawal of fee subsidies - have become conflated into one stream of thought because they each affect how much students pay.

But the fiery debate that has been triggered reveals how close to the bone is the issue of funding.

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans points to the $39bn that will flow into the sector over the next four years.

“It’s complete nonsense that universities are doing it hard,” Evans says. “I ask you to look to the figures rather than listen to the opinions of those which may reflect their vested interests.”

Evans is right, but still the whining continues. The sticking point is a 10 per cent increase to teaching and learning as recommended in the 2008 Bradley review. The government’s own report, by former South Australian education minister Jane Lomax, confirmed more money for teaching and learning was needed and 10 per cent sounded about right.

Evans commissioned Ernst & Young to do the numbers and prove 8.4 per cent more funding had gone into teaching and learning since 2008, 10 per cent if research were included.

But it largely fell on deaf ears.

SO, are universities broke?

No, says Leo Goedegebuure, director of the LH Martin Institute at the University of Melbourne. But that’s not to say there aren’t financial issues.

The impasse revolves around the funding of research activity. Under the national protocols, teaching must be informed by research and that adds a significant cost impost on teaching positions.

And with global university league tables focusing on research performance, the stakes are getting higher.

Broke? Not quite, says Simon Marginson, professor of higher education at the University of Melbourne. “Everything is relative. It depends on what standard you aspire to,” he says. “If you want first-tier universities that compete on the world stage, then there is definitely a case for more money for those that will be international research players, because research is expensive. But Treasury appears to be indicating that a second-tier system is good enough.”

For Marginson, the key issue is that if more money were to be given to teaching, would it end up there to benefit students or would it be hived off to cross-subsidise research.

“Unquestionably there needs to be more money going into universities because everyone who enrols in a degree has a right to high-quality education. But under fee deregulation you would see a bifurcation between high-cost, high-prestige courses and mass universities building numbers and working on the lowest common denominator.”

“There are signs of that now. Polarisation is awful, particularly for first-generation students who don’t have a whole lot of cultural collateral at home to fall back on.

“It all becomes about the credential, not the content. Under a fee-deregulated environment, content would get emptied out for a lot of students.”

Broke? Victoria University is being pummelled on all fronts as higher prestige universities pinch its traditional students in the enrolment free-for-all that began this year.

And its TAFE system is being annihilated by a state government hell bent on simultaneous market reform and budget cuts all packaged up in bad policy.

VU vice-chancellor Peter Dawsins, writing in the HES online today, says there may be a case for fee increases, “especially if it enables more public funding for other students to start and complete university degrees”.

And advocating an even more radical, but perfectly sound, proposition, University of Western Sydney vice-chancellor Janice Reid suggests a differential funding model. Also in the HES online, Reid says those universities that opt for fee deregulation could receive a “modest base government grant and be permitted to charge whatever they like”.

The left-over funding from those institutions could then be “redirected to universities with an express mandate of education enfranchisement and social and economic development”.

IT’S rare to see such vigorous public debate and disagreement among vice-chancellors. And while Universities Australia might be trying to keep the development of its unified policy statement on fees under wraps, the genie is out of the bottle and making quite a ruckus.

Evans might be right on the numbers and the fact that new indexation measures will deliver an additional 3.8 per cent a year to student fees and government contributions, but the funding debate is not going away.

Evans has told the HES on two occasions that the government will respond to the Lomax-Smith review by the end of the year. But by then it just might be too late.
The impasse revolves around the funding of research activity.

Vice-chancellor of the University of NSW Fred Hilmer advocates a deregulation of fees.
PM dismisses ‘history’ but Nauru fears remain

JULIA Gillard dismissed Labor’s Rudd-era asylum-seeker policies as “history” yesterday, however, fears continue that rhetoric from the time has destroyed the deterrent effect of re-establishing offshore processing on Nauru.

“That is a matter of history,” the Prime Minister said when asked in parliament about her past opposition to offshore processing by the Howard government immigration minister she once shadowed, Philip Ruddock.

But the leader of the government in the Senate, Chris Evans, who was Kevin Rudd’s immigration minister, declined to distance himself from the dismantling of the Howard government’s offshore processing regime.

“I did take great pleasure in abolishing the Pacific Solution,” he told the Senate yesterday. “It was a regime based on punishment and trying to convince people that if you hurt them, they will stop.”

Senator Evans described the recommendations of the expert panel led by former Defence chief Angus Houston and adopted by the government as “a very different approach”.

But fears remain in Canberra that the effectiveness of the measures has been reduced by Senator Evans’s rhetoric and a sleight of hand with data from his time as immigration minister.

He said in a February 2008 media release marking the departure of the last asylum-seekers from Nauru that a “total of 1637 people were detained in the Nauru and Manus detention facilities, of whom 1153 (or 70 per cent) were ultimately resettled” in Australia or other countries.

“Of those who were resettled, around 61 per cent (705 people) were resettled in Australia.”

The Coalition says this means only 43 per cent of the 1637 people detained on Nauru or on Manus Island ended up in Australia.

Senator Evans’s 70 per cent has been amplified over the years and turned into a claim that virtually everyone detained on Nauru was resettled in Australia.

Mr Ruddock said the Rudd government had “essentially abandoned measures that worked”.

CHRIStIAN KERR