Parents warned on costs

A CASEY school has warned parents enrolling their children in Vocational Education and Training certificates that costs may rise.

Hallam Senior Secondary College has included a disclaimer on its enrolment forms, warning parents that charges were “indicative” as the State Government’s changes to TAFE funding could have flow-on effects.

Some 800 of the college’s 1000 students are enrolled in at least one VET certificate course as part of their studies, a quarter of whom are also enrolled in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning.

Principal Anne Martin said schools had been kept in the dark about funding for VET and VCAL in 2013.

Ms Martin said the lack of information had led to rumours that VET funding could be capped next year.

James Martin, spokesman for Education Minister Martin Dixon, said schools would “shortly receive details of their funding arrangements for 2013”.

Mr Martin did not say if VET funding would be capped.
Lifeline for boat course

BY GOYA DMYTRYSHCHAK

THE Boating Industry Association of Victoria (BIAV) is looking to become an education provider in a bid to save the state’s boatbuilding and shipwrights trades from sinking.

The move comes as Labor lodges about 30,000 petitions in State Parliament against the $300 million TAFE funding cuts by the Baillieu government.

Before Victoria University axed its boatbuilding course at Newport, it received $3.4 million Labor funding to relocate the course to Seaworks at Williamstown. Those plans fell through, supposedly due to a decline in enrolments. VU says next year’s budget will be cut by $32 million.

The Weekly has seen dozens of testimonials sent to the BIAV in support of the continuation of the VU’s boatbuilding courses due to terminate at year’s end. The testimonials come from many Hobsons Bay businesses and from as far as South Australia and Tasmania.

BIAV grants liaison officer Ben Scullin said Gordon TAFE in Geelong had developed a business case which indicated the cost of picking up boatbuilding was $700,000.

So his association approached Manufacturing Minister Richard Dalla-Riva and Higher Education and Skills Minister Peter Hall for support with the Gordon TAFE proposal.

“The Manufacturing Minister’s basically ignored us,” Mr Scullin said. “The Higher Education and Skills Minister basically said it’s incumbent on industry, it’s a private issue basically.”

After the Gordon TAFE case fell through, Mr Scullin said boatbuilding apprentices had abandoned ship. He said unless boatbuilding continued to be taught in Victoria, apprentices would have to go interstate, change trades or become unskilled labour. Victoria’s marine industry is worth about $2 billion a year. “We have the same impact on the economy as Melbourne Airport. Now, that’s gone.

“You won’t be able to fix your boat because it will become prohibitively expensive.

“You just won’t be able to build boats in Victoria unless they’re special one-offs and you won’t be able to grow businesses here.”

Mr Scullin said the association had been forced to come up with short and long-term solutions to save the boatbuilding trade. “The short-term [solution] was to stop the hemorrhaging of apprentices. So we’re in talks with a training provider to become an auspiced training provider, so we’re going to employ a teacher.”

Mr Scullin said there could be three boatbuilding campuses. “There’s a New Zealand training model for boatbuilding that’s the best in the world and they split the training between wood and composites and aluminium.”

Government spokesman James Martin said boatbuilding would benefit from the government putting an extra $1 billion into training over the next four years.

“Boatbuilding is one area that will benefit from this increased funding, with subsidies for certificate III in marine construction, certificate III in boating services, certificate IV in engineering and certificate IV in boating services all increasing by up to 12 per cent.”

Asked where boatbuilding students could enrol next year, Mr Martin did not respond.

Williamstown MP Wade Noonan said VU had cut boatbuilding and about 40 other courses as a result of losing a third of its government funding.

“There’s no doubt that the boatbuilding industry is staring down the barrel because of the Baillieu government’s TAFE cuts.”

Mr Noonan yesterday lodged in Parliament a petition signed by nearly 700 constituents opposed to TAFE funding cuts. Statewide, 30,000 signed the petition.
Big blow: Wade Noonan, with a box of petitions which were presented to Parliament yesterday.

Pictures: Michael Copp

Dying trade? Boatbuilder Greg Blunt at his Williamstown workshop.
High-flier
Blair’s air addiction

BEN JONES

BLAIR Howe doesn’t have much interest in teaching anyone to fly himself, but the owner of Bunbury Flying School has an enormous passion for having people “catch his disease”.

The love of flying and aeroplanes is a disease to the 68-year-old, who has more than a dozen planes in his hangars at Bunbury Airport and has been collecting for more than 20 years.

“Some people get into grog, some get into drugs and then there’s people like me who are addicted to planes,” he said.

