

AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION DIGEST

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EDUCATION IN THE MEDIA

Academics want in on Rudd's plan

Bridie Smith, The Age, December 11, 2007

More than 140 senior academics have signed an open letter to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd over concerns that universities could be overlooked in Labor's "education revolution".

La Trobe University professor of philosophy and Academics Australia spokesman Andrew Brennan said that after a decade of under-funding universities had become so desperate for revenue that they were treating full-fee paying international students as "cash-crops", rather than focusing on providing quality courses.

Professor Brennan said this not only made local institutions vulnerable to outside forces such as the high Australian dollar, it could also see Australia's reputation as a desirable destination for foreign students collapse within a decade.

"The reason that overseas students keep coming is because of the prestige attached to having a degree from Australia," he said. "But if things continue the way they are, that won't last."

Foreign students represent about 25% of the student population.

Professor Brennan said federal funding had failed to keep up with the cost of educating students. He said because of this universities were increasingly reliant on full-fee paying international students.

The academics have also called on Labor to repeal the Howard government's voluntary student unionism legislation, reduce administrative costs and increase funding for research as well as fund postgraduate places.

Federal Education Minister Julia Gillard, who yesterday met the peak representative body for vice-chancellors, Universities Australia, said the Government wanted to "make sure that across the education spectrum we are investing in more resources".

Read the letter at <http://www.academics-australia.org>

Rudd urged to fix terror law limiting academic research

Guy Healy, The Australian, December 14, 2007

Kevin Rudd has been urged to repeal key parts of the Coalition's anti-terror laws that have compromised academic research and the long-term fight against terrorism.

Leading legal academic George Williams has told The Australian that laws enacted by the Howard government restrict free speech and legitimate academic enquiry.

"The irony is that government activities in seeking to restrict terrorism are compromising our ability to investigate its causes and thereby the long-term fight against terrorism," said Professor Williams, the UNSW Anthony Mason Professor of Public Law.

Legitimate research into terrorist organisations' motivations had been halted because of academics' fears of being prosecuted for associating with banned organisations, he said.

Professor Williams said academics could during their research or teaching be found to have committed an offence or brought in for questioning by ASIO.

While the legal risk of jail was low, the lack of clarity in the scope of the law combined with its potentially severe impact could lead to self-censorship, he said.

Professor Williams is calling for an exemption clause to protect legitimate academic enquiry.

In the lead-up to the election, Labor's then national security spokesman Arch Bevis said it was "very much in the national interest" that the work of academics into objectively understanding the causes and drivers of terrorism "continue and develop".

However, Professor Williams said: "Even a government with the best will in the world won't be able to address academics' concerns unless it changes the source of the problem, the over-broad laws of the previous Government."

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22923880-12149,00.html>

Maths, science students drown in debt

Guy Healy, The Australian, December 12, 2007

The country's deans of education have challenged the incoming Labor Government to provide basic detail on whether the \$111 million pre-election promise to boost student recruitment to maths and science faculties will help aspiring teachers who are already studying.

Australian Council of Deans of Education president Sue Willis told the HES yesterday that the deans welcomed the promise to effectively cut HECS payments for maths and science teachers by about \$3000 a year.

In one of the few substantial election promises concerning universities, Labor leader Kevin Rudd also promised to provide a further 50per cent reduction on such students' HECS fees if they stayed in maths and science after graduating.

"We welcome the recognition to address these issues, but since we haven't seen any detail we don't know whether it will come in time to assist young beginning teachers who have already racked up considerable debt," Professor Willis said.

Monash researcher Ian Dobson recently told the Australian Council of Deans of Science in a commissioned report that despite a significant increase in science enrolments in the period from 2002 to 2005, the long-term absolute decline in chemistry, physics and mathematics should ring alarm bells.

Dr Dobson, describing the extra charges as discriminatory, estimated that science teachers with a bachelor of science and a diploma of education were likely to enter the workforce with a HECS debt about \$5000 higher than an equivalent bachelor of arts plus DipEd graduate as a direct result of differential HECS, introduced from 1997.

