

Education paper proposes more uni exams

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Academics will go back to school and students face extra entry and exit exams under proposals in a paper issued by the federal Education Minister last night.

Striving for Quality is the second discussion paper issued as part of the Federal Government's increasingly controversial higher-education review.

Education Minister Brendan Nelson said a number of chal-

lenges must be faced if universities were to maintain the quality of teaching and learning for students.

The paper raised a number of reform options, including mandatory year-long teacher training courses for academics and additional compulsory exams for students at the beginning and end of their studies.

It also proposed a break between research and teaching, with some academics abandoning research altogether.

The report said, "It seems timely to challenge the as-

sumptions of the academic model of much of the past century and validate alternative academic career paths. Some academics may choose to specialise in teaching and become 'teaching-only' academics."

It said most academics were not professionally trained and that this should change.

"Given substantial public expenditures in universities, the broader community might expect that those who teach at university, like those who teach in schools or TAFEs,

are professionally trained." It said teaching strategies and curriculums needed to change to take into account of growing class sizes.

A shift from classes of 15 in 1994 to 18.5 in 2000 had changed the nature of study, with students spending more time outside the classroom, studying independently.

"Whether all students, particularly school leavers, are adequately prepared for this style of study is debatable," it said.

The report provoked an an-

gry response from university heads and the Federal Opposition.

President of the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee Professor Deryck Schreuder rejected the idea that research and teaching could be split. Good teaching was informed by great research, and the strong nexus between the two must not be broken.

Student testing already put in place by Government had attracted very little student interest and had produced no discernible benefits for them.

The AVCC was prepared to look at the issue, but feared it would simply result in more bureaucratic red tape.

Teaching quality was already monitored and maintained using a number of review systems already in place.

Universities needed more flexibility and freedom, not additional Government intrusiveness, he said.

Opposition Education spokeswoman Jenny Macklin said the report considered a range of simplistic measures to monitor, test, standardise

and make public teaching and learning outcomes — as if increased scrutiny in itself would improve quality.

It needed to acknowledge learning and teacher quality had been compromised because of the Howard Government's massive cuts to the sector — a cumulative \$3 billion out of universities since 1996. "Additional resources and increased investment will improve teacher and learning quality, not shiny reports to cover up Government cuts," she said.



Jenny Macklin: report hides Government cuts.