

# BOGUS COLLEGE PRESS REPORTS

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Friday 6th July 2007

# 'I'M SCARED TO TELL PARENTS I WAS CONNED'

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

When Juliana Vasquez arrived in Scotland from her home in Colombia three weeks ago to begin a nine-month English tuition course, she came with all the excitement of a 20-year-old away from home for the first time.

Making the 5000-mile journey from the capital, Bogota, was the first chance she had had for two years to see her older sister Laura, who had come to this country with her Scottish husband and settled in Paisley.

But more importantly, the trip to Glasgow was also the opportunity she had longed for to learn the English language and take the first few steps on the path to a career in the tourism industry.

Having paid her £1200 fees for the course in advance, along with her travel costs, from savings her parents had made by selling the family car and not taking any holidays for two years, it was an opportunity that she was determined not to waste.

So it was with a sense of bewilderment that she arrived at the Kelvin Business School at the Templeton Business Centre, in an ornate landmark building beside Glasgow Green in the city's east end, to find a locked and empty office.

Three weeks later, sitting in a cafe near the still padlocked premises of the school, which has the motto Make it Real - Make It KBS' emblazoned on the door, Juliana has come to the conclusion that she had been conned in an elaborate international fraud.

Fighting back the tears, she explained that since her arrival she has made several trips to the Templeton address and has met students, from as far afield as Iran, Iraq and Venezuela, all of whom have paid thousands of pounds in fees for a course - named AbleEnglish - which does not appear to exist.

Speaking through sister Laura, Juliana told The Herald she was so devastated by what has happened, and so concerned about how her family would react, that she has not been able to phone her parents at their home in the city of Villavicencio.

Although she has contacted police and trading standards officers in Glasgow, and hopes something will be done, she knows her own aspirations are in tatters. "This was supposed to be such an important step for me to get into the tourism industry and a very important thing in a cultural sense," she said. "It was so exciting when I got here to see so many beautiful buildings and the cars driving on the other side of the road and

I was so pleased to see my sister again because we had been apart for such a long time.

"This is the worst thing I have ever had to overcome and I feel for all those out there with the same experience because it is such a hard thing to try to overcome. I have been given a very serious life experience, but it was not the one that I came here for. If this is a fraud, then it is preying on vulnerable people from poor countries who come to Scotland to better themselves."

Her sister Laura Day, 29, who met her husband while studying in Australia and moved here two years ago, is equally devastated because she identified the AbleEnglish course as an ideal starting point for her sister, signed her up, and paid the advance fees from the money her parents had sent her.

She thought she had planned carefully, ensuring the centre she chose was on a list approved by the Department for Skills and Education, and also recognised by the British Consulate in Colombia as appropriate for it to issue a student visa.

After checking the website, she contacted director David Morrison by phone, as well as seeing where the offices were located, and how good travel routes were.

"I knew my sister was going to be away from home for the first time and I didn't want her to be in a bad place or a dangerous place. I wanted it to be a good place," she said.

"I spoke to David Morrison on the telephone several times and he was so easy to get hold of. He always answered me and if I got the answer machine someone would contact me straight away and everything was made easy for me."

She then got a letter from "David" at AbleEnglish stating the fees for the course were £2592, but that she would be eligible for a "special reduction" if the fees were paid up front, reducing the cost to £1200. The letter concluded: "Very much looking forward to meeting with you on your arrival."

Laura said she was appalled when she realised she had been conned.

"For what we paid for the course, and for Juliana to get here... it was the equivalent of about half of what a house would cost in Colombia," she said.

"It is a terrible thing that has happened and we don't know where to turn next.

"I don't have the courage to tell my parents, because they trusted my

judgment and I thought I did everything that had to be done and chose a school that I thought was a good one. If my sister has to go home, then all the effort will be for nothing."

According to records, the Kelvin Business School Ltd was incorporated in March 2004.

Originally the mailing address was a house in Cumbernauld, but it was changed to an address within the Templeton Business Centre and then altered once again, as recently as three weeks ago, to a different address in the same complex.

Mr Morrison is the sole director and his girlfriend, Jin Wang, is the company secretary. When the business was started, their home address was listed as the house in Cumbernauld, which is actually the home of Mr Morrison's parents.

Their most recent address had been given as a Victorian flat in the west end of Glasgow.

Contacted by The Herald last night, Mr Morrison's father said he had not heard from his son for some time. He said: "David no longer lives in this house; to be quite honest with you, I don't know where

he stays. He is difficult to get hold of. I'll phone him and it will say something like not available'."

Mr Morrison said his son had mentioned the KBS to him in the past, adding: "I don't know if he teaches, or administrates, I really couldn't tell you."

Friday 6th July 2007

# STUDENTS CLAIM 'COLLEGE' TOOK THOUSANDS FOR BOGUS COURSES

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

Police and trading standards officers are investigating claims a bogus Scottish college has taken tens of thousands of pounds from overseas students for courses that do not exist.

The inquiry was launched after Strathclyde Police were contacted by young people from as far afield as Colombia, Venezuela, Iran, and Iraq, who arrived in Glasgow to attend English language courses at the so-called Kelvin Business School. The students, who paid between £1000 and £6000 each after signing up online, had gone to the school's address at Templeton Business Centre but found a locked and empty office.

Centre owner Credential Holdings said school director David Morrison disappeared three months ago owing nearly £2000 rent. The locks had been changed to prevent him gaining access.

A former member of the staff also told The Herald he had been offered £15 an hour to teach a business course to foreign students but left last month after Mr Morrison vanished, owing him about £2000.

According to Companies House records, Mr Morrison, 30, is sole director of Kelvin Business School and the company secretary is his girlfriend, Miss Jin Wang, who is listed as a shareholder.

Their most recent home address is given as a flat in a Victorian terrace in the west end of Glasgow. Last night, however, a neighbour said they had not been seen there for about a year and Mr Morrison could not be contacted by The Herald.

The school website states it is "a leading teaching and research institution" which offers MBA, MSc, HND and HNC qualifications. There is no evidence such qualifications have been taught at the school, whose motto is "Make it Real, Make it KBS".

Despite concerns about the integrity of the courses first being raised two years ago by the Scottish Qualifications Authority to trading standards officers, the school still features on a list of approved providers of English-language courses on the website of the Department for Education and Skills in London.

The DfES declined to comment but a spokesman for the Home Office said that, from next year, it would be mandatory for those on the list to be affiliated to a recognised independent body.

The Association of Scotland's Colleges, which represents college principals, has now demanded an urgent overhaul of the regulations governing privately run colleges and said a new list should be drawn up and administered by the Scottish Executive.

In the past, it has also raised fears some companies could be trading as education providers as a way of trafficking illegal immigrants into Scotland and equipping them with visas. Neil Cuthbert, public affairs adviser, said: "If you want to open a butcher's shop in Scotland, you have to have a licence, but it seems if you want to open a college, there is nothing to stop you."

"This is very damaging to the college sector in Scotland."

Saturday 7th July 2007

# CALLS FOR ACTION ON NETWORK OF BOGUS COLLEGES

By ANDREW DENHOLM  
and CALUM MACDONALD

CALLS were mounting last night for urgent action from ministers at Holyrood and Westminster after an investigation by The Herald revealed a network of private colleges with questionable credentials taking huge fees from overseas students.

Senior politicians were urged to intervene after it emerged at least four so-called colleges offering business and language qualifications to overseas students were being run from Glasgow.

There are scores more operating across the UK, many apparently connected to a university which is operating illegally in the American state of Oregon. Professional bodies also demanded the Glasgow colleges remove logos placed on their websites without permission.

Yesterday, The Herald revealed police and trading standards officers were already investigating complaints that a bogus college in Glasgow - Kelvin Business School - took tens of thousands of pounds from overseas students for courses that do not exist.

In one case, 20-year-old student Juliana Vasquez from Colombia paid £1200 for an English-language course, only to find the address of the school was a locked and empty office.

There is also concern fake colleges could be operating as a way of bringing illegal immigrants into the country under short-term student visas. Fears over an immigration scam are made more acute by the fact some of the colleges

involved are on an official list of providers of education in the UK operated by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), formerly the Department of Education and Skills.