Read more at <http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,22909059-12149,00.html>

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GLOBAL WARMING: The Defining Challenge of Our Time

Will Climate Change Bring an End to the Platinum Age?

Professor Ross Garnaut - extracts from his recent public lecture at ANU

The interaction between strong and broadly-based global economic growth and risks of climate change is throwing out the defining challenge of our time. Our response to the challenge will shape the prospects for security and prosperity through the twenty first century.

... It is now clearer than it has ever been that the natural course of global development is for more and more of the world's people to aspire to, and to realise, living standards similar to those in the advanced economies.

The acceleration of global economic growth would be an unambiguously good thing if it were not for the inconvenient truth, that the scaling up of the patterns of life of the developed countries to the populous parts of the developing world is not sustainable without major changes in the relationship between economic activity and the environment.

The inconvenient truth has its origins in the dependence of established patterns of modern economic growth on the utilisation of fossil fuels, especially in the energy and transport sectors.

Global fossil-fuel carbon emissions from 2004 to 2006 grew at an annual rate of 3.1%, a rate in excess of that anticipated in many of the international climate change assessments, including the scenarios outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (the IPCC) which were used in the modelling for the Stern Review.

While increasing demand in recent years, and limitations on expansion of production, have lifted oil and other energy prices to exceptional levels, impending scarcity is unlikely to provide a substantial constraint on coal and total fossil fuel consumption for the foreseeable future.

There is no necessary reason why the relationship between fossil fuel emissions and economic growth will change markedly without effective policy interventions.

The recent effects of higher oil prices are instructive. Two highly emissions-intensive alternatives - coal and synthetic liquid hydro-carbons (derived from coal, tar sands, shale or natural gas) - are expanding their proportionate global roles. The average amount of carbon per unit of energy used has actually been increasing in the large, rapidly growing developing economies.

It is neither desirable, nor remotely feasible, to seek the removal of the risk of dangerous climate change through reduction in global ambitions for higher material living standards. The challenge is to remove the link between economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions.

Enough work has been done by many people for us to be reasonably confident that there are economically and technologically feasible means of removing this link. But the work has also shown that the design and effective implementation of policies that secure the necessary outcomes present immense challenges to national and international polities.

... In Australia, the CSIRO and Australian Bureau of Meteorology's latest projections under this A1FI scenario show warming of 2oC by 2070 is virtually certain for most of Australia, and highly likely for the south coast, while there is a 30% chance of exceeding 4oC in inland areas.

"Business as usual" is carrying the world towards high risks of dangerous climate change faster than seemed to be the case a short while ago. The need for an effective policy response is more urgent than we thought.

Read more at

[http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/WebObj/GarnautPublicLectureANU29November2007/\\$File/Garnaut%20Public%20Lecture%20ANU%2029%20November%202007.pdf](http://www.garnautreview.org.au/CA25734E0016A131/WebObj/GarnautPublicLectureANU29November2007/$File/Garnaut%20Public%20Lecture%20ANU%2029%20November%202007.pdf)

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HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Protecting Children from Tobacco Campaign

This is a brief end-of-year update on the Protecting Children from Tobacco campaign.

We've had some success this year in pushing the campaign aims forward. Notably in Tasmania, parliament has approved making cars carrying children smoke-free by law, to begin next year - joining SA with this law.

Both Queensland and NSW are now considering this move.

Queensland has a current review of smoke-free places, including cars carrying children. I'd strongly urge you to make a submission online before January 31 at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atods/tobaccolaws/2007review.asp>

Disappointingly, the Qld review is not specifically considering banning retail tobacco display - perhaps the question "Are other reforms required?" might be an opportunity to express a view on this omission.

Approaches to governments from a wide range of organisations always improve our chances for success sooner rather than later. We know we are up against well-resourced and tobacco-friendly retailer groups who are actively misleading governments and applying considerable pressure on them. We should lose no opportunity to argue strongly to counter this.

