

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THE DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION

I was recruited by TAFE in 1994 to teach dedicated classes of International students.

I continued teaching for 10 years until 2003, when I retired.

I was in Canada in June this year, and was told by the (Sri Lankan) hotel Manager of the attacks on Indian students in Melbourne. He said that he did not now want to visit Australia.

The mentality leading to such incidents may be influenced by a wider problem. The previous political leadership in Australia had a particular attitude to desperate asylum seekers... "there may be terrorists among them".... "they throw their children overboard" ... "they are queue jumpers"...etc.

During my 10 years in TAFE I did not see any racism against International students.

However, I did witness on a number of occasions inappropriate behaviour by some officers in the Department of Immigration.

I am aware that some students have ulterior motives in coming to Australia.

I am also aware of the Agents that "look after" International students, find Courses, deal with immigration etc, and charge a fee, and exploit students.

I am also aware that Immigration issues can be especially difficult.

I did however observe a culture in Immigration which at times was hostile to visitors.

The following issues involved my students :

1. P was from Indonesia, bright and typically polite. She needed to visit Immigration regarding her Visa. On return to TAFE she advised me of what transpired. She had been subject to strong racial comments, and had not achieved what she required. The issue was so serious that a letter from TAFE at senior level was sent to a senior person in Immigration who acted to rectify the matter. Naturally this affected her and became known to her family in Indonesia.
2. C was from Korea. He was industrious, open and friendly. He had come to Australia at his parents request and completed years 11 and 12 and then enrolled at TAFE. From memory he was in year 2 of a 2 year Course, when he approached me very upset, and showed me a letter he had just received from Immigration.  
I was amazed to read it. It was short, and simply said words to the effect that he had been in Australia for some years, this was long enough, and that he was to leave the country in 28 days. No reason, no precipitating incident, just out of the blue. I represented his case to Immigration in writing, and the matter was dropped.
3. A Korean female student, needed to deal with Immigration to have a Visa extended. She was an outstanding student, and had no trouble obtaining supporting documentation from TAFE. The Visa extension was refused. She showed me the letter, and the reasons given were unintelligible. The 2 or 3 paragraphs had apparently been in word processor memory, and had been incorrectly selected, and then telescoped into each other.  
I rang Immigration and actually got onto a supervisor. She said that it would be necessary for the student to go to the Tribunal, and pay the \$1400 fee for the case to be reviewed. The supervisor explained to me that if successful, the student would have the \$1400 refunded. I explained to her very

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forcefully that the \$1400 does not go back to the student but goes to the Immigration lawyers that students retain to defend themselves from Immigration. Easy money for the lawyers.

4. S was from Bangla Desh. He came with his wife and 2 young children and enrolled in TAFE. He told me that he had 4 (or 6) visits to the Australian Embassy in Dacca before his papers were finally in order. Each trip was 1 day on a bus.

When he arrived at Sydney Airport, he was initially refused entry, as the children's names were incorrect on one of the travel documents. He realized that the Embassy had put the names of children of another family on the document. Eventually he was allowed to enter on the understanding that he have it regularized in one month.

Then followed 18 months of continual problems with Immigration to have his documents corrected. I personally spent a great amount of time on the matter. On at least one evening I went with him to a group of pro bono lawyers in Sydney who exist to deal with problems between Immigration and International students and other Visa holders. (I cannot remember the name of the group)

My attempts to speak to Immigration by phone were fruitless, the Office being impenetrable.

S was under a great deal of stress, and his studies suffered.

During all this his wife T, a qualified social worker, obtained work in a factory in the Mascot area. She was working within her allowable 20 hours per week. Due to the above she was on a bridging Visa. Immigration carried out a raid on the factory, and she was arrested on the basis that she could not work on a bridging Visa. She made frantic phone calls to her husband to collect the children after school. He was in the TAFE Library with his mobile phone off. She eventually contacted him and he rang me in a very distressed state. I spoke to Immigration, who told me there was no alternative but for her to be sent to Silverwater.

I was incensed at her treatment, and told immigration that if she went to Silverwater, I would go to the necessary lengths to represent her case. They agreed to ring me back that day with an answer.

They did this, and said that in this instance she would not be sent to Silverwater.

On a subsequent meeting with D and Immigration we were advised that in fact she could work on the Bridging Visa. I asked for this in writing, but didn't get it.

We further asked why was she arrested if it was in order for her to work. He said that I would need to contact "Compliance", and was given a name and number. The person was not available, and was to ring back. We heard no more and T was too afraid to continue working.

On completion of his Course, he applied to emigrate to Canada, was accepted in a very short time, and left Australia.

Due to the significant problems facing students in dealing with Immigration, I made a practice of tactfully advising new students to be very vigilant in dealings with Immigration.

Any organization is a reflection of its leaders.

The then Immigration Department, together with such issues as Tampa, locking up asylum seekers in remote areas until children were permanently damaged, the "Pacific Solution", the children overboard, etc indicates Australian attitudes to visitors – and "aliens".

The then government harped on Australian qualities of "mateship", and "a fair go for everyone"....

That's the old Australia, it's gone now.

I didn't see racism among students as a key issue. The problems were from Government.

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