Although the register is not a guarantee of quality, in effect it is seen as such because overseas students are issued visas on the basis the institution they will attend is on the list.

The list's integrity was called into question yesterday after it emerged Kelvin Business School was on it, despite concerns over its legitimacy first being aired two years ago by the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC).

Also included is Glasgow Commonwealth College, one of the two colleges uncovered by The Herald. The second, Great Regent College, is applying for the same status.

Both colleges, and others like them, operate elaborate websites giving detailed information about lavish facilities. They invite prospective students to sign up for courses online, in some cases with an upfront registration fee of more than £500.

However, the addresses given for the colleges, when visited by The Herald, were a private flat in Sauchiehall Street and a rundown office block in Tradeston, one of the city's poorest areas.

Critics of the current system argue it is too complex, with responsibility passed

between the Home Office, the DIUS, police and trading standards officers. They say a simpler system operated from Scotland would be more effective.

Pauline McNeill, deputy education spokeswoman for the Scottish Labour Party, said: "We have an obligation to protect the interests of all who are educated in Scotland."

"The executive needs to look at drawing up its own list of recognised providers and it is clear the Home Office needs to ensure the register of institutions is monitored properly."

Elizabeth Smith, deputy education spokeswoman for the Scottish Conservatives, has written to Education Secretary Fiona Hyslop, urging her to step in. She said: "This is extremely worrying and demands urgent action because it challenges the integrity of the excellent Scottish college system."

An executive spokesman said: "The Scottish government is not responsible for private colleges. We can and do provide advice to the DIUS on registration applications from private colleges. However, decision about admissions on the register remain a matter for the DIUS."

The Home Office said the rules were due to be tightened up next year by making it mandatory for those on the list to be affiliated to a recognised independent body.

Saturday 7th July 2007

# UNCOVERED: A TALE OF TWO COLLEGES

By ANDREW DENHOLM  
and CALUM MACDONALD

Their brochures show New York skylines and top-quality campuses. The reality is very different, as Calum Macdonald and Andrew Denholm reveal:

## COMMONWEALTH COLLEGE

GLASGOW has never looked so good. In fact, it has never looked like this at all.

The prospectus for the Commonwealth College Glasgow has been designed to showcase both the institution and the city in which it is based, which is why an unsuspecting student could find it confusing.

The picture on the front of the prospectus is not of George Square but the Gothic Grand Place in Brussels.

Inside there is a photograph of a park, which at first glance could be Kelvingrove. Take a second glance and the Manhattan skyline is discernible.

Then there is the photograph of the sprawling green campus which looks more like a Highland estate than the rough-and-ready warehouse district of Tradeston south of the River Clyde.

Even a photograph of the modern-looking college, all glass and clean lines, bears no resemblance to the actual college, a crumbling turn-of-the-century sandstone building in Kingston Street which has seen better days.

Nonetheless, Commonwealth College Glasgow does have genuine students, mostly from Pakistan, India and Nigeria, and it does run classes and exams.

It was created by Iram Iqbal, a 29-year-

old graduate of Glasgow Caledonian University from Partick who told The Herald she started the college with money from her savings.

She is currently on maternity leave and her cousin, Umbreen Iqbal, 25, is running the college. She lives in Jordanhill in Glasgow.

Both cousins said the college had been operating for two-and-a-half years but according to official documents from Companies House it was registered as a business only in June last year.

Umbreen Iqbal yesterday showed The Herald around the college, which occupies four storeys and includes numerous small classrooms and a library with an odd assortment of books, such as Wilbur Smith novels and a copy of Murder on the Orient Express.

Umbreen Iqbal said the college was offering only HNC and HND courses and not degree-level programmes.

Yet the prospectus informs students they can choose from a number of undergraduate courses, including a BA (Hons) in accounting and finance and also postgraduate degrees, including an MA in human resource management.

The college website address is [www.gwc.ac](http://www.gwc.ac). The web addresses of all officially recognised universities and colleges in the UK end with the suffix [ac.uk](http://ac.uk). The [ac](http://ac) suffix on Commonwealth College's website is the internet country code for the Ascension Islands, where the web address for the Glasgow college is based.

The website itself includes a section called "accreditation/registration" which lists a number of professional organisations, including their logos.

Two of those organisations are the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), to which it specifically states that it is affiliated. However, a spokeswoman for CIMA said this was not the case.

She said: "They are not registered as a CIMA learning tuition provider and should not be using the CIMA logo and we have now advised them to remove that from their website."

A spokesman for ACCA added: "Commonwealth College is not one of our affiliated colleges and they are not entitled to be using our logo."

Another institution listed as an affiliate is the University of Newcastle, which is not based in the north-east of England, but instead in the north-west of the United States in Portland, Oregon. According to the state authorities, the University of New Castle (as it is sometimes referred to on its website), is operating illegally in the state of Oregon.

The other college investigated by The Herald, the Great Regent College, also claims affiliation with this institution.

Umbreen Iqbal insisted Commonwealth College was a legitimate institution. She said: "We have nothing to hide. I know of four or five different private colleges in Glasgow which I have checked out and which did not look good.

"It is difficult for us when there are Mickey Mouse colleges out there. It doesn't help those, like ourselves, who are doing things legitimately."

## GREAT REGENT COLLEGE

THE Great Regent College is a grand sounding institution which boasts of a worldwide reputation for academic excellence.

The first port of call for potential students is the college website, which is full of information about the centre, its staff and facilities.

In particular, the college is very proud of its campus, which it claims "has a uniquely harmonious blend of rich, historic buildings and modern, innovative facilities".

In fact, Great Regent College is based up a close in a grubby second-floor apartment in Glasgow's Sauchiehall Street, and its name does not even feature on the security door buzzer at street level.

The Herald was welcomed into the "college" yesterday by Wasim Hashmi, who said he was the college co-ordinator.

Mr Hashmi said the owner was a Mr Akhtar, who was unavailable. Nevertheless, Mr Hashmi willingly gave a tour of the "college", which comprises two large rooms and a few smaller ones.

Of particular interest was the computer lab, which it is claimed on the website is "fully equipped with latest versions of computers" and the library which

the college said is "equipped with all necessary books and relevant materials enabling students to carry out their research work".

The lab is nothing more than eight outdated Dell computers and the library a small collection of seemingly random books, few of which have anything to do with computers or IT.

Nevertheless, the greatest asset of any institution is not bricks and mortar, nor books and computers, but its staff.

Again, the Great Regent College is very proud of its staff. It claims: "We understand that highly professional and trained teachers are extremely essential for the prospective students to educate them outstandingly using modern teaching techniques."

"For this purpose we have hired highly professional and experienced teaching staff to meet the higher standards of teaching requirements."

However, when asked about this Mr Hashmi said the college was merely "in the process of recruiting staff" and said so far the faculty was made up of two English language teachers and two IT teachers.

Of the discrepancy between the description of the "harmonious blend of rich, historic buildings" and the reality of a second-floor flat, Mr Hashmi said: "We were wanting to build on Pollokshaws Road. We were almost in a final deal, then the deal was denied, so we came here and got this."

When quizzed how many students had passed through Great Regent College, he said: "We have not started yet, we are brand new."

"We have recently registered with the Department for Education and Skills, we work very hard to try to start up in September."

Yet on the college's website it claims that many students have passed through the college, graduated and are now pursuing successful careers. It states: "Great Regent College which is known as a name of excellence and an academic resort. The Great Regent College has received recognition throughout the United Kingdom for its excellence in liberal arts, research, technology, business and hospitality management. Employers consistently marvel how GRC graduates are able to hit the ground running, making a GRC degree worth more in the marketplace."

How a college which has yet to admit any students can also boast of employers being consistently marvelled by its graduates is not explained.

Neither is it explained how the college is going to cope with running no fewer than 141 undergraduate degree programmes in everything from clinical genetics, molecular medicine and mathematics to philosophy, fine art and law from premises up a close.

