

# Uni courses stall

Two more bachelor of aviation courses are on the way out as universities make financial cutbacks. The move brings to four the number of degree courses axed in the past year.

Helen Waddington reports.

**2**004 WILL BE the last year of student intake for Bachelor of Aviation and Bachelor of Science (aviation) courses at the University of Western Sydney and Townsville's James Cook University (JCU).

The decision at UWS comes after an internal review of all courses offered. The university received more than 100 applications, but could offer only 50 places, down

and the discipline cannot compete with popular courses, including arts and business degrees, that are cheaper to run.

Last year, Newcastle University and RMIT University axed their undergraduate degrees. Current third year Bachelor of Science (aviation) students at Newcastle will be the last to graduate. The university will continue its post-graduate courses, with an emphasis on further education for

pear off bush to get their flying hours up," says Griffith's Paul Bates, "but the students willing to beat the bush path go places, as opposed to the ones staying behind in the city centres writing job applications."

All the universities quote the cost of flying training as an additional charge on course fees. Estimated costs range from \$32,000 to \$40,000 for the full CPL qualification. Of course, it all depends on the proficiency of the student pilot. Lecturers do point out that the flying component counts as course credits and replaces subjects that would have incurred a HECS charge anyway. These high costs have seen more students enrolling in the non-flying stream of degrees where available.

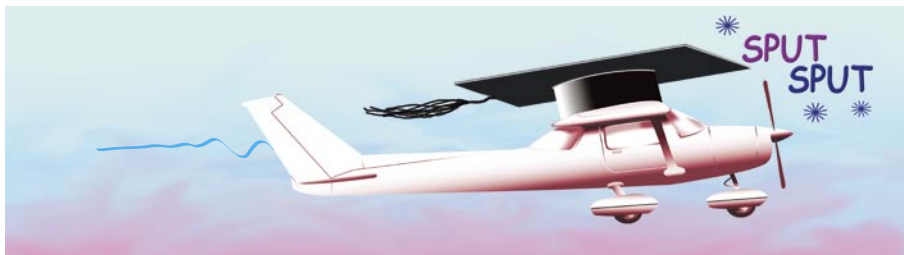
Although aviation degrees might lack the prestige of law or medicine, they are far from "mickey mouse" courses, with students put through a gruelling program of subjects ranging from flying through engineering to business management. Practical experience figures prominently.

At UNSW, students enrolled in the flying stream of the Bachelor of Aviation are some of the hardest working uni students around. Unlike their counterparts in other courses, they don't get a long hot summer break. Their academic year starts early January with their first hours flying.

For Darryl Knight, the new chief instructor at Central Queensland University, in Bundaberg, the challenge is not just to train quality pilots but to give them as much varied experience as possible. He plans to start charter operations so that students can take part in working throughout their years of training.

Meanwhile, students of Edith Cowan University in Perth have a unique way of gaining valuable flying time. The school provides its community with a shark alert service in summer. Students patrol the coastline with a Cessna 172RG (Cutlass) equipped with a siren and public address system.

Juggling flying time and academic studies is often a challenge. Russell Jaycock at JCU reports a high number of dropouts from students struggling with high level science or maths subjects while maintaining their flying progress. Often the appeal and fun of flying wins out over hitting the books.



from 70 enrolments last year.

JCU's aviation degree has been running for only a few years. It was started in the hope of attracting more students to the School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences, but interest was lower than expected.

Reports from the other six universities offering aviation degrees in 2004 show that demand for places is up, but in the current tertiary education climate many students are missing out. In some cases, the number of school leavers nominating bachelor of aviation degrees as their first preference was double that of 2003.

The required entry score was up, and, at most universities, students wanting to study aviation had to be in the top 20 per cent to make the grade.

Despite increased demand, universities have been unable to increase the number of places offered because of quotas set for Higher Education Contribution Scheme courses. Class sizes in aviation are small,

qualified pilots and others in the aviation industry.

**Student interest** Victoria's RMIT is retaining only a Diploma of Air Transport course within its school of aerospace and engineering. Flying school co-ordinator Bob Duddington says the university is working towards reinstating the degree course. He sees a need for the course to be restructured to better tailor it to industry needs. What was traditionally an engineering-based course will have to train pilots in others areas, such as management, safety, human factors and airline operations to be a viable degree once more.

Student interest in aviation degrees reflects the view that the courses give graduates an edge on other pilots in a tight job market.

Swinburne, the University of NSW (UNSW) and Queensland's Griffith University all reported good prospects for their graduates. "We tend to lose track of them when they first graduate and disap-