However, he said the majority of people who came in to learn never got past getting their solo pilot’s licence.

“We get people show up here at 65 years of age who want to learn to fly but don’t want to sit in a classroom and learn the theory,” he said.

Blair had always been around aircraft when he was growing up with two uncles flying in the airforce in World War II — one flying Spitfires and the other Lancaster bombers, while his father managed an aerial fertiliser spreading business on New Zealand’s North Island where the aircraft were used to spread fertiliser over hilly countryside where traditional fertilising methods were impractical.

The real start for Blair, though, was when he started a business in Mount Magnet and was doing business with customers “700 miles down a dirt road” and was sick of driving for hours on end.

Instead he headed to Perth and signed up for his private pilot’s licence and the rest, as they say, is history.

Blair is well known around Bunbury for his 68-year-old, nine tonne, restored DC3 which sits on his property in Myalup, but its the rest of his fleet which give the general public the chance to learn to fly themselves.

He is not really interested in teaching and does not even have his instructor’s licence, but it’s enough for him to know that there are other people who share his passion for aeroplanes and flying.

These days the flying school has about 75 students off and on with around seven or eight full-time students. That’s all set to change next year when the school will be able to take students from private licences all the way through to their commercial pilot’s licence.

It takes someone with a special passion to learn to fly these days, with the process of obtaining one’s pilot’s licence easily reaching more than $100,000.

But with pilot training soon to come under the Government’s HECS scheme used by university students to pay for their studies, the process is going to get a lot easier, and Blair said he was happy there would be more students coming through the school.

For him, what matters is more people getting the thrill of flying and feeding their own love for aeroplanes.

“Some people get into grog, some get into drugs and then there’s people like me who are addicted to planes.”
Blair Howe’s Bunbury Flying School’s hangar contains some wonderful flying machines including ultralights, aerobatic and sight-seeing aircraft. PICTURE: BEN JONES
SWAN ORDERS FREEZE ON $2BN IN HANDOUTS AS LABOR TACKLES BUDGET REVENUE SHORTFALL

Razor gang targets federal grants

EXCLUSIVE

DENNIS SHANAHAN
DAVID UREN

THOUSANDS of federal grants promised to groups ranging from community bodies to universities are at risk as the government’s razor gang seeks billions of dollars in budget savings to offset the sharp downturn in revenue.

The Australian has learned that the Gillard government has imposed an across-the-board clamp on an estimated $2 billion a year in federal grants after cabinet this week received its latest updates on the budget position.

The order for ministers to review all grants and strictly control any funding that has not been already paid or contracted came at Monday night’s cabinet meeting.

The meeting was held before Labor’s decision to dump the $15-a-tonne floor price for carbon from 2015, the crunching of two dental schemes for a “large saving” and Julia Gillard’s departure for the Pacific Islands Forum in the Cook Islands.

The clamp on politically sensitive grants, which number in the thousands and can be vital for community groups in MPs’ electorates, has some ministers concerned about a new backlash for an already unpopular government. Other ministers are also concerned the high cost of commitments to the national disability insurance scheme and the upcoming Gonski school education reforms are unsustainable in the long term as government revenue continues to fall. But the tight control on spending from Wayne Swan is designed to keep the government on track to meet its promise of a surplus, forecast at $1.5 billion, in the 2012-13 budget.

Freezing and assessing grants is a traditional method of treasurers’ razor gangs to “check under every log” when trying to cut government spending.

The biggest source of pressure on the budget is the plunge in commodity prices, particularly for the nation’s iron ore exports.

Mr Richardson said the damage to revenue caused by the fall in commodity prices was being compounded by the continuing strength of the Australian dollar.

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Razor gang eyes grants as Swan orders freeze on handouts

Continued from Page 1

“This is hurting company profits, superannuation taxes, and both the minerals and the petroleum resource rent taxes, while capital gains tax, across various revenue heads, is still in a hole,” he said.

Mr Richardson said it was not yet certain that the deficit this year would be in the order of $10bn, as some economists have suggested, but he said the outlook for 2013-14 was even worse. It would take until the following year for the full impact of the downturn in commodity prices to be felt.

While revenue is weakening, there are new pressures on spending. The new Pacific Solution to the asylum-seeker problem carries a heavy cost. According to the expert panel, the cost of re-establishing a processing centre in Nauru will be between $1.2bn and $1.4bn, while the centre in Manus Island in Papua New Guinea would be about $900m over the forward estimates.

Immigration Minister Chris Bowen said the expansion in the humanitarian intake would cost $1.3bn over the budget period, with a $50m cost this year.