Just how the horses, presumably essential for those Great Regent College undergraduates studying for the BSc (Hons) in Equine Sports Science, are going to manage up two flights of stairs remains a mystery.

Monday 9th July 2007

# MEXICAN DUPED BY 'COLLEGE' ORDERED OUT OF UK

By CALUM MacDONALD

A Mexican student ordered to leave the country by the immigration authorities faces the prospect of returning home without recouping thousands of pounds paid to the man behind a bogus Scottish college.

Magali Angeles Camacho, 32, paid more than £3000 for a course at a "college" in Glasgow which an investigation by The Herald has exposed as a sham institution.

David Morrison, the man behind the Kelvin Business School (KBS), has vanished owing thousands of pounds to vulnerable students from poor countries around the world.

Police and trading standards officers launched an inquiry into the activities of Mr Morrison, from Cumbernauld, his girlfriend Jin Wang, and KBS last week after The Herald's investigation into the burgeoning unregulated private college industry in Scotland.

One overseas student, Juliana Vasquez, whose parents forwent holidays and sold the family car to raise the money to send her to KBS, was left £1200 out of pocket and stranded in Scotland after Mr Morrison disappeared.

The Herald also uncovered two other Glasgow "colleges" with dubious credentials which falsely claim affiliation to reputable professional organisations

in the UK, mislead students with deliberately inaccurate descriptions of their staff and facilities, and offer courses which are of little, if any, worth.

They specifically target overseas students and it is feared that the so-called colleges could be enabling the trafficking of illegal immigrants into Scotland by equipping them with student visas.

Miss Camacho is the latest victim to fall prey to Mr Morrison's sophisticated scam, which involves the use of a professional-looking website.

He then signs them up for courses, some of which do not exist, offering huge discounts if they pay up front with cash.

Miss Camacho, from Morelia, paid Mr Morrison £3404 for a course for an advanced diploma in business administration. When she turned up for the first day of the full-time course at the "college" within the Templeton Business Centre in January she immediately knew something was amiss.

She said: "I was the only person there, except for David. Eventually two other students - I think they were Kenyan - turned up.

"The teacher, who was also African, arrived late then told us there would be no teaching that day. Over the next week it got worse. The teacher was always late and always left early, he never prepared

anything, he put things up on the board and never explained a thing.

"When I challenged him and asked him where he was educated and why he did not seem able to teach us anything he became rude and angry and aggressive."

The two African students seemed unconcerned about the quality of the teaching. Miss Camacho said: "I was there because I wanted to learn. They only seemed to be concerned about getting their visa."

After just one week Miss Camacho, who was already in possession of a student visa as she had previously been studying English in Glasgow, was informed by the Home Office that an application for renewal had been denied and she must leave the UK.

She said Mr Morrison gave her a cheque for the amount owed, but when she went to cash it the bank said he had called ahead to cancel it. The "college" is now locked up.

Speaking from his home in Cumbernauld last night, Mr Morrison's father said: "I don't know where he is. I think he might have gone to China, but I'm not sure."

Tuesday 10th July 2007

# BOGUS COLLEGES AND VISA MANAGEMENT

DAVID BLACKIE,  
International Education Connect Ltd,  
The Green, East Rudham, Norfolk.

A leading Scottish university and one of the country's largest further education colleges last night called for a London-based school of management to remove misleading references to them from its prospectus.

Napier University in Edinburgh and James Watt College in Greenock said the Millennium City Academy in Westminster had no right to claim in its current online prospectus they were "partnership institutions" or had "progression arrangements".

Similar concerns were also raised by Westminster and Northumbria universities.

The moves by Napier and James Watt also sparked action by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which has recently accredited the Millennium City Academy to deliver HNDs and HNCs.

A spokesman said the SQA was "concerned" about the information in the prospectus and intended to hold discussions with the private college about them.

Millennium City Academy is a private business college. The company was incorporated in January 1997 and

originally known as Outlaw Business Solutions before its name was changed in June of that year.

The company filed its latest set of accounts for year ended June 30, 2006, under special Companies Act provisions, which allow small companies to produce abbreviated financial statements. No turnover and pre-tax profit figures were listed.

However, the accounts do show the company had negative shareholders' funds, rendering it technically insolvent. They also show it was owed £252,030 and had just £8067 in the bank.

Company director is Miro-slava Brown and the secretary is Andrew Ballam Davies. Mrs Brown is married to Peter Brown, described as founder and "head of school" on the website, and is also a director of the London Graduate School of Management, based at the same address in Mortimer Street in Westminster.

She is a director of another firm, Hosts International, which arranges accommodation for overseas students.

In the alumni section of the academy's website, it is stated: "Students from our

college usually return their (sic) country of origin and take up extremely good positions."

Among a number of former students pictured under "Some of our successes" is Harsha Shivdasani, a former BBA and MBA student.

Of the five alumni featured, she is the only one whose current employer is named. She is business development manager of Hosts International.

Last night, Andrew Ballam Davies, financial controller of the Millennium City Academy, told The Herald the references to universities and colleges on the prospectus were there "in error" and would be removed.

A spokeswoman for Napier University said: "We have no partnership links with Millennium City Academy."

A spokesman for James Watt College said they helped the academy set up its HND and HNC courses but the agreement lapsed several years ago.

Wednesday 11th July 2007

# THE TINY TROPICAL ISLANDS LINKED TO GLASGOW 'COLLEGES'

By CALUM MacDONALD

The trail stretches from volcanic South Pacific islands through the Indian subcontinent to a grimy former warehouse district south of the River Clyde.

It connects a discredited online "university" with immigration agents in India and Pakistan who sign up students for private colleges in Glasgow.

The reason for concern is twofold: the qualifications are questionable; and the immigration loophole could allow people of dubious character entry to the UK posing as genuine students.

As a result of The Herald's investigation into the unregulated and burgeoning private college industry in Scotland, the Border and Immigration Agency is checking credentials of some institutions.

Two of these in Glasgow - Great Regent College and Commonwealth College - are affiliated with the University of Newcastle, an Oregon institution which was declared by state authorities to be operating illegally.

That "university" claims its academic accreditation is granted by a government department in the Wallis and Futuna Islands, about two-thirds of the way from Hawaii to New Zealand in the South Pacific Ocean, where the adult literacy rate is just 50%.

Until last weekend, Commonwealth College in Glasgow was prominently displaying the logo of the University of Newcastle on its website and claiming affiliation to it.

The website also displayed the logos of reputable professional organisations such as the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants and Edexcel, the UK exams body.

They were removed from the site over the weekend after The Herald revealed the organisations had not given permission for their use. Edexcel confirmed yesterday it threatened legal action over the misuse of its logo.

Umbreen Iqbal, the woman behind Commonwealth College, denied a link with Newcastle, though the college website claimed one until Friday. She said: "When Commonwealth College was formed, it dealt with the University of Newcastle. It doesn't now."

Ms Iqbal admitted yesterday that Commonwealth College engages immigration agents on the subcontinent to recruit students seeking UK entry visas, but she maintained its students were all bona fide.

Ms Iqbal claimed last week that Commonwealth College had been running for two-and-a-half years but records with Companies House show it was set up only last June.

Ms Iqbal, 25, and her father Iqbal Sheikh, 55, both from Jordanhill in Glasgow, set up another college in November 2004, Glasgow City College.

Initially, she denied knowledge of it but when told The Herald had registration documents bearing her signature, she

said: "We were going to set it up but it never traded."

She confirmed the Commonwealth College prospectus was withdrawn after it was highlighted that photographs purporting to be of the college campus and Glasgow landmarks showed sites in Brussels and New York. She said: "We are in the process of getting new ones made. We are running a legit college."

The other institution highlighted by The Herald last week was Great Regent College, which, despite boasts on its website of a historic campus, is based up a close in Sauchiehall Street.

It is also linked to the University of Newcastle and thus the Wallis and Futuna Islands. It was set up in March by Javid Akhtar, 26, a Pakistani shop assistant who lives in Kinning Park in Glasgow.

One of its website boasts was that "employers consistently marvel how GRC graduates are able to hit the ground running", even though it has yet to open its doors.

