

Call to solve poverty

Briefs...

“It’s really difficult living independently as a student”

Pressure is mounting on the Federal Government to tackle student poverty, as figures reveal a stark reality.

According to vice-chancellor Glyn Davis, 440 students at Melbourne Uni are in effect homeless, “hot-bedding” with relatives or friends because they could not afford their own residence.

Painting a grim picture of student life, Davis said a recent analysis found the majority of students were studying part time, with many working more than 20 hours a week to cope

with rising living costs.

Vacancy rates within a four-kilometre radius of the CBD were around just 0.8%, making it even harder for students to get accommodation, he said.

“At the University of Melbourne — a university that has the highest proportion of (former) private school students ... in the nation — we know we’ve got 440 students who are currently homeless,” Professor Davis said. “It is clearly hard, and getting harder, to be a student.”

Australian Scholarship Group figures show, for example, that an average teaching student in a share house will face costs of almost \$100,000 over the next four years, including an average \$5000 in accommodation costs a year, \$5000 in groceries, \$1600 in transport, and \$5000 in HECS tuition costs.

One proposal being put forward is to expand HECS so that students can take out loans to cover growing living costs.

But the proposal, is under fire from students and the academic union as a recipe for increased debt. The National Union of Students has warned that a similar system in New Zealand has led to some student debt doubling or trebling.

“It isn’t a sensible policy,” NUS president Angus McFarland said. “It preys on vulnerable students.”

He said the federal Government should be focusing on improving access to Austudy and the Youth Allowance by reducing the age of independence from 25 to 18 and increasing the parental income threshold.

“The reality is it’s really difficult living independently as a student and it’s getting worse, particularly in the major capital cities,” McFarland said.

“Students are missing class because of work commitments which means students aren’t getting their money’s worth for their degrees.”

Summer study, winter travel

Deakin has become the first Victorian university to introduce a trimester system with the major objective to provide flexibility for students. It aims to allow students to study in three trimesters per year and complete a three year bachelor degree in two calendar years or a 12 unit Masters degree in one calendar year. Alternatively take time off trimester 2, for instance and still finish in three years.

RMIT’s eco-friendly campus

RMIT’s new \$56 million Design Hub building in Melbourne will incorporate environmentally responsible design with an outer skin of 16,000 sand blasted glass cells, some of which will be photovoltaic solar power collectors. Fresh air enters rooms through floor vents, reducing the reliance on airconditioning.

Fewer VCE graduates enrol

A growing number of public school students in Melbourne’s west are enrolling into university, as more from the east take on trades and apprenticeships, according to new Victorian Government research.

TAFE loans could go national

Victoria’s proposals for a HECS-like loan system for TAFE and its plan for a shake-up of the sector could be a model for a national system, state Skills and Workforce Participation Minister Jacinta Allan was reported saying.

Generation gap not so wide

The University and Beyond 2007 report, released by Graduate Careers Australia found that students and graduates of today share with previous generations an interest in good training and development and interesting, challenging work.

Business of growth



RMIT is set to invest more than \$200 million in two separate developments that will transform the northern end of Melbourne’s CBD.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Margaret Gardner, said the developments were a key part of RMIT’s \$500 million capital works program to upgrade and consolidate its business teaching and research facilities.

Gardner said the \$180 million Swanston Academic Building was the largest investment in academic facilities ever undertaken by the University and the

project would consolidate the RMIT Quarter at the top end of Swanston Street.

“RMIT is also spending \$23 million refurbishing the Emily McPherson building, a magnificent National Trust property that will be home to our Graduate School of Business and Juris Doctor program,” she said.

“As a global university with its heart in the city of Melbourne, we have a proud history of leading-edge architecture and we see ourselves as an essential part of the city, reflecting and shaping its future.”



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