Our webpages, including links to all our factsheets, provide research evidence. This year we have seen important new studies - for example the latest Wakefield et al study showing impact on undermining quit attempts.

Once again, many thanks for your support - please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any suggestions, questions or problems.

Stafford Sanders

Communications Officer

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Read the campaign news page at http://www.ashaust.org.au/lv3/action_POS.htm

Read the latest research at http://www.ashaust.org.au/lv3/action_POS.htm#RESEARCH%20EVIDENCE

Read more about ASH at <http://www.ashaust.org.au>

Half our six-year-olds have cavities

AAP December 17, 2007

Children in the African nation of Uganda have better oral health than those in Australia, a new report has found.

Overall, Australian 12-year-olds ranked eighth best out of 44 countries, including 18 OECD nations, in a comparison of the number of children with decayed, missing and filled permanent teeth.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report found local children's oral health was better than in New Zealand, Greece, Norway and Germany, but worse than in The Netherlands, England, Sweden, Denmark - and Uganda.

The institute's Jason Armfield said fluoridated water was a major reason why Australian children enjoyed better oral health than many other countries, but there was still room for improvement.

"Locally, oral health problems in children are still evident," he said.

Almost half the country's six-year-olds still suffer cavities - an average of two - in their baby teeth.

More than four in ten 12-year-olds had cavities in their permanent teeth.

The report also confirmed the Australian state with the worst teeth is Queensland, the only state that does not universally fluoridate its water.

Young children in Queensland and the Northern Territory had the highest number of decayed, missing or filled baby teeth, while those in Western Australia and South Australia had the lowest.

Queensland - along with the ACT and Tasmania - also had the worst record for rotten permanent teeth among children, while South Australia and the Northern Territory were the best.

"Children from areas where drinking water contained negligible fluoride had poorer dental health than did children from areas with either naturally or artificially fluoridated water," the institute found, adding that state variation was also due to the quality of dental services available.

Hobart and Canberra began fluoridating their water in 1964, followed by Perth and Sydney in 1968, Adelaide in 1971, Darwin in 1972 and Melbourne in 1977.

The Queensland government last week announced it would follow the other states, ensuring 80 per cent of Queenslanders would be drinking fluoridated water within two years, growing to 95 per cent by 2012.

The institute examined data from the 2002 Child Dental Health Survey, which covered more than 136,000 children aged four to 15 from all states and territories except New South Wales.

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TEACHER ISSUES

Alarm as teachers dwindle

Guy Healy, The Australian, December 12 2007

Entry scores for future teachers are predicted to fall despite criticism they are already too low, as demand for teaching places plummets across the nation.

Applications for teaching places had plunged by 30 per cent over two years in Queensland, and Western Australia is unlikely to fill places for the coming year.

A leading educator, University of Queensland academic Ken Wiltshire, said teaching wasn't "attracting enough knowledgeable or intelligent people".

"It's a crisis. The tertiary entrance ranks are too low. The status of the profession is too low. We need to be talking it up and offering performance pay," said Professor Wiltshire, who ran the Queensland Government's curriculum review.

Latest figures for Queensland show applications this year were down almost 23 per cent on 2006, on top of a 7 per cent to 8 per cent drop the previous year, adding up to a total drop of 30 per cent.

In Victoria, applications for entry in 2007 and 2008 were down 12 per cent, after increasing by 2.5 per cent the previous year.

The numbers in WA fell by 15 per cent between 2006 and this year, and there is a further 2 per cent decline in entrants for next year, which means the available places cannot be filled. At the University of Western Australia, teaching is reportedly at 75 per cent capacity.

In NSW the picture is mixed: some institutions have indicated double-digit drops in applications, while others are holding steady.

Steve Dinham, research director (teaching and leadership) at the Australian Council for Educational Research, described the latest figures as "quite startling", as demand had been building strongly in the previous five years, and this was reflected in rising entry requirements.

