

Give universities

more, say Greens

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Joanna Mather

The Greens party has labelled Labor "anti-academic" and called for an immediate funding rise for universities as hundreds of academic jobs come under threat in NSW.

Greens senator Lee Rhiannon gave notice late yesterday of a Senate motion calling for a 10 per cent rise in federal support per university student to stave off job losses and safeguard teaching quality. A vote is scheduled for today.

Senator Rhiannon's motion came after the National Tertiary Education Union claimed Macquarie University and the University of NSW were planning to join the University of Sydney in cutting staff.

On Monday, the University of Sydney blamed an enrolment downturn for plans to shed 230 academic and administrative jobs. Vice-chancellor Michael Spence said savings of \$28 million were needed in 2012.

Senator Rhiannon accused Labor of being as "anti-academic" as the previous Howard government. She said unease over job cuts was not confined to NSW, with losses also on the cards at La Trobe and the University of Melbourne. "The issue of the quality of education comes into this," she told the *Australian Financial Review*. "Clearly we've had an approach

under successive governments where university funding has been squeezed."

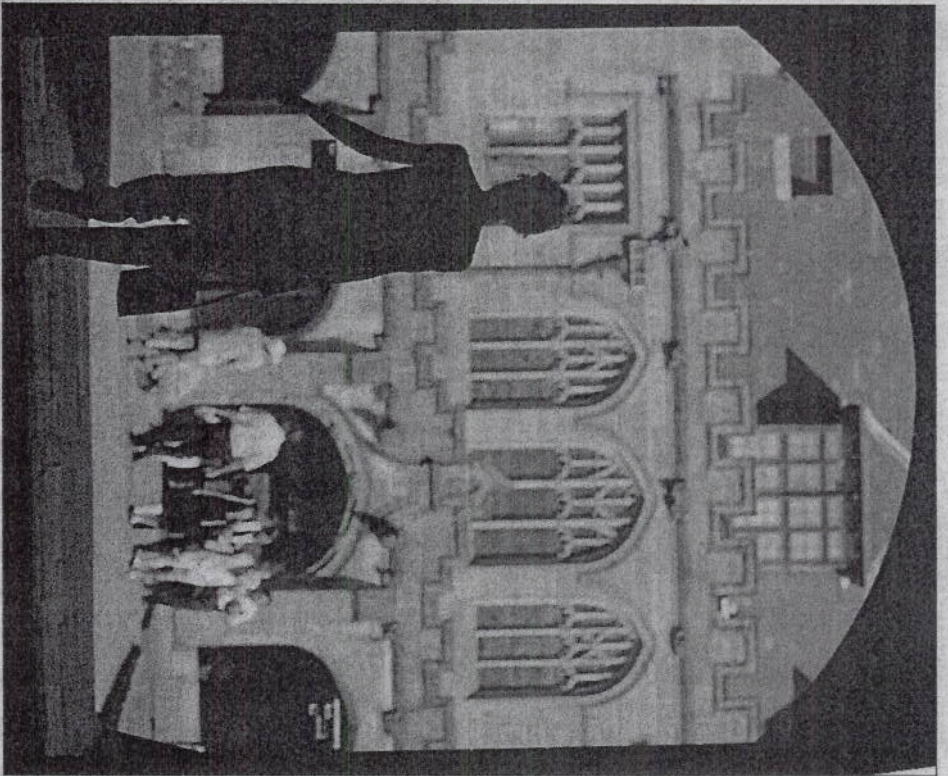
The Tertiary Education Union claims Macquarie University plans to reduce staff numbers by 50 and an unspecified number of jobs in UNSW's faculty of arts and social sciences are due to go. This was despite financial results for each showing surpluses of \$100 million or more for calendar year 2010, the latest figures available.

A row over surpluses has also erupted between federal Education Minister Chris Evans and peak body Universities Australia.

Universities Australia has taken exception to a report released by the minister earlier this month which showed universities recorded \$1.95 billion in surpluses in 2010. Senator Evans said the results meant universities should not expect any further injections of funding to emerge from a review of per student, or base, funding levels.

"I have been upfront with Australian university leaders that, in the current budget environment, new injections of funding for universities in response to the base funding review are not realistic," he said, adding that \$3.15 billion was being added to university budgets between 2011 and 2015 as a result of better indexation of government grants.

But Universities Australia chief Glenn Withers said the report was "unnecessary and misleading" and



Sydney University has cut staff to address budget shortfalls.

Photo: PAUL JONES

the true surplus figure was closer to \$680 million.

The report said government funding, including tuition loans for students, rose 8.9 per cent to \$12.4 billion in 2010. Eighteen institutions had surpluses exceeding \$50 million.

Dr Withers disputed figures given in the report. He said when one-off capital injections such as those resulting from the government's

recommended the project be funded with \$3.25 billion. Late last week Mr Betts wrote to Infrastructure Australia chief Rod Eddington to apologise and testify to the amount and quality of work undertaken in developing the regional rail link.
Jason Murphy

Workers win pay rise

Sydney Ferries workers won a 3.25 per cent pay rise over the next two years and a two-year guarantee that there will be no forced redundancies of permanent staff when a private operator takes over the fleet from the NSW government. Staff held a stop work meeting yesterday to discuss the plans to franchise the ferries. The Coalition is considering a shortlist of tenders for the initial eight-year contract, which will start next year.
Michaela Whitbourn with AAP

Boat intercepted

A boat carrying more than 100 passengers was intercepted off the coast of Western Australia after a phone call was made to WA police. HMAS Maitland reached the vessel north-east of Christmas Island yesterday afternoon. About 116 passengers and five crew are believed to be on board.
AAP

Refugees sew lips shut

Three Kurdish men at Darwin's immigration detention centre had sewn their lips shut, and two were in hospital after taking an overdose, refugee activists said. Three Falli Kurd asylum seekers from a region straddling the border of Iraq and Iran sewed their lips together on Monday, activists claimed. About 9pm on Monday, a fourth Kurdish asylum seeker was taken to hospital by ambulance after he took an overdose and collapsed. A fifth Kurdish asylum seeker was taken to hospital about 40 minutes later in a similar condition.
AAP

Fire ant fears