

Collapse of private college sparks debate

To what extent should private post-secondary institutions be regulated?

BY MICHAEL CONNORS
AND MARK TIPPLE

ST. JOHN'S (CUP) — Ambrose Hickey, a student at an aviation school owned by the Career Academy, was looking forward to completing his studies last month. The Aircraft Maintenance student says he only had five weeks left to go in his program when he was met with an unexpected setback — his school closed down.

"First it was just disbelief," Hickey said. "I mean, Friday morning we wrote a test, and then all of a sudden they say, 'Oh, by the way, your school is closed'."

Hickey was one of many students and employees at the Academy's 14 campuses in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Ontario who were displaced by the school's sudden August 14 collapse due to financial problems.

The closure of the 19-year-old college — one of Newfoundland's oldest and largest privately-run post-secondary training schools — was met with outrage from students who wondered how they'd be able to finish their studies.

Demanding a guarantee that they'd be able to complete their education, about 120 former Career Academy students, including Hickey, spent two weeks camped out on the front lawn of the Newfoundland provincial legislature.

In response, the government arranged for Newfoundland's 1,400 Career Academy students to finish their programs at other schools, while the Career Academy tried to find new

investors to take over the college.

Hickey, who was transferred to a public aviation

college system, Hickey adds.

"The main reason I went to a private college is because none of the other

Scotia, also owned by the Career Academy, has prompted the Nova Scotia government to regulate the

public college programs generally reported higher earnings than students who graduated from one- and two-year private college programs. Further, the report found that graduates of university masters' and diploma programs and three-year public college programs were more likely to find employment related to their field of study than graduates of shorter private and public college programs.

Last month, the Newfoundland provincial government decided to stop granting licences for new private colleges and launch a public review of Newfoundland's private post-secondary industry.

Dale Kirby, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Students, says problems with private colleges are no surprise.

He says there's a lack of quality control in the private college system.

"I think that assurance is there in the public system, because it's publicly funded and there's public accountability," he said. "In the private industry, there's no legislation other than what government decides to legislate. And the [Newfoundland government] hasn't decided to legislate too tightly."

school in nearby Gander, says the saga has damaged people's confidence in privately-run colleges.

"If it can happen to our school after 20 years, what's to say it can't happen to a new school that's only open two years?" he said.

"I've been talking to a lot of people and [they] are not considering private colleges as a way to go. Right now there's no stability there as far as a lot of people are concerned."

On the other hand, there are problems with accessibility in the public col-

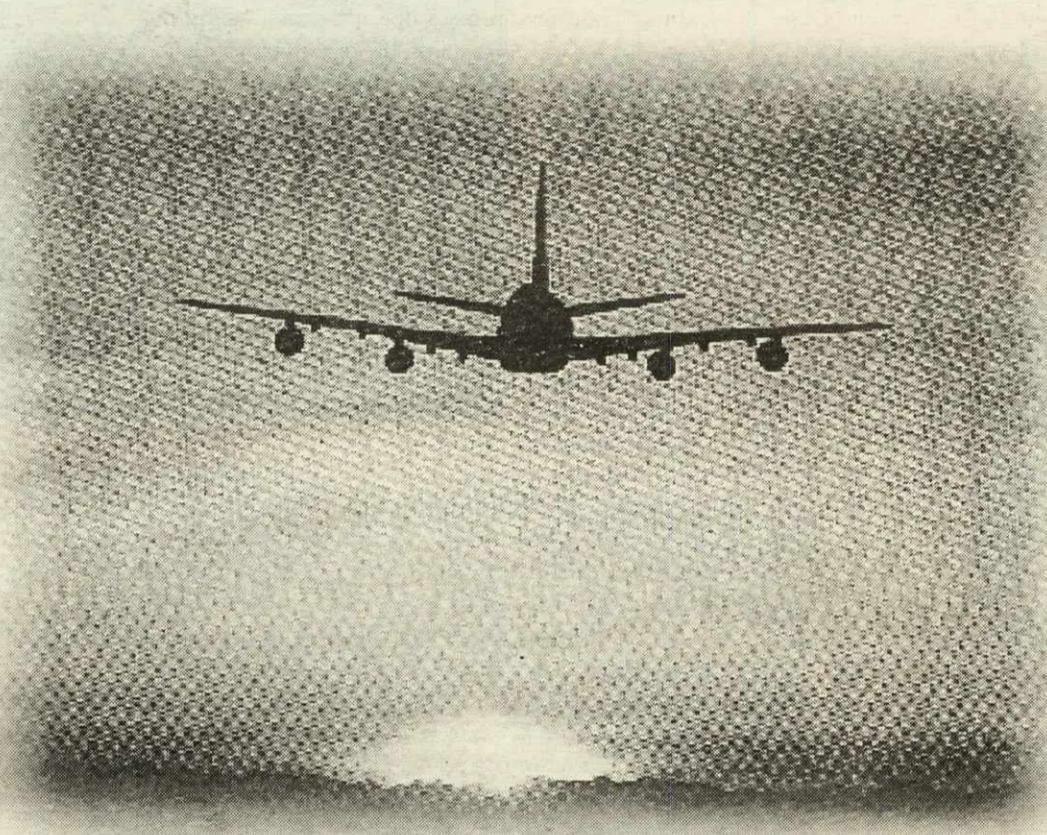
leges could offer what I wanted. Gander, Newfoundland could offer it, but there was a three-year waiting list and it's a three-year course," he said. "So that would have been six years, whereas I got in right away with [the Career Academy] and I should have been finished in 15 months."

But the closure of the Career Academy is just the latest in a series of incidents that have raised questions about private colleges in Newfoundland.

The collapse of the School of Aviation in Nova

province's private college system. The twenty students at that school will either be placed in other schools to complete their education, or reimbursed for the amount they paid the Academy for the Fall semester.

Also, a recent provincial report on post-secondary education found that students who graduated from university or three-year pub-



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