Wasim Hashmi, the college co-ordinator, said: "This must have been some mistakes in writing and compiling data."

Of the withdrawal from the website of the 141 undergraduate courses, including philosophy, clinical genetics and mathematics, he said: "We are not ready to offer these kind of courses yet."

Wednesday 11th July 2007

# VISA PROBE INTO BOGUS COLLEGES

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

The Home Office yesterday launched an investigation into whether a string of Scottish colleges with questionable credentials uncovered by The Herald are being used as an elaborate front for an immigration scam.

Its Border and Immigration Agency is to probe whether the colleges have been set up purely to bring immigrants into the UK under student visas, rather than to educate them.

In the wake of the move, Des Browne, the Scottish Secretary, said he was "obviously concerned" over any suggestion the UK's "robust immigration policies" had been compromised.

Last week, The Herald revealed a number of colleges based in Glasgow were advertising non-existent courses or were using logos of recognised educational and industry bodies on their websites without permission. Despite this, all the colleges were on an official government list which allows visas to be issued to students who have secured a place at them.

Two of the colleges, Commonwealth College Glasgow and Great Regent College, set up dubious websites which described lavish facilities and highly

specialised courses, despite being based at a private flat and a rundown office block.

Another two institutions, Middlesex College and Glasgow College, which were unearthed yesterday, both have misleading website addresses registered in the Ascension Islands. Two of the colleges, and scores more operating throughout the UK, appear to be connected to an institution called Newcastle University, which is operating illegally in the American state of Oregon.

The Newcastle University website, which has no connection to the legitimate institution in the north-east of England, claims to have a UK base in Essex but its address is actually home to a private college called Abbey College, whose principal is listed as Mohammed Ali Raja.

The Abbey College prospectus has detailed information about the process for applying for a student visa and, under the heading "overseas consultants", contains a list of immigration agencies in Pakistan and India.

Yesterday, Umbreen Iqbal, the woman who runs the Commonwealth College, confirmed the institution used immigration agents on the sub-continent

to recruit students. Middlesex College said they had opened a Glasgow branch specifically to capitalise on the Scottish Executive's Fresh Talent initiative, which allows successful students a visa extension when they finish their studies. Glasgow College also advertises Fresh Talent.

A source close to one of the colleges said last night: "It is all about immigration and getting a visa. I have seen it in Lahore where they hire out a function room in a hotel and give seminars on how to get into the UK through a college."

A spokesman for the Border and Immigration Agency said: "Institutions are visited on an intelligence-led basis and removed from the register where they are found not to be bona fide. A total of 45 colleges have been removed since 2005."

Thursday 12th July 2007

# CIVIL SERVANTS 'KNEW OF BOGUS COLLEGE THREAT TWO YEARS AGO'

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

Two high-ranking civil servants in Scotland were warned about the threat from bogus colleges two years ago, according to a confidential discussion paper seen by The Herald.

A Scottish Executive report for a meeting of the Review of Scotland's Colleges - chaired by Mark Batho, head of lifelong learning, and attended by Aileen McKechnie, head of the further and adult education division - made specific reference to two colleges in Glasgow with questionable credentials.

One, the Kelvin Business School, is currently being investigated by police following allegations that overseas students paid thousands of pounds in advance fees for courses that didn't exist. The other institution referred to was Glasgow City College, which closed shortly afterwards, but whose owners started up the Commonwealth College Glasgow, which has this week been threatened with legal action over the inappropriate use of logos belonging to legitimate educational and industry bodies.

At the time of the meeting, in October 2005, the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC) urged the executive officials, both of whom are still in post, to change the law to protect the integrity of

the further education sector.

The report states: "It (the ASC) has .... pressed the Scottish Executive to use its influence to deal with the bodies concerned and further suggested that the feasibility of restricting by law the use of the term "college" should be explored."

However, because the two bodies mentioned were private businesses and did not come under the scope of the executive, its further and adult education division decided only to "recognise the importance of protecting and enhancing the reputation of Scotland's colleges at home and abroad" by working with colleges, other government departments and agencies to "ensure that this is achieved".

An executive spokesman said yesterday that whenever they had received a complaint about a college, officials had immediately reported the matter to the appropriate authorities, including the Home Office, trading standards and the police.

However, last night the ASC demanded tougher action and, in a letter to Fiona Hyslop, the Education Secretary, called for a new accreditation process to be introduced in Scotland to regulate any

institution calling themselves a "college".

Howard McKenzie, acting chief executive of the ASC, said: "We first brought the issue that any organisation can call itself a college to the executive in 2005, but no action beyond initial conversations was taken to amend this.

"The importance of recognising colleges formally is now more pressing than ever in order to protect the standing of Scotland's 43 further education colleges, which provide education and training to over 500,000 students every year.

"At a time when colleges and universities are working hard to attract students from overseas in the face of international competition, the ASC is concerned that the recent revelations will have a negative effect on students currently considering coming to study in Scotland."

An executive spokesman said: "We will consider any representations that are made to us but there is already a UK-wide system of registration and work is under way to make it more robust and we welcome this.

"Ministers recognise the importance of promoting the reputation of Scotland's colleges and universities."

Monday 16th July 2007

# COLLEGE REPUTATIONS

IAN MACPHERSON MBE,  
Chairman, South Lanarkshire  
College, East Kilbride.

South Lanarkshire College is proud to have just been inspected in detail by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education. This process involved many HMIE inspectors spending about two weeks in the college looking at every aspect of what we do. Our partner colleges and every school in Scotland goes through a similar process, with the result that Scottish education is renowned for its quality worldwide.

South Lanarkshire College strongly supports the view that every institution bearing the title of "college", be it a school or one of Scotland's colleges of further or higher education, should earn the term for its quality processes. We believe the title of college should be protected in law, preventing fraudsters from taking advantage of students and of Scotland's reputation.

Scottish Executive civil servants have been working closely with the colleges to consider how best to do this but it is a complicated process, involving the whole of the UK. Working with the new administration, we are hopeful of making this a reality in the near future.

Monday 16th July 2007

## COLLEGE GIVES FREE TUITION LIFELINE TO STUDENT

A Colombian student who faced deportation after travelling 5000 miles to study an English language course at a Scottish business school which was locked and empty when she arrived has been handed a lifeline.

After The Herald featured the plight of Juliana Vasquez, a Glasgow-based language school has offered her free English tuition to allow her to complete her stay in the country. The 20-year-old arrived in Glasgow last month after paying £1200 for an English language course advertised by the Kelvin Business School, which is now being investigated by police and trading standards officers.

She - and a number of other students from across the world - arrived at the address in the east end of the city to find a padlocked office and no sign of the owner, David Morrison. With no money and the prospect that her student visa would be invalid if there was no course to attend, she faced deportation by the Home Office.

However, Andrew Lennox, who runs the Glasgow School of English, has offered her a 25-week course free of charge after reading newspaper articles about her predicament.

Speaking through her older sister Laura, who lives in Paisley, Juliana said: "I am absolutely delighted with everything that has happened since we first contacted The Herald for help.

"We are very happy also because we knew someone might listen to us, but we never thought that someone would also help us and this response has been unbelievable.

"To be offered a place at the Glasgow School of English means the world of difference to me. I came here to learn English and to experience another culture and that has now been made possible."

Laura also thanked another Glasgow-based English school, Live Language, which gave Juliana several weeks of tuition while it had a free place.

Laura revealed that they have finally telephoned their parents in Colombia, who sold their family car to pay for the lessons, to tell them what had happened.

"It was very difficult and we didn't know how to start. I said to my mother that we were going to tell them something really bad, but that not to worry because everything was okay. The conversation went on for three hours and she was very upset at first, but she was very happy at the end. She says she is going to write to the Queen and the Prime Minister to thank them."

Mr Lennox said he was delighted to be able to help Juliana and ensure she and her family had a good experience of Scotland. "A bad impression of Scotland and Glasgow is not good in general and this was not good for our business either because we are trying to attract students from around the world."

