

Briefs...

Pinching post-grad's pay

Universities will claw back some of the extra living money they have been paying research students if the federal Government boosts the postgraduate stipend, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations says.

CAPA president Nigel Palmer said he believed "a number of institutions" already had decided to recoup any such savings by reducing top-up payments to research students with commonwealth scholarships. He said the savings should be reinvested in university-funded scholarships.

Federal Innovation Minister Kim Carr recently said it was the Government's "ambition to increase the value of the postgraduate stipend as budget circumstances permit".

The APA annual stipend is \$20,427, near the poverty line.

"It's madness to be losing tomorrow's researchers due to inadequate income support today," Palmer said.

Overcrowded lectures

Overcrowding at Victorian universities is so

bad that more than half the students say they have sat on the floor at lectures.

A survey by the National Union of Students found that lectures were attended by up to 300 people and 40 per cent of students said lecture facilities were unable to meet the educational needs of the people crammed into them.

Student sleep out

Around Australia students slept out recently as part of the National Union of Students Demand A Better Future: Less Talk More Action campaign.

Union president, David Barrow said "Students are awaiting Labor's announcement about the funding and reform of student-income-support".

"While students aren't chronically homeless, it is hard to expect quality educational outcomes if students are under housing stress" he said.

"Reform of student income support is long overdue. Unsurprisingly the global financial crisis has made the situation worse by hitting student jobs hard (low paid casual jobs in hospitality, retail and services)" he said.

Overseas students still coming here

"There is a flight to security through tertiary training in uncertain times"

The \$15.5 billion export education boom continues to defy the global recession, showing record annual growth of 20.8 per cent in the number of international students in universities and vocational colleges for the key March enrolment period.

In one of the few bright spots for the economy, universities set another record with 21.7 per cent growth in new students in March, driven by a 40 per cent leap in enrolments by Indian students and a 19.6 per cent jump among Chinese students.

University leaders welcomed the surprise figures, saying they were "remarkable".

Universities have suffered a calamitous \$800 million loss in investment income

since world finance markets collapsed last September, with the University of Melbourne saying it had been ravaged by the financial crisis.

Universities Australia chief executive Glenn Withers was reported saying that vice-chancellors had been "worried" that overseas demand would be down as the recession hit the finances of Asian families.

"(But) there is a flight to security through tertiary training in uncertain times -- both domestically and globally," Withers said.

He attributed the strong result to the quality of Australian education, and an even greater priority that Asian families, traditionally great investors in their children's education, were making in education in uncertain times.

A spokeswoman for Education Minister Julia Gillard said the figures were "certainly encouraging for the sector in these difficult economic times and show the strength of the sector".

Export education was Australia's third-largest export behind coal and iron ore, the spokeswoman said.

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