

- August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009-

### **FISA DEMANDS ACTION BE TAKEN**

The Federation of Indian Students of Australia ([www.fisa.org.au](http://www.fisa.org.au)) and the Student Representatives of Sterling College conducted a series of meetings with the students of the college to address their issues in further detail.

Following conversations and discussions had with students, it is of concern to FISA how the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (the industry's peak body for private colleges) aims to resolve the issues around the closure of Sterling College.

ACPET conducted a meeting with the students of the college on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> July 2009 at 12PM and assurances and confirmation were provided on two key aspects:

1. Find new and current students alternative colleges within 28 days
2. Provide the students who have completed their course with transcripts and certificates

Sterling College Student Representatives and other students from the college then meet on Friday the 31<sup>st</sup> at 5PM to address concerns and issues that were not covered in the ACPET meeting. FISA organised the meeting in conjunction with the National Union of Students.

The closure of private colleges with a large number of international students is more complex and sensitive than initially perceived, especially when students are in large numbers, and have limited or no support system.

The meeting highlighted various issues and categorised students under the following:

1. NOT ARRIVED – New Students registered with Sterling and have not yet arrived in the country
2. NEW STUDENTS - Students who have recently arrived in Sydney in the last 4 weeks
3. CURRENT STUDENTS – Students who are currently in a course, some who have only a few weeks or even days left to complete the course
4. COMPLETED STUDENTS - Students who have completed their course and awaiting their transcripts

ACPET has promised to resolve student issues within 28 days, however, the issues they are addressing are solely to do with finding a replacement college.

Students are left to solve, on their own, the issues of refunds, visas and any other additional expenses that they incur with regards to new college enrolments. Other possible costs include relocation and job losses in case the new alternative college is found to be away from their current location and the breaking of rental agreements. Legal issues in respect to immigration and changes in immigration law were also discussed at the meeting.

Unfortunately, there is no single point of contact for affected students to seek advice, direction and attention to cover issues around their future in Australia with respect to living, working and continuing studies. Students are scrambling from point to point to address their issues with no clear direction, support and confidence. Past experiences with similar college closures have demonstrated that students are the worst affected and there is no effective customer service provided to them to ensure a fair and smooth process during this time of change.

FISA is challenging the Australian State and Federal Government to take action and create a full-fledged proactive student services centres that will address student issues from all aspects. Investing in international student support services will only strengthen the confidence, trust and future business opportunities for Australia and there is no better time than now to take this action and initiative. FISA representatives and founders will offer support to the government in creating this centre and provide future assistance in its operation, as it is working in the interest of the students and is working at grassroots and strategic levels too.

The issues that captured are as follows, they have been categorised under the type of student (as defined above).

1. NOT ARRIVED – New Students registered with Sterling and have not arrived in the country
  - a. These students may have paid their tuition and other fees in advance; does ACPET have any information about this?
  - b. Have the students been advised about the situation and their next course of action?
  - c. Does ACPET have details of these students?
  - d. Does Immigration know who these Students are? Can Immigration contact them and advise them on their next course of action?
  - e. How many such students are there?
2. NEW STUDENTS - Students who have recently arrived in the last 4 weeks
  - a. Who has their contact details?
  - b. Do they know the procedure with ACPET?
  - c. Do they know the complex ESOS Act to avail their refund if they would like to do so?
  - d. What local support and guidance is available for these students?
  - e. Do they have a fair choice for their new provider, or will they be forced to choose a provided set by ACPET?
  - f. How long do they have to wait for their refunds?
3. CURRENT STUDENTS – Students who are currently in a course, some who have only a few weeks or even days left to complete the course

- a. Sterling has multiple courses offered to the students; can all students be given quick and immediate replacements within 28 days?
  - b. Students from Community Welfare have confirmed that there is no other private college in Sydney offering the same course as recognised by AIWC
  - c. There are around 300 students currently registered in Community Welfare at Sterling
  - d. ACPET confirmed in the Friday meeting that it will not transfer students to TAFE for community welfare or any other courses. What is the future for these students?
  - e. Students studying hair dressing and cookery may have to spend on their tools again as they will have to comply with the new college rules with regards to tools
4. COMPLETED STUDENTS - Students who have completed their course and awaiting their transcripts
- a. Who has access to Sterling College's database?
  - b. Students have confirmed that the college database is not accurate. Student marks were being manipulated to fudge the system.
  - c. Many students have not received their transcripts from previous terms and are concerned how the completion certificate will be provided
  - d. Students going through placement need a college supervisor to sign their work experience every week, who will do that in the interim?
  - e. Does ACPET or someone have access to the RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning)

Some of the common issues and concerns addressed are:

1. At their meeting, ACPET verbally confirmed that they will provide the students with transcripts. However documentation provided by them clearly states that they will not provide transcripts
2. Student confirm that the Sterling College database has not been updated regularly and many students may lose out as they may be forced to re-do terms as there may be no proof as to what courses were completed
3. ACPET have directed students currently undergoing placement to continue their activities. However, there are questions around who is covering the students with insurance. Also, students on placements require a college supervisor's signature, now that the college is closed, who is going to do this?
4. Students have confirmed that many of them have only their COE - however the expectation from ACPET is that students should possess their transcripts from each semester for them to find the appropriate replacement college and go into the correct term. Students want to know if the Recognition of Prior Learning is up to date and current.

5. Many new students have not received their Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) as the details and documentation goes directly to the college. New students don't know the provider as the college looks after this process.
6. Some students have been sent to the wrong placements, which do not meet the requirements of Community Welfare. They may have to repeat their placement subject to comply. Additionally students will incur a cost - how will this be resolved?
7. There are currently students overseas who have paid their fees but have not yet arrived in Australia
8. Students who have come with dependants, will the status of dependants change?
9. Some of Sterling's staff have advised FISA and the students that they will be happy to assist ACPET and other bodies by returning to Sterling College and working on a volunteer basis to print transcripts for students

Another area of concern for FISA is that students are being approached by various bodies with vested interests (immigration lawyers, private colleges, solicitors etc) that are luring or assisting them in many contrasting directions and causing further confusion in the minds of students.

Gautam Gupta, founder of FISA says, "There is still no single point, one-stop-shop for international student issues to be resolved. How many more colleges need to be shut down and closed for the government to take adequate action, how many more students need to be beaten up on the streets for the government to take serious action?"

"FISA is the student's voice and we are challenging the government to look at these international student issues in a new light, how many more forums and round tables does the government want to conduct before it really take some real action?", continued Gautam.

FISA feels that it is unfair for students to be asked to go to different departments and read hundreds of pages of Acts, rules and policies with no professional help or counselling provided to clear their doubts.

"Enough is enough, this should be the last time any lobby group should be raising these concerns, take action now and make a difference. There is a huge 'industry' at stake and many jobs and life's are at stake", says Gautam.

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