Jackie Furneaux, marketing manager with Live Language added: "Juliana came to us in a panic and didn't know what to do and we felt for her."

There has been concern fake colleges could be operating as a way of bringing illegal immigrants into the country under short-term student visas.

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

Kelvin Business owner contacts Herald after probe

The owner of the Kelvin Business School has finally contacted The Herald more than a week after we revealed that police and trading standards officers were investigating him. The inquiry began after international students who paid thousands of pounds in advance fees for English courses arrived at his office to find it padlocked and empty. Credential Holdings, which own the Templeton Business Centre where his office was based, said school director David Morrison disappeared three months ago owing nearly £2000 in rent and the locks had been changed to prevent him gaining access. He has told students the reason the courses were not provided was because he was out of the country and the two other key holders for the business resigned. Mr Morrison declined to speak directly to a reporter, stating in his e-mail: "My immediate concern is with the students of the school whom I have contacted on several occasions. "I have also begun to contact relevant authorities for advice on the status of international students currently enrolled and for international students that have been unable to enroll due to the current crisis." Meanwhile, the owner of a college threatened with legal action after advertising a course in its 2006-07 online prospectus which it had no right to teach last night apologised for the "error". Prasenjit Kumar Singh, chairman of the Halifax Group of Colleges, which has an office in Edinburgh called the International College Scotland, said the inclusion of a law course run by Northumbria University in its prospectus for Albert College, Leicester, was "erroneous".

Wednesday 18th July 2007

## ACADEMY TOLD TO REMOVE COLLEGE CLAIMS

By ANDREW DENHOLM  
and CALUM MACDONALD

A leading Scottish university and one of the country's largest further education colleges last night called for a London-based school of management to remove misleading references to them from its prospectus.

Napier University in Edinburgh and James Watt College in Greenock said the Millennium City Academy in Westminster had no right to claim in its current online prospectus they were "partnership institutions" or had "progression arrangements".

Similar concerns were also raised by Westminster and Northumbria universities.

The moves by Napier and James Watt also sparked action by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), which has recently accredited the Millennium City Academy to deliver HNDs and HNCs.

A spokesman said the SQA was "concerned" about the information in the prospectus and intended to hold discussions with the private college about them.

Millennium City Academy is a private business college. The company was incorporated in January 1997 and

originally known as Outlaw Business Solutions before its name was changed in June of that year.

The company filed its latest set of accounts for year ended June 30, 2006, under special Companies Act provisions, which allow small companies to produce abbreviated financial statements. No turnover and pre-tax profit figures were listed.

However, the accounts do show the company had negative shareholders' funds, rendering it technically insolvent. They also show it was owed £252,030 and had just £8067 in the bank.

Company director is Miro-slava Brown and the secretary is Andrew Ballam Davies. Mrs Brown is married to Peter Brown, described as founder and "head of school" on the website, and is also a director of the London Graduate School of Management, based at the same address in Mortimer Street in Westminster.

She is a director of another firm, Hosts International, which arranges accommodation for overseas students.

In the alumni section of the academy's website, it is stated: "Students from our

college usually return their (sic) country of origin and take up extremely good positions."

Among a number of former students pictured under "Some of our successes" is Harsha Shivdasani, a former BBA and MBA student.

Of the five alumni featured, she is the only one whose current employer is named. She is business development manager of Hosts International.

Last night, Andrew Ballam Davies, financial controller of the Millennium City Academy, told The Herald the references to universities and colleges on the prospectus were there "in error" and would be removed.

A spokeswoman for Napier University said: "We have no partnership links with Millennium City Academy."

A spokesman for James Watt College said they helped the academy set up its HND and HNC courses but the agreement lapsed several years ago.

Tuesday 17th July 2007

## MOVES TO TIGHTEN RULES ON COLLEGES

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

Ministers were yesterday facing further calls to tighten up the rules governing the use of the term "college" after an investigation by The Herald uncovered several questionable institutions in Scotland using the name.

Under UK law the term "university" is tightly controlled, but any private educational business can currently call itself a college.

The Home Office is investigating a number of Glasgow-based businesses which were calling themselves colleges. Some were advertising non-existent courses or were using logos of recognised educational and industry bodies on their websites without permission.

Two of the colleges, Commonwealth College Glasgow and Great Regent College, set up dubious websites which described lavish facilities and highly specialised courses, despite being based at a private flat and a run-down office block. Details on the websites have now been changed.

Yesterday, Ian Macpherson, chairman of South Lanarkshire College in East Kilbride, wrote to The Herald urging the Scottish Executive to support greater

protection of the term college.

He said: "We strongly support the view that every institution bearing the title of college, be it a school or one of Scotland's colleges of further or higher education, should earn the term for its quality processes. We believe the title of college should be protected in law, preventing people from taking advantage of students and of Scotland's reputation. Scottish Executive civil servants have been working closely with the colleges to consider how best to do this, but it is a complicated process, involving the whole of the UK. Working with the new administration we are hopeful of making this a reality in the near future."

The call comes days after Howard McKenzie, acting chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Colleges, highlighted similar concerns first raised in 2005.

"We first brought the issue that any organisation can call itself a college to the executive in 2005, but no action beyond initial conversations was taken to amend this," he said.

"The importance of recognising colleges formally is now more pressing than ever in order to protect the standing of

Scotland's 43 further education colleges, which provide education and training to over 500,000 students every year.

"At a time when colleges and universities are working hard to attract students from overseas in the face of international competition, the ASC is concerned that the recent revelations will have a negative effect on students currently considering coming to study in Scotland."

A spokesman for the executive said: "Protection of the term college' is a reserved matter."

South Lanarkshire College recently received one of the best inspection reports by HM Inspectorate of Education.

It was awarded a rating of "very good" in every subject area reviewed. Of the 21 grades awarded by inspectors across the whole college, 17 were graded "very good" and the remaining four were "good".

Friday 20th July 2007

## STRONG PEDIGREE OF SCOTLAND'S COLLEGES

SUE PINDER,  
Convener of the Principals' Forum  
and Principal and Chief Executive of  
West Lothian College, Argyll Court,  
Castle Business Park, Stirling.

The principals of Scotland's colleges have followed with interest your newspaper's coverage of the exposure of bogus colleges.

As your readers will know, this is a matter which has been raised previously, and was discussed in depth at the Review of Scotland's Colleges Core Group more than two years ago. At that time our colleagues in the Scottish Executive treated the matter seriously, sought advice on potential measures and progressed all action available to them.

The college sector in Scotland condemns any situation where potential students from home or abroad are misled into believing they are being offered a quality learning experience when clearly they are not.

The quality of the student experience in Scotland's colleges has always been open to public scrutiny, and is very well documented in the regular and rigorous reviews by HMIE and other external bodies, which show that Scotland has colleges of which it can be justly proud.

The principals' forum, comprising the principals of all the incorporated colleges, believes that it has already taken positive measures which protect the integrity, image and values of further education colleges in Scotland. Through working collaboratively over the past five years we have created the concept of "Scotland's Colleges". This is more than just a name: it represents a dynamic vision for the college sector and is grounded in common purpose and shared values.

Together, we have become a powerful voice, promoting and furthering the interests of our 450,000 students. The most recent evidence of this was the Association of Scotland's Colleges prospectus for the 2007 election, entitled Scotland's Colleges: Forward Together, and the prominence given to the importance of the college sector by all political parties in achieving prosperity and success for Scotland's people.

These measures, we believe, are an important defence against bogus

colleges, because they exemplify all that is distinctive about the college sector in Scotland. In many respects our best defence is simply who we are.

The strength of the college sector lies in its core mission to develop skills and build a competitive and fairer Scotland. It is greatly assisted in this mission by positive relationship-building and multi-faceted partnership work, particularly with key partners such as the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Funding Council.

I doubt that any of the bogus colleges you have reported could claim such a pedigree.

