



Rating plan for trainers

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THE creators of a rating system for training courses claim it could help restore the battered reputation of Australia's \$15 billion vocational education sector.

The sector has been rocked by a recent ABC *Four Corners* program that uncovered training providers selling fake work-experience certificates and forged English language exams in exchange for thousands of dollars in cash.

Authorities are investigating a string of colleges including 17 in Victoria. In Queensland, students have been left out in the cold after Sterling College went into administration and closed its Brisbane doors a fortnight ago. The college also closed its Sydney operation last month, sacking staff.

The Institute for Trade Skills Excellence (ITSE) launched a rating scheme for training providers late last year but the take-up rate is slow.

The Star Rating Scheme provides accreditation for individual Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses. To date, only 100 accreditations have been granted out of the thousands of courses offered by about 4000 registered training organisations across Australia.

ITSE was set up with the backing of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group and National Farmers' Federation to promote trade skills training and careers.

ITSE CEO Brian Wexham has urged training providers to use the Star Rating system to promote themselves to potential students.

"If you're a training organisation that's in it for the wrong reasons, you're unlikely to apply to us (for a Star Rating)," Wexham says.

"It is imperative that we offer students a recognised indication of the quality of educational institutions so they can make an informed decision about where to study."

The Star Rating Scheme can be viewed as part of the solution for both international and domestic students looking to get the best outcome in the workplace following the completion of their chosen training course or apprenticeship.

Providers applying for a rating must meet strict criteria or make changes to meet the criteria.

"We tell them the areas that they can improve in from an industry perspective," Wexham says. "Improvement is what this is all about."

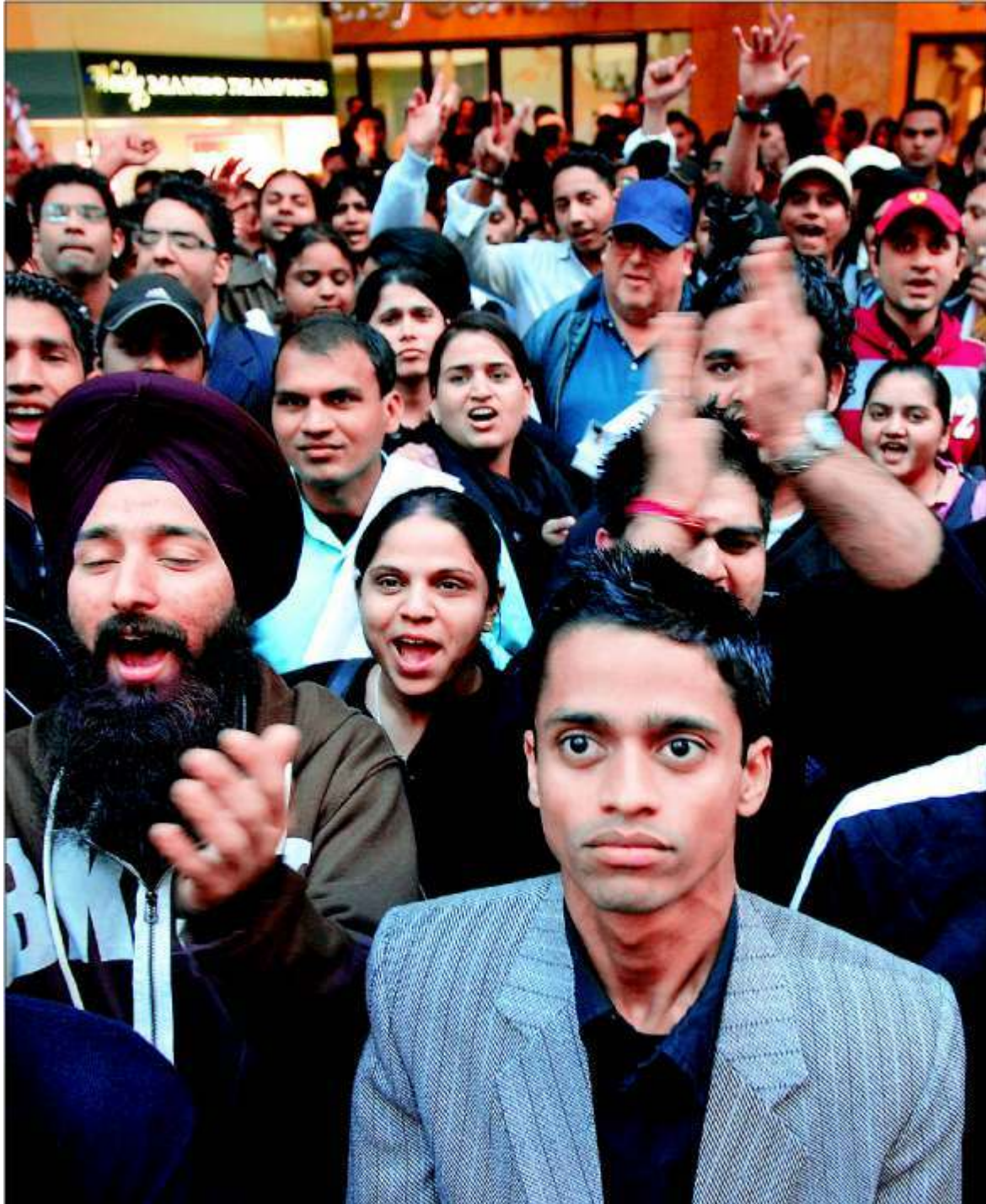
"The VET system in Australia is of a very high quality, but we have a few (training providers) that have detracted from that recently."

The Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) also provides a measure of assurance for accredited members. ACPET ensures students who are displaced when a training provider closes down are placed in alternative training institutes.

The council is currently working with students left stranded by the closures of Sterling College, in Brisbane and Sydney, and Melbourne International College to help them continue their studies.

"This has obviously been a very distressing time for students involved and ACPET's number-one priority has been to minimise the impact on students," ACPET spokesman Andrew Smith says.

"I would like to again reassure students who have been offered a placement through the Tuition Assurance Scheme that they will now be able to continue their studies without financial disadvantage."



STRANDED: Angry students from the failed Sterling College rally in Pitt St, Sydney, to protest over their school's closure. They will be offered alternative courses.