Potential student teachers were sensitive to media portrayals of the profession, especially press reports about violent and disengaged students, he said. He suggested the ABC's hit drama *Summer Heights High* might have promoted a "that looks too tough for me" effect.

UWA education dean Bill Loudon said there had been numerous government inquiries into teacher education since 1979, but to surprisingly little effect.

"Teaching is looking less attractive as a profession than it has been in the past. The profession and employers will have to work much harder on persuading the kinds of altruistic young people who have always entered teaching that it's a worthy occupation," Professor Loudon said.

He said key research had shown that the proportion of women from the top 40 per cent of ability entering teaching had halved during the past two decades as they chose other professions, and the proportion from the second lowest 20 per cent going into the profession had doubled.

Australian Council of Deans of Education president Sue Willis said the most important thing Education Minister Julia Gillard could do was to read the report of the inquiry into teacher education, tabled in parliament last February, and "use that as a starting point".

Professor Willis also hoped Ms Gillard would revisit the embargo on variable HECS for education and boost the base funding for teacher education.

ACER chief executive Geoff Masters said it was well known that "if you really want to make a difference in schooling, you need to improve the quality of teaching by attracting more and better teachers, and keeping them".

"Under present arrangements, they hit a ceiling at about \$60,000 to \$70,000, and go into management or go outside teaching," Professor Masters said. "But we need to pay our better teachers to stay in the classroom (and) to continue to develop as highly accomplished teachers."

The Business Council of Australia has called for an increase in top teacher salaries to \$130,000. Barry McGaw, former Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development education director and now director of the University of Melbourne Education Research Institute, said "the barrier to entry isn't the cost of training, it's the reward upon graduation. Maximum pay is reached (by) about age 30 and is only 1.7 times the starting salary."

Teachers 'bullied more' in public schools

Tamara Davis, The Australian, December 15 2007

Teachers at government schools are bullied more frequently than their colleagues in the independent and Catholic sectors, with a survey suggesting the problem is rife in Western Australia and Queensland.

Preliminary findings from a national survey conducted by the University of New England found government teachers were commonly criticised for their work, excluded from decision-making, threatened, intimidated, shoved and sexually harassed.

The voluntary internet survey attracted more than 800 responses, with 99.8 per cent reporting they had been bullied at school by fellow teachers, principals or parents.

Senior lecturer in business, economics and public policy at UNE, Dan Riley, said the results showed that a disturbing proportion of teachers were being bullied regularly.

"Government schools are not very attentive to bullying," he said. "Claims made (by bullied teachers) often take a long time to be investigated or are ignored altogether."

The survey found bullying was less common in Catholic and independent schools. The most common instance reported at independent schools was insulting emails.

Most complaints were made by teachers in NSW, about 40 per cent, but teachers in Western Australia and Queensland were over-represented in the survey.

The acting federal president of the Australian Education Union, Angelo Gavrielatos, stressed that the survey was voluntary. "It needs to be recognised that the respondents had self-selected to participate in the survey ... although the issue of bullying is of concern in any workplace, and this is no exception," he said.

SCIENCE EDUCATION

Huge gulf separating science students

Nicola Berkovic, The Australian, December 14 2007

Teachers in NSW have broken ranks with their colleagues elsewhere in Australia to criticise the standard of science education amid concerns many students are falling behind.

Australian students performed strongly compared with their OECD counterparts in the Program for International Student Assessment released last week.

The PISA test of 15-year-olds showed Australian students were in equal fourth place for science, behind Finland, Hong Kong and Canada.

The results were an improvement on Australian students' sixth-place ranking in science in the previous PISA test, in 2003.

But NSW Science Teachers Association vice-president Anna Davis said the strong overall results masked a deep chasm that existed between those at the top and bottom of the class.

"Whilst first impressions may suggest Australia is doing well in science education, a closer study of the results reveals this is not the case at all," she said.

