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Australia tougher on student visa rules

By ALICE LAI

THE Australian Government has tightened its control over issuing student visas in an attempt to prevent private schools and colleges in Australia from capitalising on the increasing influx of Hongkong students.

Speaking at the Education in Australia seminar, the Vice-Consul (Education) of the Australian Consulate-General, Miss Denise Faulkner, said yesterday the new measure would require students to pay one year's tuition fees in advance when applying for a stu-

dent visa. She said applicants must be over 18 years old and have a comprehensive standard of English.

Students would be required to participate in an English examination held by the college they intended entering, and the result would have to be presented when applying for a visa, along with documented proof of financial subsistence for the payment of academic expenses.

After completion of an approved course, foreign students would have to return to their

homeland unless they wanted to apply for an extended visa for further studies.

In the case of the latter, a college attendance record, with an attendance rate of above 90 per cent must be submitted when re-applying.

Despite several complaints about Australian colleges, the number of students applying to study there is on the rise, according to Mrs Lisa McGahan, Education Marketing Officer of the Australian Trade Commission.

She said about 4,000 Hong-

kong students had applied for student visas in the last academic year and an increase was expected in the coming year.

Mrs McGahan attributed the increase to the rising educational standards of Australia and the facilities available to students there.

She said the standard of Australian education had improved dramatically in recent years and was now comparable to education in the US and the United Kingdom, the two most popular destinations for Hongkong people studying abroad.