

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING : 19 October 2015

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION PORTFOLIO

(SE15/062) ESOS - ASQA - RTOs - Programme 2.3: Visas

Senator Carr, Kim (L&CA 133) asked:

Senator KIM CARR: I would like to turn to Australia Post. The Federal Police have executed 30 warrants across Melbourne, with 100 police taking actions against two international colleges: St Stephen's Institute and Symbiosis. These are RTOs operated as basically visa mills to bring international students in to be used as contract labour for Australian businesses, including Australia Post. Individuals have been charged with deception, deception involving property and forging documents. ASQA was advised a couple of days earlier and was asked to provide technical advice. On the day of the raids, ASQA immediately acted to suspend and then cancel the RTOs' registration. It raises questions about how they were able to operate for so long before ASQA took action.

As I understand it, funding to the colleges by the Victorian government has been suspended. They were both CRICOS registered. Indications are that most of the students were Indian, 57 in one and seven in the other; Chinese, eight and three; and there was one Turkish student. I am just wondering if you have information on these particular colleges.

Mr Wilden: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: As I understand it, the students undertook no training and they worked full-time—which is, of course, as you know, in breach of the ESOS Act. These were actually used as visa mills. It is suggested that hundreds of people might have gone through these particular RTOs. Are you aware of how many people have gone through them?

Mr Wilden: I do not have that information. We will take it on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: At least 60 people were working for Australia Post. You are familiar with that?

Mr Wilden: No.

Senator KIM CARR: Were you involved in the police actions against these colleges?

Mr Wilden: I would have to defer to my colleagues in Border Force who look after the operations side.

Senator KIM CARR: Can I ask is the assistant commissioner is able to assist me?

Mr Outram: The three people I mentioned who have been arrested earlier on—I have just been advised—were three who related to that matter. I might ask Assistant Commissioner Lancaster to provide that detail. Mr Lancaster: Yes, those three who were arrested were involved in the visa fraud that applies to students. That was an AFP investigation, Operation Aristotle. We supported the AFP and ASQA in relation to that. Three people were charged with a number of offences against the Criminal Code Act, which involved false documentation being supplied to the students and, as you said, quite a number were involved.

Senator KIM CARR: How many students were involved in each of these RTOs?

Mr Lancaster: I would have to take that on notice because it is primarily run by the AFP and ASQA.

Senator KIM CARR: What countries of origin were involved?

Mr Lancaster: I believe there were several countries of origin.

Senator KIM CARR: The breakdown of those, if you could. I understand that one of the RTOs, St. Stephen, was listed as an SVP provider at the time. Is that correct?Mr Lancaster: I would have to take that on notice. I do not have the details.

Answer:

The Department actively participated in the joint operation which saw the registration of St Stephen Institute of Technology Pty Ltd and Symbiosis Institute of Technical Education Pty Ltd removed.

St Stephen Institute of Technology Pty Ltd was participating in streamlined visa processing arrangements at the time of the operation.

The below table shows the number of primary student visas granted in the last three years to students who submitted a confirmation of enrolment from St Stephen Institute of Technology Pty Ltd or Symbiosis Institute of Technical Education Pty Ltd. Where more than one confirmation of enrolment is recorded, the education provider is based on the highest course level.

Education Provider Name	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
St Stephen Institute of Education Pty Ltd	151	91	50
Symbiosis Institute of Technical Education Pty Ltd	29	14	10

The country with the greatest representation of students were India in 2014-15, there were 48 primary visas granted to students who had a confirmation of enrolment for St Stephen Institute of Technology Pty Ltd and applied using an Indian passport. Similarly, five of the visas granted to students with a confirmation of enrolment for Symbiosis Institute of Technical Education Pty Ltd applied using an Indian passport.

Departmental data showed five applications were processed for St Stephen Institute of Technology Pty Ltd under streamlined visa processing arrangements.

Note 1: Excludes Foreign Affairs or Defence Sector visa (subclass 576) as no confirmation of enrolment is required.

Note 2: Excludes student visas granted where a letter of offer was submitted.

Note 3: Excludes student visa holders who transferred to study at these providers but did not apply for a new student visa.