Wednesday 25th July 2007

## END TO BOGUS COLLEGES

It is excellent news: all private colleges that recruit students from overseas will be required to register with the Home Office and prove they are genuine educational establishments. The discovery that hundreds of small language schools in Britain - including some in Scotland exposed in recent weeks by The Herald - have been a front for people to enter the UK to work illegally has raised serious concerns. It is not merely a question of illegal immigration, but the exploitation of genuine would-be students which makes it imperative that these bogus colleges are prevented from perpetrating further abuses.

That new rules will not come into effect until 2009 leaves a worrying window of opportunity for those which are merely an immigration scam to continue to exploit the loophole for the next 17 months. Those that are short-changing students by providing classes which do not meet any recognised standard should be inspected urgently so they can be regulated and, if they meet the criteria, registered. More may be required, such as limitations on the use of the word

college, so that it is crystal clear to foreign students who want to study in the UK whether they are applying to a genuine institution.

As The Herald revealed the extent of the situation in Scotland, it became clear the problem is not confined to the 1800 or so colleges that are not on the Home Office register. One in Glasgow, Kelvin Business School, which is under investigation by police and trading standards officers, and believed to have taken tens of thousands of pounds for non-existent courses, was on the official list of providers of education in the UK operated by the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills. Of two others of doubtful standing recently uncovered by The Herald, one was on the list and the other had applied to join. Given the time-lag between yesterday's announcement and the new registration system coming into effect, it is alarming that Kelvin Business School was still on the register two years after the Association of Scottish Colleges raised concerns about its legitimacy.

It should be remembered that legitimate educational establishments are also

EDITORIAL COMMENT

harmed by the existence of bogus ones. Overseas students are an increasingly valuable commodity; as Immigration Minister Liam Byrne pointed out, they bring in £5bn a year to the UK.

Further and higher education institutions in Scotland depend on the good name of Scottish education in an increasingly competitive market. Colleges throughout the UK and the Association of Scottish Colleges have been campaigning for tougher regulations. Their concerns should have been addressed sooner. To preserve their high standards and for the sake of all the students working for genuine qualifications, the cheats must be shut down.

As well as an education issue, this is an important immigration one. The student loophole is not only a route for illegal workers to enter the country, but a rather obvious one for potential terrorists. It should be closed before 2009.

Wednesday 25th July 2007

## LOOPHOLE OF VISAS VIA BOGUS COLLEGES WILL BE CLOSED

By CALUM MacDONALD

An immigration loophole that enables people to come to the UK to work illegally while claiming to be students is to be closed, government ministers have announced.

Yesterday's move follows concern that hundreds of small schools have been acting as a front for people to enter the UK to work illegally.

The Home Office is to tighten the registration regime governing private colleges which recruit students from overseas in an attempt to weed out the bogus institutions operating simply as "visa shops".

Earlier this month, an investigation into the unregulated and burgeoning private college industry in Scotland by The Herald found a number of colleges based in Glasgow were advertising non-existent courses or were using logos of recognised educational and industry bodies on their websites without permission. Despite this, all the colleges

were on a government list which allows visas to be issued to students who have secured a place at them.

Two of the colleges set up websites which described lavish facilities and highly specialised courses, despite being based in a rundown office block and in a private apartment up a close.

In the wake of the revelations, the Home Office's Border and Immigration Agency launched an investigation into whether the colleges were set up purely to bring immigrants into the UK under student visas, rather than to educate them.

The investigation is ongoing, but the Home Office and the newly formed Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills in Westminster were able to outline the new regime yesterday.

From 2009, all private colleges recruiting students from overseas will be required to register with the Home Office and prove they are genuine.

Bill Rammell, Higher Education Minister, said: "Unaccredited institutions should seek accreditation as soon as possible. These improvements will mean we are better equipped to protect the UK against those individuals and colleges who want to misuse the student route of entry."

Liam Byrne, Immigration Minister, said: "Abuse of our education system will not be tolerated. Foreign students bring in a huge £5bn a year, but migration has to support Britain's national interests."

The Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC) has been pressing ministers to tighten up the rules to prevent abuse by bogus colleges. Sue Pinder, convener of the ASC's Principal's Forum, said: "The ASC welcomes the UK government's announcement. We have been calling for such a measure for some time."

Friday 7th September 2007

# BOGUS COLLEGE EXPOSED BY THE HERALD IS STRUCK OFF VISA LIST

By ANDREW DENHOLM and CALUM MACDONALD

A bogus college uncovered in an investigation by The Herald has been struck off an official government register which allows it to bring overseas students into Scotland.

Commonwealth College in Glasgow has been registered with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) for more than a year, clearing it to recruit foreign students on short-term visas.

However, the college has now been removed from the list after The Herald uncovered a series of discrepancies in courses it was offering and false claims made on its website about affiliations with professional bodies.

Two of those organisations - the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants - said they had no connection with Commonwealth College.

The college's Glasgow prospectus even featured photographs of Manhattan in New York and Central Square in Brussels rather than images of the city where it was based.

Although Commonwealth College will now be unable to bring any more students into the country, three other colleges in Glasgow which featured in The Herald's investigation - Great Regent, Middlesex and Glasgow College - are still on the register.

Yesterday, The Herald uncovered a fifth

college in Glasgow, the LSMT Business School - also on the register - which is believed to be actively recruiting students in Pakistan for courses starting in October. A spokeswoman for the DIUS said she could not comment on individual cases, but added: "If a college is removed from the register it is because it no longer meets the entry requirements." Umbreen Iqbal, principal of Commonwealth College said she would no longer be recruiting students, but hoped to get back on the register once she had changed the name of the college.

The existence of Commonwealth College, and hundreds of similar unlicensed colleges across the UK, have fuelled fears that fake institutions are routinely used as a front for bringing illegal immigrants into the country under student visas.

Concerns over the immigration scam were made more acute by the fact that all four of the colleges uncovered in Glasgow were on the official DIUS register of providers, despite their questionable credentials.

Although the DIUS argues that the register is not a guarantee of quality, in effect it is seen as such because overseas students are issued visas on the basis the institution they will attend is on the list.

The LSMT Business School, which is advertising a series of degree-level programmes in business management,

computing and tourism, is operating from a run-down premises in Dixon Street, beside the River Clyde.

The college prospectus claims Dundee University is one of a number of legitimate universities which is acting as an accrediting body for its courses.

However, a spokesman for Dundee said yesterday that LSMT had no connection with them.

The prospectus for the LSMT Business School also includes explicit instructions for prospective students on how to pass an interview with an immigration officer.

Concerns over the activities of such colleges has now prompted the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC) to call for a change in the law to protect the reputation of the further education sector in Scotland.

The ASC has written to Des Browne, Secretary of State for Scotland, calling for the 1985 Business Names Act to be changed to include protection of the term "college".

The Act currently protects the names "university", "polytechnic", "institute" and "special school" and only those who have approval from the Secretary of State can use such terms. However, "college" is not protected.

Friday 7th September 2007

# PROTECTING OUR COLLEGES

EDITORIAL COMMENT

First, the positive development. Commonwealth College in Glasgow, one of the spurious so-called institutions exposed by The Herald recently, has been removed from a Westminster government register. As a result, it should no longer be able to recruit students from abroad. This has a double benefit. Students should no longer be exposed to fraud by paying for courses that do not exist. In addition, there will be one place fewer where an immigration scam with security implications can operate (it is easier to obtain a visa for Britain by signing up online for a "college" on the register).

Next, however, comes the negative news. An ongoing investigation by this newspaper has uncovered a fifth college in Glasgow (the LSMT Business School) with highly dubious credentials. It, too, is on the register and claims links with Dundee University. In fact, there is no connection and the university has acted to ensure all references are removed from the LSMT website. Claiming an association with an established seat of higher learning in Scotland is a worrying development.

Scotland's tertiary education sector has a reputation for quality and integrity which it must guard and project if it is to attract students from home and abroad to secure lifeline teaching and research funding. When false colleges pose a threat to that reputation, and reputable institutions are not even aware that their good names are being exploited, alarm bells should ring. That action is being taken to protect further and higher education, somewhat belatedly, is in no small part down to The Herald. The government at Westminster has decided that all private colleges that recruit students from overseas will be required to register with the Home Office and prove they are genuine before they can operate. This, too, is a positive development. It is unfortunate, however, that the new rules will not apply until 2009. Even when they come into operation, will the safeguard be sufficient? The Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC), which represents the further education sector, does not think so. The reputation of its member institutions, many of which offer higher education courses, has also come under threat from sham private colleges

claiming academic links with the FE sector. FE colleges also operate in a competitive environment and equally need to demonstrate rigour and an adherence to standards.

