

Warning on tutoring products and services

8 February 2013

NSW Fair Trading and the Australian Tutoring Association are warning parents and students about the need to check carefully before signing up for tutoring products and services.

Fair Trading Commissioner Rod Stowe said tutoring businesses needed to be able to substantiate any claims they make and should abide by the Australian Consumer Law and its guarantees in relation to any tutoring services or products.

"Fair Trading has issued a substantiation notice to one business about its marketing claims and all businesses should be aware of the need to be able to back up any claims they make to consumers," he said.

"Testimonials should be genuine and businesses selling products door-to-door should not take payments within the ten day cooling off period and must abide by termination requirements."

Fair Trading received 12 complaints and six enquiries about tutoring products and services in 2012.

Mr Stowe said consumer detriment was a concern in non-English speaking communities where there was a great demand for tutoring and less inclination to make formal complaints to government agencies.

"We will be working closely with multicultural communities to get the message out to parents and students about their rights and the help that Fair Trading can provide if and when disputes arise," he said.

Australian Tutoring Association CEO Mohan Dhall said the organisation's membership had grown about 20 per cent in the last year.

"We now have 428 business and individual members and the Association is the largest it has ever been," he said.

"Tutoring in all its forms is highly valued by parents and the sector continues to grow.

"However, in some non-English speaking background communities parents do not exercise their rights for proper accountabilities. They should ask whether their tutor is a member of the ATA."

The ATA's Code of Conduct requires businesses to:

- have a refund policy
- fully disclose staff qualifications
- avoid exaggerated or misleading claims, deceptive practices or high pressure selling
- accurately report on the students' progress and avoid creating dependencies
- interview prospective staff face-to-face and in person, including interstate staff
- refuse to do the work for the student
- disclose the form(s) of testing used when assessing students
- disclose the relationship between any programs of study and the curriculum offered by the NSW Board of Studies
- have a written grievance procedure available for parents in the event of any dispute.

Mr Stowe said parents and students should follow some basic tips when buying tutoring products and services.

- Read any contract carefully before signing and be aware of any cancellation conditions.
- Ask how 'guarantees' of success can be substantiated and be careful of companies that rely on web-based communication and don't offer telephone numbers or office locations.
- Exercise caution with overseas or interstate institutions promoting their services on the internet.
- Ask questions about the total cost of services as well as refund and cancellation policies.
- Ask for full disclosure about the qualifications and experience of tutors prior to engaging them.
- Check that any computer-based learning program software is compatible with your computer and the internet connection is fast enough for online tutoring.
- Check to make sure the tutor holds the appropriate Working with Children check.
- Check how long the tutoring service has been in business.
- Ask the service to give you the name of any other parents you can talk to about the quality of its tutoring services.
- Check tutors have been interviewed face-to-face by the tutoring service.
- Make sure the form of proposed tutoring is relevant to NSW education courses or other institutional requirements.

The Fair Trading *Tutoring tips for parents* fact sheet can be downloaded from the Fair Trading website. It is available in English, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean and Vietnamese.

[Tutoring tips for parents fact sheet](#) (PDF size: 214kb)

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