

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TRAINING

SENATE LEGISLATION COMMITTEE - QUESTIONS ON NOTICE 2003-2004 ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARING

Outcome: 3
Output Group: 3.3 – AEI Group

DEST Question No. E764_04

Senator Carr asked on 20 February 2004, EWRE Hansard pages 46-47.

Question:

Did you have any correspondence in regard to the Australian Institute of Commerce and Languages from students formerly enrolled?

This is correspondence that has been sent to DIMIA and the Prime Minister. Have you not had any access to this information? Have you not been provided with this information?

Could you give me a report on what action was taken to rectify those matters and whether any investigations were undertaken into the complaints that were raised?

Answer:

Australian Institute of Commerce and Languages – student complaint

- a) *Did you have any correspondence in regard to the Australian Institute of Commerce and Languages from students formerly enrolled?*

On 11 September 2003, the Department received a copy of a letter from Mr Damian Nowicki, a former student of the Australian Institute of Commerce and Language (AICL) addressed to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). Mr Nowicki's letter, dated 8 September 2003, contained a series of allegations about the poor quality of education training services and facilities provided by AICL. On 24 September 2003 two Departmental officers met with Mr Nowicki to discuss his allegations. On 25 September 2004, Mr Nowicki provided the Department with a letter and attachments dated 24 September 2004 providing information purporting to substantiate his allegations.

- b) *This is correspondence that has been sent to DIMIA and the Prime Minister. Have you not had any access to this information? Have you not been provided with this information?*

A copy of Mr Nowicki's letter to DIMIA dated 8 September 2003 was provided to the Department on 11 September 2003 by DIMIA. A copy of his correspondence to the Prime Minister was received by the Department on 13 January 2004.

- c) *Could you give me a report on what action was taken to rectify those matters and whether any investigations were undertaken into the complaints that were raised?*

Departmental action

On 11 September 2003, the Department received a copy of a letter complaints and allegations about AICL dated 8 September 2003 from Mr Nowicki addressed to DIMIA and the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB). Mr Nowicki alleged that the quality of AICL's teaching was poor; the facilities were dirty and the students were treated unfairly.

In response to this information, officers of the Department's Industry Regulation & Compliance Unit (IRCU) attended the premises of AICL and conducted a monitoring visit under section 130 of the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (the Act). The monitoring visit focused on the independent grievance handling/dispute resolution procedures required under the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students (the National Code). On the basis of information provided by AICL at the time of the visit, these procedures were deemed to be adequate but could be improved by including extra provisions for external grievance handling. AICL was advised accordingly.

At his request, IRCU officers met with Mr Nowicki in Canberra on 24 September 2003 to discuss his allegations. In addition to the claims made in his letters to DIMIA and VETAB, Mr Nowicki alleged that there was limited access to AICL's Internet facilities; the overall quality of the facilities was substandard; there were inadequate procedures for communication between the students and AICL management and AICL's promotional material was vague and ambiguous.

The IRCU officers advised Mr Nowicki that as most of his allegations related to matters covered by the Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF), the matter would need to be referred to VETAB for further investigation. Mr Nowicki was asked to provide additional information to enable this referral to be made. None was provided.

NSW VETAB action

When VETAB received Mr Nowicki's letter of 8 September 2003 referred to above, they advised him that his concerns related to the standards of the AQTF.

On 9 December 2003 and 19 December 2003, VETAB conducted a compliance audit of AICL against the AQTF standards and the requirements of the National Code. VETAB determined that of the 124 AQTF standards and the 70 requirements of the National Code against which they were assessed, AICL was non-compliant with 20 AQTF standards and 5 requirements under the National Code.

Of the areas of non-compliance, only one AQTF standard (standard 1.5) and only one National Code requirement (paragraph 45), both of which refer to independent grievance handling/dispute resolution procedures, were relevant to Mr Nowicki's claims.

In response to VETAB's audit, AICL has made the required changes and adjustments to their policies and procedures and is now assessed as complying with the AQTF standards and the requirements of the National Code.