FED: Australian universities among world's best

CANBERRA, Aug 15 AAP - Five Australian universities are among the world's 100 best tertiary institutions, according to new rankings.

The University of Melbourne, Australian National University, the University of Queensland, the University of Sydney and the University of Western Australia are among the top 100 in the latest Academic Rankings of World Universities, published on Wednesday.

In the top 500, Australia had 19 of its 37 universities listed.

The sector's peak body, Universities Australia, said the nation had the third highest number of universities in the list.

Australia was one of just two countries to increase the number of universities included in the list from 2011.

"This is an outstanding result for Australia and demonstrates the nation's commitment to having a world-class university system providing teaching and research at the highest levels," chief executive Belinda Robinson said in a statement.

Tertiary Education Minister Chris Evans said the result showed the Labor government's investment in universities was paying off.

"This is an outstanding result when you consider that the top two countries have significantly more universities than Australia's 37," he said, pointing out there were 4495 universities in the US and 115 in Britain.

"The Gillard government's effort to build a world class higher education system for Australians has now received global recognition and success."

AAP klc/lk/evt
VIC: Staff, students to protest TAFE cuts

MELBOURNE, Aug 15 AAP - TAFE students and teachers will rally in Melbourne on Thursday to protest budget cuts from the sector worth $300 million.

The cuts have been described as on par with the worst excesses of the Kennett Government.

Australian Education Union Victorian branch president Mary Bluett said the reduced funding will have a significant impact on the viability of TAFE in Victoria, particularly in regional areas.

"It is estimated 2000 TAFE staff will be made redundant as a result of the funding cuts," Ms Bluett said in a statement.

National Tertiary Education Union Victorian state secretary Colin Long said large numbers of dedicated TAFE staff had already been made redundant and services across the state had been cut.

"The speed and brutality of the Baillieu Government's cuts to TAFE are on par with the worst excesses of the Kennett Government," he said.

In May, Victoria's Higher Education Minister Peter Hall defended changes to higher education funding which he said provided an additional $1 billion to the sector over four years.

"The Victorian government has an obligation to ensure the record amount of taxpayers' funding going into the training system is spent on areas of greatest need to the state's economy," Mr Hall said.

A government spokesman in May said the Brumby government's uncapped tertiary funding policy had resulted in massive growth in "courses that led nowhere", leading to an over-supply of people trained in areas such as fitness and aromatherapy.

AAP gg/alm/jfm
Abbott fails to deliver killer blow

An insight to Tony Abbott’s thinking emerged on Tuesday when he told the Coalition joint party-room that, of course, Julia Gillard wanted to talk about boats because the carbon tax was “so toxic”.

The claim was almost comical given the timing. This was the morning after a historic victory. After a decade of preaching from the moral high ground on refugee treatment, depicting Tony Abbott as heartless and hardline, Labor had capitulated.

Apparently, he had been right all along.

Much rubbing in of the Government nose would follow but the Opposition Leader’s reluctance to dwell exclusively on his victory was telling.

It showed his laser-like focus on an issue can sometimes look inflexible. But more importantly, it betrayed a grudging recognition that although he had dished out a fearful beating to Julia Gillard on boats, he’d foregone the knock-out punch.

Her last roll-of-the-dice ploy of appointing Angus Houston, Michael L’Estrange, and Paris Aristotle to break the deadlock, had actually worked. Their deviously political formula saved enough face on both sides, nodding politely to tow-backs and Malaysia without backing either. For Gillard it offered both a direction to move, and the objective authority to do it - crucial given her own party’s sensitivities.

Abbott knew the cost. In boxing terms, she had dragged herself off the ropes. And by adopting the trio’s 22 recommendations, replete with the re-opening of Manus Island, and Nauru for detention and off-shore processing, she had also managed to tie him to the new system.

While the government of the day will always tak
the prime heat for a failure to stem the flow of boats, Labor had cantilevered some ownership responsibility for borders over the party divide.

From here on in, the Coalition will struggle to remain as aloof from boat arrivals as it had. In its new “no advantage” provision ensuring a boat person cannot gain faster entry to Australia than would have been possible through the orderly UNHCR process, it is arguable that the new system is actually tougher than the Pacific solution.

At the same meeting, on Tuesday, Julie Bishop was in no hurry to move on so quickly from boats policy, speaking of “the public humiliation of a government,” and the PM’s “person responsible for this shameless episode”, which had seen a thousand drownings and 22,000 asylum seekers since Labor came to power. But by Wednesday’s Question Time a mere day later, the Coalition had swung fully back to carbon - eschewing any questions or point-scoring on boats.

This is amazing given Labor’s retreat. When the then Immigration Minister Chris Evans dismantled the Pacific solution in 2008, he described it as “one of his greatest pleasures in politics”. This week, Evans was reminded of this. Responding, he pointed to other aspects of the Howard-era policy – including Temporary Protection Visas – arguing that it had been “punitive and wrong”.

“It was a regime based on punishment and trying to convince people that if you hurt them you will stop coming,” he told Parliament.

But Evans’s distinction is moot. “Punishment” once again the central tool in stoppin the boats. Despite the sneering at Mr Abbott for reducing the problem to a “xenophobic” three-word slogan, his work sits at the heart of Labor’s policy.
Education panel appointed

Michaela Whitbourn

The author of federal Labor’s higher education review and a former productivity commissioner are among a panel of experts appointed by the NSW government to oversee a new research centre to guide education policy.

The Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation, to be launched today by Education Minister Adrian Piccoli, will collect and analyse data from the state’s education providers, including schools and universities, to identify effective teaching practices and increase the number of people attaining higher qualifications.

“We need to be sure that our investments in education continue to be targeted appropriately, maximising student benefit,” Mr Piccoli said. “It’s time to start forming a really clear picture of what works across the sector, ensuring our education system remains a leader.”

As part of the NSW education department, the centre will be overseen by an advisory panel chaired by John Ainley, deputy chief executive officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research.

The 12-member panel includes Peter Shergold, a Howard-era head of the Prime Minister’s Department, Denise Bradley, the head of federal Labor’s higher education review, and Lateral Economics chief executive Nicholas Gruen, a former Productivity Commissioner and an adviser to ministers in the Fraser, Hawke and Keating Labor governments.

The centre’s first report, to be released today, examines school teaching methods that contribute to higher levels of student achievement. It notes that frequent use of computers in year four science and mathematics classrooms “is associated with lower achievement”.

“This report show us some of the small things teachers do that make a big difference to student outcomes,” Mr Piccoli said.
Aussies need to be skilled at something: minister

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 says 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 of National Skills Week in Sydney on Monday.