

Briefs...

Student funding up

Student services at Swinburne have been given a \$600,000 funding boost to enhance student life on campus. The funding will be introduced for 2009 by the Swinburne Student Amenities Association (SSAA) and will benefit students at each of Swinburne's campuses.

"Swinburne is committed to improving student life and making time on campus more enjoyable and engaging for our students," said SSAA CEO, Andrew McFarland.

"We are continually looking to improve the student services on campus and this extra funding will allow us to increase our current budget for social and cultural activities by 100 per cent."

The investment will also go towards scholarships for student leaders, additional SSAA staff, student IT support and a new student legal service.

Brain drain plan

Australia's richest research fellowships have been thrown open to international talent, a move the Federal Government hope will end the "brain drain" anxiety. Australian Laureate Fellowships will replace the Federation Fellowships, which restricted the number of foreign applicants. Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Minister Kim Carr said the new \$239 million scheme would begin this month.

"We're trying to attract the best researchers, irrespective of their nationality," he said.

Indian crackdown

An immigration crackdown will make it harder to recruit students from India, the fast-growing big market in Australia's \$12.5 billion education export industry.

Although, an Immigration Department spokesperson said "genuine applicants had nothing to fear from the changes".

There were 65,000 Indian students in Australia in the year to June. Though they make up a smaller market than the Chinese, the Indian growth rate is much higher: student numbers grew by 55%, compared with 19% from China.

The China market, however, benefits in the latest revision of immigration risk, which is based on factors including rates of document fraud, visa overstay and asylum claims and non-skilled residency for a spouse.

African student guide



Victoria University has produced a DVD and booklet about the Australian Workplace for Horn of Africa students called *Working in Australia*.

The DVD has been recorded in English and four community languages – Dinka, Amharic, Somali and Arabic and aims to assist the transition of students from the Horn of African background into further study or work in Australia.

Graduates quality declines

The proportion of students from low socio-economic areas and the overall quality of university entrants have declined in recent years, according to a new book by an ACU economics lecturer Dr Sarah Wright.

An investigation into the equity and efficiency of Australia's higher education system studies the effect of changes in higher education policy including the impact of the rising level of the cost of higher education since 2004.

Wright found that there was a decline in the quality of university applicants and entrants in the period 2004 to 2007 and that the number

of students with university entrance scores between 50 and 60 had more than doubled during this time. Similarly, the proportion of students with scores of less than 50 receiving and accepting an offer to university had also increased.

The book also showed that there are only a small number of courses where the student contribution to their education actually reflects the true cost of the course. In 2008 students studying both law and business/commerce/economics degrees will pay HECS fees equal to 84 per cent of their total course costs while students becoming doctors and dentists are

paying fees equal to 35 per cent of the total course costs and those studying agriculture only 27 per cent.

"Under the current HECS system the Government is contributing relatively more funding to students studying in the areas of agriculture, physical science and visual and performing arts, than to the areas such as teaching, nursing, law and economics, despite the relatively higher unemployment rates in agriculture, physical science and visual and performing arts," Wright said.

"This in turn encourages universities to offer places in these discipline areas with relatively high unemployment

rates. This is not only worsening areas of skills shortage but also inefficiently allocating resources in the higher education sector.

"Overall the research showed that Australia's higher education system is inefficient and does not cater for the needs of the less-advantaged in society.

"Through my study, I found that Australia's higher education system is seriously underfunded compared to other OECD nations and does not reflect the benefits that a quality higher education system could bring to the nation."

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