The new dental scheme announced yesterday will eventually cost only slightly more than the scheme it replaces. However, the existing chronic dental health scheme, which is costing about $1bn a year, is not in the budget forward estimates as the government made a policy decision to cut it in 2008 that it has been unable to get through the Senate.

As a result, the new scheme will have a budget impact over the four-year budget estimate period of about $2.5bn, although this will not start to be felt until the second half of 2013-14. This will have to be offset by savings to prevent damage to the budget bottom line.

Mr Richardson said the new budget costs would be difficult to manage, because the public sector was already trying to achieve 4 per cent efficiency savings to help hold costs steady. “The stronger the economic headwinds, the harder is the task to hold the line on expenditure.”

Bank of America Merrill Lynch chief economist Saul Eslake said that the difficult budget outlook had not stopped either the government or the opposition from floating open-ended and potentially very expensive commitments, including the NDIS, increased funding of schools, and, in the case of the Coalition, the replacement of carbon tax with an expensive direct action plan and the promise of personal income tax cuts.

Coalition finance spokesman Andrew Robb said it was no surprise that commodity prices were falling. “The terms of trade (the difference between export and import prices) are 40 per cent higher now than they were in the Howard years, which the government claims to be the golden era for tax revenue,” he said.

“The terms of trade don’t have to collapse — they only have to come back 30 per cent or so and we’re looking at $50bn to $60bn deficits for the next three or four years.”
JOHN ROSS

A NEW approach to trade training will drag Australia out of a "time-served" model by changing the way apprentices are taught, managed and paid.

The federal government has teamed up with the Australian Industry Group on a $9 million project in which engineering apprentices could qualify before the traditional four years.

More than 3000 budding fitters, machinists, toolmakers, welders and sheet-metal workers at 10 colleges in six states will be trained on the competency-based model, which rates apprentices on skills rather than time spent learning.

Federal Skills Minister Chris Evans said even though competency-based training had been around for 20 years the time-served model dominated. "Apprentices who are keen and doing well feel frustrated if they don't get rewarded for that effort," he said.

AiG chief executive Innes Willox said the time-based approach was one of the reasons a third of apprentices dropped out in their first year. "They feel they're just serving time," he said.

AiG education and training director Megan Lilley said the obstacles included a training system based on a four-year timetable and employer concerns that speeding up training meant "dumbing down" apprentices.

Senator Evans said industrial obstacles had also been a sticking point, with employers keen on lengthy apprenticeships. "That's part of what encourages employers to take on apprentices, not having to pay full tradesman's rates," he said.

The project relies on an award that replaces first, second, third and fourth-year pay rates with apprentices graduating to the next stage once they have the necessary skills. While they could finish in less than the four years, some could take longer.

University of Melbourne skills expert Leesa Wheelahan said fast-tracked apprenticeships could work for mature-aged apprentices but not school-leavers. "Learning how to be an electrician or something like that isn't just a matter of ticking off the competencies," she said. "Learning has to be become embodied so that when apprentices look at something they just know what to do and don't have to invoke theory in their heads. The idea you can just speed that up is a bit silly."

Senator Evans said the average age of apprentices was about 23 and most had prior experience.
Anger over the state government’s $300 million-a-year TAFE cuts continues to simmer, with petitions calling for the decision to be reversed securing 30,000 signatures.

Labor MPs will table the petitions in Parliament this week.

Already 550 jobs have gone from the TAFE sector, with more than 2000 expected to go by the start of next year. About 80 per cent of courses will be affected.

Some students will face massive increases in their course fees, with at least five TAFEs warning they will lose more than $25 million each including Victoria University, which operates campuses across the western suburbs.

In June, the university’s deputy vice-chancellor, Professor Anne Jones, said it had been forced to make difficult decisions.

From next year, animal studies, boatbuilding and events and tourism courses won’t offered by the university, while those in sports and fitness, hospitality, business and financial services will be significantly reduced.

“These decisions were made in a swift and thorough manner to ensure our ongoing viability but also with the future structure of the university in mind,” she said.

TAFE provides a crucial, yet often undervalued pathway into the workforce. From carpentry to plumbing, hairdressing to youth work, the range of vocational education options is seemingly endless. For many Wyndham residents TAFE has played an important role in their lives, whether it be equipping them with the skills to get a job, retraining after retrenchment or simply broadening their knowledge.

There are fears the cuts could lead to the amalgamation or closure of some campuses. We can only hope the government decides to re-think it’s decision to force such fundamental changes to an integral part of our education system.

Cameron Tait is chief of staff at the Weekly.