

# Australia plans new protection for students

By VIOLA LEE

THE Australian Government plans to introduce a list of tough measures to give greater protection to overseas students from July next year.

Endorsed at an all-state Australian Education Council meeting this week, the measures to be adopted include:

- Setting up a trust fund to compensate overseas students in case a private institute runs into trouble or loses its registration.
- Adopting a code of registration for institutions accepting overseas students.
- Issuing student visas only after a state certifies that the education institution the student is to be enrolled in is registered.
- Setting up a code of conduct for the overseas marketing of Australian educational services to ensure the quality of education and support services, as well as asking schools to provide sufficient information to allow students to form an accurate impression.
- Working out a system to ensure standards of academic awards offered by institutions in different states are comparable.
- Instruct institutions to ensure the credibility of its

overseas agents, ensuring they act in the best interests of the applicants and the institutions.

All states agreed to join this national scheme except for New South Wales (NSW), which claimed the measures were an extension of bureaucratic involvement in private enterprises.

Moreover, the state considered that it would be costly to inspect standards of all institutions offering overseas education, and that even Australian students did not get such consumer protection.

But the Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr John Dawkins, made it clear that visas might be refused for students wanting to study in states which did not participate in the scheme.

NSW is understood to be reconsidering its position because refusal could jeopardise its A\$30 million (HK\$192.6 million) a year slice of the annual national earning of A\$100 million (HK\$642 million) from the education export market.

The national scheme was drawn up after several complaints about the country's expanding overseas student programs.

The Federal Government is investigating 10 institu-

tions offering overseas education in Australia. For the 82 overseas students from the troubled MDA Grammar School in Melbourne, the Federal and Victorian State Governments have agreed to offer them free places at Victorian Government schools or subsidised overseas places at their current schools.

MDA was suspended from accepting overseas students in February following complaints from overseas students about the standard of education and support services at the school.

The issue was raised by Legislative Councillor Desmond Lee Yu-tai in an hour-long meeting with Mr Dawkins on June 15. Mr Lee went to Australia earlier this month with Mr Wong Kam-lam, a representative of parents whose children attended MDA.

Mr Lee yesterday said he welcomed the long-term and immediate solutions offered by the Australian Government, which demonstrated itself to be a responsible Government offering education to overseas students.

Some other education bodies assisting students to study overseas would also like to see the Australian Government publish a list of approved agents for recruiting students.