



Australian Immigration Law Services

11th August 2009

SUBMISSION

Senate Inquiry
Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
Welfare of International Students

Dear Senators

Over the past 10 years in private practice I have spoken to tens of thousands of international students studying in Australia. Our office has also assisted thousands obtain their residency visa's.

In the last couple of years I have become increasingly concerned regarding the behaviour of many CRICOS registered education providers regarding the manner they treat their students. It appeared to us that students had no where to go for anyone to listen to their concerns.

Frustrated by VETAB and DEEWR seemingly disinterest in assisting students with their problems at schools, in January 2008 our office decided to publically name and shame any provider who mistreated their students through our subscription E-newsletter IMMIGRATION NEWS. This is a free service and currently has 5,700+ direct subscribers who are mostly international students. We knew if students found out about the school was treating their students they would possible choose not to enrol with them.

In January 2008 we wrote our first article concerning a vocational College called Sydney International College of Business, exposing the way they treated their students. It was aptly named, "Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely". According to an ACPET source, the only reason SICB continued to remain open was the problem of relocating 1,500 students to other schools. In reality it should have been closed.

Later in the year after receiving evidence of serious issues of fraud at Global College we were then the first to expose their hidden secrets and passed this information to VETAB and the SMH. This school was subsequently closed down by VETAB.

This year we also exposed a similar scam operating at Windsor College. This information and evidence was passed to DEEWR who never even bothered to acknowledge the information provided to them.

Recently I was writing to the CEO of Sterling College asking him to explain how the school mistreated one of its students. This school has now closed before printing our story but that is still an ongoing investigation. We have also forwarded the complaint

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to DEEWR and raised concerns regarding the behaviour of its senior compliance officer. To date DEEWR they have not bothered to acknowledge our complaint despite the Deputy Prime Minister making public assurances on ABC radio that it would be "looked into".

In one of our most recent articles "Aerospace plummets back to Earth", we have raised a very serious complaint regarding the same DEEWR compliance officer. We have asked DEEWR to explain the context of her notes and the reasons for her visit to this school. It would seem on the face of the evidence on hand DEEWR has spent tax payer's dollars simply to gather information for Aerospace to openly attack the 8 whistle blowing international students who raised concerns about this provider. There is no evidence that any of their claims about the school had been investigated.

Since we began writing our stories we have had threats of legal action from some of the schools we have focused our attention on. These threats have hardened our resolve to expose any CRICOS provider who miss-treats their enrolled international students.

DEEWR is meant to be the government organisation to look after these students but we have raised very serious issues regarding their actions which seem to openly support the education providers at the expense of the students. On the evidence before me it seems DEEWR is only concerned about protecting first, students second. This needs to be urgently addressed.

Today I read Julia Gillard's opinion piece in the SMH she states "*We want to make sure those who come here enjoy their time in Australia and get the quality education they seek*".

There is no point in tightening the rules when those charged to oversee and enforce them show an arrogant disregard to serious complaints made against them. Transparency in government departments is a fundamental cornerstone of any democracy to ensure corrupt activities are not allowed the opportunity to take hold and flourish. Currently DEEWR has about as much transparency as the Paramatta river.

Our office recommends an Overseas Students Ombudsmans office be established so students have an authority that could look into their concerns. Such an organisation can investigate complaints regarding the education industry in Australia independently from government and private sector influence. I have publically made this appeal in the article printed by the SMH on the 21st July 2009.

There is a high probability that all of the vocational provider closures that I have listed above and the suffering experienced by thousands of students would have been avoidable had students had somewhere to voice their concerns. The problems would have been picked up earlier and this would allow the government implement a solution that perhaps would not require complete deregistration or a school closing its doors.

I am more than happy to attend the Senate Inquiry to share my experience in firstly, handling the problems international students face in this country and secondly exposing corruption within education providers.

Please find attached the supporting documentary evidence regarding the issues I have raised above.

Kind regards



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