

## NEW YEAR, NEW JOB?

As the credit crunch bites and companies threaten job losses many people's thoughts turn to a change of career. For many this might be one of the courses offering to teach you a new trade. However, South Ayrshire Trading Standards are warning consumers to be vigilant when signing up to distance learning training courses which offer qualifications in the building sector such as plumbing and electrical installation.

David Thomson, Trading Standards Manager said: "Our Advice Centre received a complaint from a consumer who had signed up for a home study electrician course which he had been told verbally would qualify him to work in the domestic and industrial electrical sectors. The consumer signed a credit agreement which meant that he would have been paying nearly £8,000 over 5 years for the course. However, not long into the agreement he discovered from a friend that the qualification that he had signed up for was not quite what it seemed. He complained to us and our investigations showed that to become an electrician qualified to work in the domestic and industrial sectors in Scotland is more complex than completing a distance learning course."

Fiona Harper of SELECT and Secretary of the Scottish Joint Industry Board for the Electrical Contracting Industry stated: "We are very concerned that people are signing up for courses under the false impression that they will qualify them to work in the electrical contracting industry. It is very upsetting to have to tell people that an 18 month distance learning package with a couple of practical courses will not qualify them for an SJIB Grade Card or to work in the domestic or industrial electrical sector in Scotland. Our advice is to always contact the SJIB or SELECT (Scotland's Trade Association for the electrical, electronics and communications systems industry) before signing any contract for electrical courses and we will be able to tell you whether they are valid."

David Thomson continued: "In this instance we advised the consumer to write a letter saying that he had been misled and that he was cancelling the contract. We provided practical help with the letter and were pleased when he received a full refund of the money paid and the contract was cancelled. Consumers should be aware however that not all companies may be so willing to refund monies paid so promptly."

Councillor Peter Convery who has a special responsibility for Trading Standards issues commented: "It is alarming to think that people who could be spending their redundancy money on a course to open up new job opportunities could be misled about the validity of the qualification. In this instance the consumer was lucky to find out quite quickly that the qualification was not valid so that he could seek a full refund but it must be very distressing for those that get to the end of course and find out that the qualification is not industry recognised. I would emphasise SJIB's advice that anyone thinking about signing up for a distance learning course that offers an industry qualification should check with the governing body for that industry to ensure its validity before investing any time or money."

For the plumbing or electrical industries, contact the following organisations to check the validity of the course before signing up to anything.

The Scottish Joint Industry Board for the Electrical Contracting Industry, The Walled Garden, Bush Estate, Midlothian, EH26 0SB. Telephone: 0131 445 9216

SELECT, The Walled Garden, Bush Estate, Midlothian, EH26 0SB. Telephone: 0131 445 5577

Scottish and Northern Ireland Plumbing Employers Federation (SNIPEF), 2 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LB Telephone: 0131 225 2255 [www.becomeaplumber.org](http://www.becomeaplumber.org)

Anyone who has any concerns regarding this matter contact South Ayrshire Trading Standards at 5/7 River Terrace, Ayr or telephone 01292 616060.

Notes to the Editor:

For further information contact:

Margaret-Ann Headrick  
Tel: 01292 616066