According to the PISA results, about 13 per cent of Australian science students failed to meet the minimum level required to participate adequately in the workforce.

Certain disadvantaged groups performed particularly poorly on scientific literacy, with 40 per cent of indigenous students and 27 per cent of students from remote areas failing to meet the OECD baseline.

Ms Davis said the report showed the gap between Australian students of the same age could be equivalent to several years of schooling.

The NSW Science Teachers Association has also raised concerns about students' attitudes towards science.

Ms Davis said the PISA study showed Australian students had a lower interest in science than the OECD average.

"If Australia is to be well served by science in the future, more has to be done to make science education relevant and meaningful to all young Australians," she said.

Ms Davis said improved professional development for science teachers was key to addressing these issues.

She said this needed to be coupled with adequate resources for science teachers.

"Inequalities in resourcing as well as inequalities in opportunities for professional development of their teachers result in the patchy delivery of science syllabuses," she said.

RESEARCH: UNESCO REPORTS

Stopping Violence in Schools: What Works?

12 December 2007

As part of UNESCO's follow-up to the UN Secretary-General's World Report on Violence against Children, this current report focuses on violence in schools and aims to increase visibility on the issue. It provides an update on the implementation of the World Report's recommendations with regard to preventing school violence.

The expert meeting report highlights good practices on stopping violence in schools from specialists from all regions. It calls for an internationally co-ordinated effort in research, data collection and advocacy. It reiterates a full commitment to strengthen and enforce legal and policy mechanisms that protect the rights of children.

UNESCO is currently working on two main recommendations: an international media advocacy campaign on violence in schools and expanding the role of the International Observatory on Violence in Schools through a web link with the UNESCO portal and regular e-newsletters.

The 2006 World Report painted a detailed picture of the nature, extent and causes of violence against children in general and proposed actions to prevent and respond to it.

Read more at http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=55046&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All

10 December 2007

This new publication is a joint UNESCO and UNICEF framework for the realization of children's right to education and rights within education.

The result of intensive collaboration between UNESCO and UNICEF, the publication brings together the current thinking and practice on human rights-based approach in the education sector.

It presents key issues and challenges in rights-based approaches and provides a framework for policy and programme development from the level of the school up to the national and international levels.

Read more at http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=55006&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Global Perspectives on Teacher Learning: Improving Policy and Practice

This publication is the 84th in the Fundamentals of Educational Planning series. It looks at all forms of teacher learning, formal and informal, from teachers' own early schooling, through their training, and on to the end of their teaching career.

It argues that to formulate policy and design effective programmes for teacher preparation and professional development, the whole spectrum of teacher learning must be considered.

Much recent research and fresh knowledge have been brought together for the first time in this publication by the authors John Schwille, Martial Dembélé in collaboration with Jane Schubert.

Read more at http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=53219&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

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REMINDEES

8 February - **Quantitative Analysis of Teaching and Learning Forum** - Melbourne - http://tlu.ecom.unimelb.edu.au/contact_us/register.html

14-15 February - **International Conference on Educational Leadership** - Wollongong - <http://www.uow.edu.au/conferences/educonf08/index.html>

3-6 June - **International Conference on Learning** - Chicago, USA - <http://www.LearningConference.com>

26-28 June - **World Education Forum SA International Conference** - Adelaide - <http://www.infront.com.au/evt/wef/>

25-27 July - **NSW Federation of Parents & Citizens Associations State Conference** - Albury - <http://www.pandc.org.au/>

27-29 August - **Society for Provision of Education in Rural Australia Conference** - Melbourne

20-21 October - **ACSSO National Education Conference** - Brisbane - <http://www.acsso.org.au>

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RESOURCES

Fundraising Directory - www.fundraisingdirectory.com.au Also: www.fetesandfestivals.com.au

Drug Awareness Website - www.drugawareness.com.au/

Australian Schools Directory - www.australianschoolsdirectory.com.au

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