What's in a name? A lot when it is associated with quality and reliability. It is no coincidence that the names university, polytechnic, institute and special school are protected by law and only those institutions approved by the Scottish Secretary can use them. The ASC is lobbying for college to be added to the list. There is no good reason why this should not be the case. Doing so would add another layer of protection that would be helpful. Legitimate private colleges would have nothing to fear from this. The rest would be exposed and weeded out, as they should be as a matter of urgency.

# FIRST LESSON: HOW TO ENTER THE UK

By ANDREW DENHOLM  
and CALUM MACDONALD

It would seem to be sensible, if somewhat obvious advice.

The website for the LSMT Business School in Glasgow suggests overseas applicants seeking a visa should avoid getting into an argument with an immigration officer.

It continues by offering detailed instructions on how to pass the UK entry interview, stating: "It is vital to rehearse what you are planning to tell by anticipating the interview questions and simulating real life answers."

And it warns: "If you are not able to articulate the reasons you will study on a particular programme . . . you may not succeed in convincing the consular officer that you are indeed planning to study rather than to immigrate."

The explicit nature of such guidance is certain to fuel suspicions that the LSMT Business School, along with hundreds of similar unlicensed colleges across the UK, is not all it seems. The concern is that fake colleges are being used as fronts for bringing illegal immigrants into the country under short-term student visas, which can be extended for several years by simply signing up to another course.

An investigation by The Herald has already uncovered four colleges in Glasgow advertising non-existent courses or using logos of recognised

educational and industry bodies on their websites without permission.

Despite this, all the colleges were on an official government list operated by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) which allows visas to be issued to students who have secured a place at them.

Two of the colleges, Commonwealth College and Great Regent College, set up dubious websites which described lavish facilities and highly specialised courses, despite being based at a private flat and a rundown office block.

Another two institutions, Middlesex College and Glasgow College, both have misleading website addresses registered in the Ascension Islands which gives them an ac prefix which mirrors the regulated ac.uk address of all legitimate colleges and universities in the UK.

Yesterday it emerged that, in the wake of The Herald's investigations, the DIUS has now removed Commonwealth College from the register. However, the others are still on it - as is the LSMT Business School - which carries many of the hallmarks of those discovered earlier this year.

The website of the LSMT Business School, which has another "campus" in London, is registered in the Ascension Islands and, under a banner welcoming students to its Glasgow campus, shows a

picture of the Glasgow Science Centre.

In reality, the college is located up a close in a crumbling building in Dixon Street between the St Enoch Centre and the River Clyde.

The website claims the campus has three "state-of-the-art" media suite classrooms and a "multi-purpose teaching suite", but when The Herald visited the premises they were locked and appeared to be empty.

A man who works in a neighbouring office said a number of Asian men had occupied the offices last year and put a college sign on the door, but no students had been seen since.

LSMT is currently advertising a number of courses, including teacher training, which it claims are being externally assessed and accredited by Dundee University, when in fact it has no such connection.

A spokesman for Dundee University said: "The university does not have, nor has it had, any links or agreements with LSMT Business School. Some of the courses they have listed on their website are not even offered at this university.

"We have asked that LSMT Business School remove all references to the University of Dundee from their website and any associated literature."

It also claims "academic collaborations" with a number of international colleges, including the Plekhanov Academy of Economics in Moscow, the C and E College in Beirut and the Euro College, Macedonia.

The accounts and official company documents for LSMT show that it has been in existence since 2003 and has a number of directors, including Fatima Imtiaz, from Pakistan, Shafqat Qamar, from Essex, and Syed Kazmi from Glasgow.

Formerly known as Careerwise Ltd, the last accounts for the company for the year ending July 2005 show that it had a turnover of only £500 despite having a staff of eight executive officers.

When contacted by The Herald, Mr Qamar, who is based in London, said the Glasgow campus would be opening at the end of September. "We plan to start in Glasgow from the end of September. We are bringing a lot of students from London to Glasgow because London is very expensive and so we are convincing them it will be better for them," he said.

The Herald's investigations have alarmed legitimate colleges, who first warned Scottish government officials about bogus colleges two years ago.

Since then they have tried to persuade politicians and the civil service to put pressure on the Westminster

government to change the law to protect the name "college", but so far the Scottish government has insisted it is not a matter for it.

Last month, the Home Office announced plans to tighten the registration regime governing private colleges to weed out those operating simply as "visa shops" by ensuring an accreditation with a recognised regulatory body.

However, the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC) has now written to Des Browne, Secretary of State for Scotland, calling for the 1985 Business Names Act to be changed to include protection of the term "college".

The act currently protects the names "university", "polytechnic", "institute" and "special school" and only those who have approval from the Secretary of State can use such terms. However, "college" is not protected.

The ASC argues that the omission allows those who wish to set up dubious education establishments to give themselves an air of credibility by using the term.

Howard McKenzie, acting chief executive of the ASC, said: "We are deeply concerned at the increasing problem of bogus colleges operating in Scotland. Globalisation makes it easy for students from overseas to study anywhere in the world, and competition between

education providers is fierce.

"The ASC believes that if bogus colleges were not allowed to use the name college' in their business name it would make it much harder for them to recruit students from overseas."

The association has received backing from Murdo Fraser, education spokesman for the Scottish Tories. "There is clearly an abuse of process going on here and there is a clear case for greater regulation of these so-called colleges," he said.

The facts

- There are 43 further education colleges in Scotland.
- In 2005-06 there were 450,000 students in the further education sector.
- Scotland's colleges employ 21,615 staff.
- The sector's total annual turnover is more than £600m.
- Estimates suggest there is a return to the economy of £3.20 for every £1 invested in colleges.
- The most popular subject is IT, with 72,000 enrolments.

Saturday 8th September 2007

# STUDENT LEADERS CALL FOR HOLYROOD PURGE OF BOGUS COLLEGES

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

Student leaders yesterday urged the Scottish Government to take action to clamp down on the activities of bogus colleges which are suspected of operating as a front for a visa scam.

The call came after an investigation by The Herald revealed a string of colleges in Glasgow advertising non-existent courses or using logos of recognised educational and industry bodies on their websites without permission.

Despite this, all the colleges were on an official government list operated by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) which allows visas to be issued to students who have secured a place at them. One college has now been struck off the register.

On Thursday, the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC) called for the Secretary of State for Scotland to press for a change in the 1985 Business Names Act to include protection of the term "college".

The act currently protects the names "university", "polytechnic", "institute" and "special school" and only those who have approval from the Secretary of State can use such terms.

The ASC argues that bogus institutions deliberately use the unprotected term

"college" to trade off the good name of the further education sector in Scotland, but risk damaging that reputation in the process.

The Scottish Government has so far argued that the matter is not one for it because the Business Names Act is not part of its devolved powers.

However, colleges - and now student leaders - argue that because further education in Scotland is being damaged, the government here should take some responsibility.

Yesterday, NUS Scotland urged Fiona Hyslop, the Education Secretary, to do everything she could to protect legitimate colleges in Scotland.

James Alexander, president of NUS Scotland, said: "We are asking the cabinet secretary to take action on an issue which is of great concern to students in Scotland.

"This issue has already been identified as one of concern, but nothing has been done to restrict the use of the word college or tackle the growing problem of bogus colleges.

"Without such action it is not only the individual students who suffer, but the good name of colleges in Scotland and

the reputation of our nation as one of the best providers of adult learning in the world."

Mr Alexander has now written to Ms Hyslop seeking a meeting to discuss the matter further.

Earlier this week, it emerged that a bogus college uncovered in an investigation by The Herald has now been struck off an official government register which allows it to bring overseas students to Scotland.

