



## Memorised essays will not earn top marks

HSC students have been warned not to regurgitate memorised essays in their first English exam on Friday.

As nearly 70,000 year 12 students prepare to sit this year's exams, the president of the NSW Board of Studies, Tom Alegounarias, said those who memorised essays would be disappointed.

"To achieve high marks students have to display originality in terms of form, style and content. The HSC nowadays is not just a set of exams, it is a program for student growth and improvement towards independence."

A year 12 student from a Sydney girls' school has written to the Herald to complain about the many students who she said had memorised essays written by adults. The student, who did not want her name published for fear of offending her classmates, said the HSC had failed to encourage students to think creatively and independently.

"The nature of the HSC English exams, as much as examiners try to avoid such a thing, warrants a myriad of regurgitated essays," she said.

"Many HSC students have outside-of-school tutors and I am very aware that the essays that many will be regurgitating in their HSC exam will be their tutors' thoughts, not their own."

The student said she was also concerned that many of her close friends had been diagnosed with anxiety this year.

The first HSC exams sat will be classical Greek and business studies on Thursday. Mr Alegounarias said these two subjects captured the diversity of interests promoted in the "modern HSC".

The exam will run simultaneously at schools in Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

Mr Alegounarias said HSC students in the past had won places in universities including Oxford. "This highlights the international recognition of this credential."

While doubt has been raised about the reportedly inflated number of A-levels awarded in Britain, Mr Alegounarias said the number of equivalent band-6 grades awarded in the HSC had remained steady over the years.

*Article from the Sydney Morning Herald*

# Greek men are mommy's boys

It seems that the stereotype of the average Greek man who lives at home until a worryingly advanced age and relies on his mother to do all his cooking and cleaning might be accurate after all.

According to figures made public yesterday by Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency, Greeks are more likely to live at home with their parents until their late 20s or mid-30s than almost any other European men.

The numbers indicate that 56 percent of Greek men aged 25 to 34 live in their parents' home. Only men in Bulgaria (61 percent) and Slovenia (60) percent are more reliant on their mothers and fathers.

By contrast, only 8 percent of Finns, 4 percent of Swedes and 3 percent of Danes in the same age group live at their parental homes. The EU average was 32 per-

cent.

Greek men also rank last in terms of the proportion who cohabit with their partners.

However, the survey was also revealing about the tendencies of Greek women in their 20s and 30s. It indicated that 36 percent of them also remain with mom and dad between the ages of 25 and 34, just behind Slovenia (38 percent) and Slovakia (42 percent). The EU average was 20 percent. Unsurprisingly, Greece also ranks high in the 18-24 age group, where 67.7 percent of women and 84.4 percent of men live with their parents. The EU average in this age group was 71 percent for women and 82 percent for men.

The survey, which used 2008 figures, found that 46 percent of Europeans aged 18 to 34 (or 51 million people in total) still live with their parents.

## NSW Government extends rent freeze for pensioners and urges Federal Government to examine ways to help pensioners in private rental accommodation

The NSW Government will continue the rent increase holiday for single rate pensioners in public housing, following a request from the Commonwealth. The decision means the one-off \$30 increase granted by the Federal Government in 2009 to single rate pensioners will not be included in the assessment of household income until the next NSW State Budget in 2011 – when it will again be reviewed.

This is the second year in-a-row the Commonwealth has made such a request of state governments.

As a result, the NSW Government will also set up an official Roundtable with pensioner and social housing stakeholder groups to discuss the impact the Commonwealth's request will have longer-term on the supply and financial sustainability of community housing, affordable housing and social housing.

The decision was announced by Premier Kristina Keneally and Housing Minister Frank Terenzini.

"We took the Federal Government's request to extend our rent increase holiday for pensioners seriously, which is why the Cabinet considered it in a thorough Budget Committee process," Premier Keneally said.

"This decision will assist the 70,000 single rate pensioners who live in NSW social housing with the costs of living.

"However, I am still very concerned about the cost of living pressures faced by pensioners in private rental accommodation," Ms Keneally said.

"While I understand many pensioners across the State may be struggling, pensioners living in public housing do have the advantage of paying just 25 per cent of their household income in rent.

"The Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association agrees that many pensioners renting privately may be paying up 60 to 70 per cent of their income on rent alone."

Ms Keneally said that pensioners in private rental housing, unlike those in social housing, do not have access to low rent or guaranteed tenure, and are vulnerable to rent hikes applied by their landlord.

"I am calling on the Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, to outline how the Commonwealth proposes to assist 190,000 pensioners in NSW who live in private rental housing."

Ms Keneally said that she and Minister Terenzini would also press the Commonwealth to ensure the funds available to state governments and community housing providers to build more social housing did not erode over time.

"The effect of Minister Macklin's request this year and last year is to reset state governments' rent policies, which in effect means a loss of income to state housing agencies and to community housing providers each year," Minister Terenzini said.

"We expect the community housing sector in NSW will lose about \$2 million in foregone rent this year, as a result of the Commonwealth's request.

"It is our responsibility to ensure that we can provide housing to as many vulnerable people as possible, including women fleeing domestic violence, young people without family support and homeless people but also pensioners who may be struggling with high costs in the private rental sector."

Premier Keneally said that every dollar of social housing rent is used to help another person or family trying to find safe, decent accommodation.

"If this request from the Commonwealth becomes a standing request, it will mean that state governments and community housing providers across

Australia will have a diminishing pool of funds from which to build more social housing – further exacerbating the cost of living pressures for vulnerable people," Ms Keneally said.

"I am asking Minister Macklin to clarify if the Commonwealth intends to make this an on-going request of state governments, and if so, what steps the Commonwealth would do to ensure that vital funds remain available on an on-going basis to state housing agencies and community housing providers."

Mr Terenzini said that he would be writing to stakeholder groups this week to convene a Roundtable later this month.

"The NSW Government is in the business of building houses for those most in need, and the Roundtable will be an opportunity for us to work together with community housing providers to ensure a sustainable future income stream to meet current and future demand."

### Background

- There are 69,590 single rate pensioners in public housing and around 190,000 pensioners living in private rentals.
- The average rent for a single rate pensioner living in public housing will now be around \$74.80 per week, up from \$72.70 to incorporate the September CPI increase. If the rent holiday had ended (including CPI), rent would have increased to \$82.30 per week.
- The average weekly rents for a one-bedroom unit in the private sector are in Blacktown (\$210) and in Liverpool (\$200).
- The NSW Government is delivering record amounts of social housing, including over \$2 billion in social housing services and infrastructure this year alone. The bulk of housing being built under the Federal Government's Economic Stimulus Package will be managed by the community housing sector.