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SINCE 1855

Friday, January 12, 2001

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# Exam scandal harms Uni's image

## Sutton laments marks fallout

By ANNE BRANSDON

Wollongong's multi-million-dollar image as a destination of educational excellence would suffer because of allegations of grade altering to protect the lucrative international student market, according to Wollongong University vice-chancellor Professor Gerard Sutton.

An Australia Institute report, which will address the issue of whether the failing grades of high fee-paying students at Australian universities have been boosted, is due to be released in February.

Wollongong University Department of Bio-

logical Sciences associate professor Ted Steele has signed a statutory declaration stating that at least two of his honours students had their marks boosted from a fail to a high grade.

However, Prof Sutton said Dr Steele had not given him "a skerrick of evidence to support his claims" and categorically denied that any grade alteration had taken place at the university.

"There has been no change of marks and the proper departmental practices have been followed," Prof Sutton said.

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## Getting high on Adrenalin



Skateboarder Tim Saunders, 15, of Fairy Meadow, was among the hundreds of teenagers at Wollongong's biggest youth festival, Adrenalin, at Wollongong High School for Performing Arts yesterday. The festival continues today - see STORY P7.

Picture: SYLVIA VINCENT

## Take your junk, leave only footprints



A careless visitor in need of awareness-raising education nonchalantly walks away from her rubbish on an Illawarra beach. Picture: KEN ROBERTSON

By DANIELLE WOOLAGE

Visitors to the Illawarra and Shoalhaven are urged to leave only their footprints on the region's beaches this summer.

Beachgoers will be bombarded by a litter-prevention strategy over the next six months urging them to take their litter home with them.

The Leave Only Footprints campaign is a pilot project designed to raise community awareness, particularly among young people, about the environmental impact of littering on Illawarra and Shoalhaven beaches.

South Coast beaches have a

reputation for being some of the most pristine on the coast and Wollongong, Kiama and Shellharbour councils have stepped in to ensure they stay that way.

Kiama Council health and environment officer Leesa Swan said beaches in the region were some of "the loveliest" on the coast but they were also a likely place to find litter.

"Beaches are one of the highest-ranking rubbish hot spots," she said. "People frequently leave food wrappers, plastic bags and broken bottles on beaches."

"Broken bottle are a big problem because they are a danger to the

community and marine life often get entangled in or swallow plastic bags, which can prove fatal."

Ms Swan said stormwater pollution from catchments also ended up on beaches, contributing to beach pollution.

She said people aged 13-25 would be targeted by the strategy.

The Leave Only Footprints campaign kicks off on Sunday at 11am at Kiama Main Beach.

It is the first of four events designed to teach the importance of litter prevention. Other events: Mollmook Beach, January 21; Lake Illawarra, January 26; North Wollongong Beach, February 4.

# Grading changes rife: Prof

By ANNE BRANSDON

A University of Wollongong professor has claimed that altering grades in favour of paying overseas students is a national problem used by universities to secure government grants and subsidies.

Professor Ted Steele said the practice was a national epidemic and that he would be making a submission to the Federal Government Senate Inquiry in March which has been set up to investigate the claims of grade alteration and other anomalies in the education system.

"It affects many academics all over the country. My case is a very specific example and because it is clear cut it is getting all the attention," Prof Steele said.

Prof Steele has accused the university of changing the grades of two honours students that he had originally failed.

The accusations have been denied by university staff and in particular Vice-Chancellor Gerard Sutton.

"I am a public whistle blower," Prof Steele said.

"But, I am prepared to go ahead. The truth will stand on its own."

Head of the Biological Sciences Department Prof Rob Whelan said the assessments had been followed to the letter, with an examination of theses by three markers, including on external marker and a discussion by the departmental examination committee.

He also recognised that Prof Steele had been at the forefront of maintaining university standards.

He said in one of the cases that Dr Steele was concerned about was based on the external marker giving the student a lower mark than the university's markers. Dr Steele agreed with the lower mark.

"Ted supported the external examiner's view but there were no real grounds for modifying the mark. The student was given the fairest possible

## Scandal hits uni

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Prof Sutton said he was in no doubt that the university's competitors would use this issue to their advantage.

"There is no way of changing the negative impact that has occurred with these statements, other than to refute them like I am now," Prof Sutton said.

"But the damage is done because our international competitors will use it."

"Unfounded, unsupported, misleading claims of this nature clearly hurt the university and clearly hurt the department from which Dr Steele comes."

hearing and is a very strong and capable student," Prof Whelan said.

Prof Sutton has also refuted claims that Prof Steele had been penalised for his outspokenness by the removal of grant money, saying the university was used to Prof Steele's periodic outbursts.

"Dr Steele has never been a victim in his whole career at this university. If anything he has been given more opportunities than perhaps he has deserved," he said.

"Dr Steele claims he is a victim whenever he is unable to succeed in nationally competitive research grants which have nothing to do with the university."

Prof Steele has also been outspoken about the soliciting of senior executives by the university instead of the advertising of positions.

## Institute stays mum on claims

The organisation preparing a report that will consider any existence of grade fixing at the University of Wollongong refuses to comment on the matter.

A spokesman for the Australia Institute, based in Canberra, said the institute would not be making any further comment until the report was made

public at the end of February.

It is believed the Academic Freedom and Commercialisation of Australian Universities report will show that a number of universities with full fee-paying students passed students who had failed their subjects and boosted exam results.

## Defence acts on cancer scare

Growing concern over the use of depleted uranium yesterday prompted the Defence Department to report its supplies of the ammunition had been shot into the sea more than a decade ago.

The department said it would identify troops who served in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, joining other nations worried after the reported deaths from cancer of Italian and Belgian veterans of Kosovo and Bosnia.

Meanwhile, the debate over the safety of the ammunition has split NATO.

Britain and the United States argue there is no health risk from depleted uranium, while Germany, Italy,

Portugal and Belgium are demanding a full inquiry.

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) confirmed it used depleted uranium ammunition for a short time after installing the Phalanx anti-missile systems on navy ships. Phalanx was a fully-automated system with minimal handling of the ammunition by personnel, Defence Department spokesman Tim Bloomfield said.

The depleted uranium ammunition - 20mm rounds all used up by 1986 - had been shot over the sea and did not raise the dust problem. The ADF now uses Australian-made tungsten tipped ammunition in the Phalanx system.

NATO INQUIRY - P14



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### SUMMER FUN AT KEMBLA GRANGE

Luncheon bookings are available in the Bert Lillye Lounge. A lavish buffet carvery is available for as little as \$27.50, or you may like to try our Bistro, where great meals are provided for around \$10.00 throughout the month of January.

SUNDAY 14th

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