Commonwealth College in Glasgow had been registered with the DIUS for more than a year, but has now been removed from the list.

However, four other colleges in Glasgow - Great Regent, Middlesex, Glasgow College and the LSMT Business School are still on the register despite significant discrepancies in the courses being offered and claims made about affiliations with legitimate bodies.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "The Scottish Government recognises the importance of promoting the reputation of Scotland's colleges at home and abroad and takes very seriously any potential damage to this."

Friday 5th October 2007

# THREE ARRESTED AFTER SWOOP ON SUSPECTED BOGUS COLLEGES

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

A man and two women were arrested yesterday in an immigration raid on two suspected bogus colleges for foreign students.

The man, a college principal, was arrested on suspicion of obtaining leave to remain in the UK by deception while the two women, both college administrators, are suspected of breaching visa conditions.

Meanwhile, officers trawled through documents and computer files at the college site in Stratford, East London, while students were questioned over their visas and how long they had spent studying there.

The raid follows a series of revelations by The Herald about a network of bogus colleges operating across the UK, with several raising suspicions in Scotland.

In September, one such college in Glasgow was struck off an official government register which allows it to bring overseas students into Scotland.

Commonwealth College in Glasgow had been registered with the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills for more than a year, clearing it to recruit foreign students on short-term visas.

However, the college was removed from the list shortly after The Herald

uncovered a series of discrepancies in courses it was offering and false claims made on its website about affiliations with professional bodies.

Yesterday's raid involved a team comprising 35 immigration staff, police officers, HM Revenue and Customs and Trading Standards officers and was part of an ongoing series of operations into potentially bogus colleges.

The intelligence-led operation targeted Monteagle College and Lloyds College, which were both operating out of the sixth floor of the same business centre.

The colleges, understood to be on the government's register of education providers, are thought to have about 600 students on their books.

However, officers found one empty classroom, no teachers and one student who had turned up to hand in a letter.

The government-run Border and Immigration Agency is investigating privately run colleges to check that they are not enabling people to remain in the UK without the correct visas or helping students who are using such colleges to stay in the country.

A student questioned by officers yesterday, who was from Bombay, India,

said the fees for his business course were £4000 a year.

He admitted to officers: "I don't come regularly. I haven't been here for the last two weeks."

As the two arrested women were led away, officers were on their way to their homes to check their passports, marriage certificates and other documents.

In the midst of the raid, another two students arrived to register at the colleges. One, also from India, told officers he had already paid £3500 for a business course.

The agency will now check the visa status of all students registered at the colleges.

A spokesman said visas would be revoked from students if they were failing to attend classes.

Tony Smith, the agency's regional director for London and the South-East, said: "We would have expected to see a number of classrooms and teachers. There is one empty classroom, no teachers and one student. This is not operating as you would expect a college to operate."

Monday 8th October

## 67 STUDENTS RECEIVE VISAS AFTER PAYING £500 TO BOGUS COLLEGE

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

Sixty-seven students received visas after paying around £500 each to join courses at a bogus college uncovered in investigations by The Herald.

The revelation is the first time the scale of operations at such a college - and the likely financial gain - has been uncovered.

A request under Freedom of Information legislation shows that 67 students were given visas to remain in Scotland in the academic year 2006-2007 by the Borders and Immigration Agency after signing up for courses at Commonwealth College in Glasgow.

UKvisas, a branch of the Home Office which issues visas to students coming into the country, does not keep accessible records of which educational establishments those students are attending but a Home Office source said the college had admitted to having 25 first-time overseas students last year.

The Herald understands that a minimum charge for a visa would be at least £550, netting Commonwealth College more than £50,000. However, students could be charged much more - possibly even thousands - depending on how long they want to stay. Commonwealth College has so far filed no accounts for the last financial year.

The college was allowed to bring in overseas students after being registered on a list of approved providers operated by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS).

However, the college was subsequently removed from the list shortly after The Herald uncovered a series of discrepancies in courses it was offering and false claims made on its website about affiliations with professional bodies.

Two of those organisations - the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants - said they had no connection with Commonwealth College.

The college's Glasgow prospectus even featured photographs of Manhattan in New York and Central Square in Brussels rather than images of the city where it was based.

The existence of Commonwealth College, and hundreds of similar unlicensed colleges across the UK, have fuelled fears that fake institutions are routinely used as a front for bringing illegal immigrants into the country under student visas.

Last night, Murdo Fraser, education spokesman for the Scottish Conservative Party, who has raised the matter of bogus colleges in the Scottish Parliament, said: "It is absolutely essential that action is now taken against these colleges to prevent this abuse of the immigration system."

Howard McKenzie, acting chief executive of the Association of Scotland's Colleges, also expressed concern over the issue, claiming it once again illustrated the need for the UK Government to restrict

use of the term "college".

The ASC has already written to Des Browne, Secretary of State for Scotland, calling for the 1985 Business Names Act to be changed to include protection of the term "college".

The act currently protects the names "university", "polytechnic", "institute" and "special school" and only those who have approval from the Secretary of State can use such terms. However, "college" is not protected.

In a separate development, the LSMT Business School in Glasgow has insisted that detailed advice on its website to help overseas applicants pass the UK entry interview is entirely legitimate.

As The Herald reported in September, the school's prospectus states: "It is vital to rehearse what you are planning to tell by anticipating the interview questions and simulating real-life answers."

However, Waseem Kazmi, an LSMT official, said the information had been taken out of context.

"Our advice is strictly to help them choose the course and then prepare for the consular interview so they will have a better chance to study in the UK and start building their futures," he said.

"It is stated obviously on our website to be truthful during consular interviews."

Tuesday 9th October

## PRIVATELY-RUN COLLEGE FACES ACTION OVER FALSE ADVERTS

By ANDREW DENHOLM,  
Education Correspondent

A privately-run college which insisted it was not a bogus operation is facing action from Scotland's exam body after falsely advertising courses in its online prospectus.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is to write to Middlesex College in Glasgow asking it to remove references to HND and HNC qualifications in business and information technology from its website.

Although the college, in the city's Fox Street, has applied to the SQA for accreditation to run these courses, it has not received permission to do so.

A spokesman for the SQA said: "Middlesex College is not a registered SQA centre and therefore use of our identity is at best premature given that they have opened negotiations with us. We will be contacting them about the inappropriate use of our identity."

Last night, a spokesman for the college accepted the inclusion of the SQA courses was a mistake and promised to remove the references.

"We are not trying to mislead anyone.

"We will make sure it is removed. It may be that this is a proof copy of the prospectus and not the final copy or it could be an old one," he said.

In September, The Herald visited Middlesex College, whose headquarters are in London, as part of our investigation into the burgeoning network of privately-run colleges in Scotland.

Following the visit, Yemi Adegoke, the college's London-based academic dean, contacted us to raise concerns that it was unfair to "lump" Middlesex in with other "cowboy" colleges.

Meanwhile, in a separate development, the Association of Scotland's Colleges (ASC) is to pass on a dossier of The Herald's investigations to all Scottish MPs urging them to take action.

The ASC has already written to Des Browne, Secretary of State for Scotland, calling for the 1985 Business Names Act to be changed to include protection of the term "college".

The act currently protects the names "university", "polytechnic", "institute" and "special school" and only those who have approval from the Secretary of State can use such terms. However, "college" is not protected.

"We will now be writing to all Scottish MPs seeking their support for protection of the word "college" and including a dossier of The Herald's articles," said an ASC spokesman.

This summer, an investigation by The Herald revealed a network of private colleges across the UK with questionable credentials charging overseas students thousands of pounds to study courses which appeared not to exist.

Many were using logos of recognised educational and industry bodies or claiming partnerships with legitimate universities without permission.

Senior politicians in Scotland were urged to intervene after it emerged that at least four colleges offering business and language qualifications were being run from Glasgow.

The fear is that some of these colleges are little more than visa shops which provide an easy route into the country or a means of staying here.

There are also concerns that the unregulated nature of private colleges allows unscrupulous organisations to charge thousands of pounds for courses which are not externally accredited and have no real value to employees.

