



Beware the counterfeit college con

WORKPLACE STAFF

IF YOU are looking to further your education or career, it's wise to remember South Africa has more non-accredited colleges than accredited ones – and this should be a crucial point to consider when choosing a tertiary institution.

Distance education is globally recognised as the most effective way of studying – it's convenient, saves you money and time, and work can be tackled at your own pace.

However, the study method's rise in popularity has been matched by the emergence of unscrupulous fly-by-night operators who award qualifications that are not worth the paper they are printed on.

Richard Leeming, principal of Academy of York, advises students to investigate a college and its courses before signing up.

"Make sure the college is registered with a recognised institution, and that the courses it is offering are also recognised," he says.

Scam colleges are known as "diploma mills" and fall mainly into two categories – those that

openly sell degrees for cash, and those that are more dangerous by masquerading as real schools.

Students are lured into the latter scam with promises of minimal work and fast-track learning that awards qualifications in a short period. "Graduates" emerge from these colleges thinking they have earned a real diploma or degree.

"The term 'diploma' is often misused in this country," Leeming warns.

"Current legislation demands that an accredited diploma course be aligned to the National Qualifications Framework, and the qualification should take a minimum of three years to complete. Anything below these standards is not actually a diploma.

"There are many colleges offering shorter, in-house courses and calling them diplomas which, sadly, is not the case," says Leeming.

In addition to checking a college's accreditation and whether your course has market value recognised by public and private-sector companies, prospective students should take a close look at the college's website, social media page, physical address and

telephone number.

"Any college worth its salt will answer the phone during working hours and have an actual 'bricks and mortar' address," Leeming points out.

"At Academy of York, we invite students to our premises to meet our team of student advisers and see that our team consists of real lecturers and support staff. What's more, we encourage prospective students to ask for feedback from past and current students."

Another valid consideration is whether the college provides student support that enables distance learners to keep motivated, direct their queries and ultimately excel.

"Further education can be a solution to fast-tracking your knowledge and career opportunities, but it can also be a minefield – unless you are able to steer clear of questionable ventures or colleges.

"As long as you look properly before you leap, distance learning could be the key that empowers you in your chosen field, and gives you the edge when applying for your dream job," Leeming concludes.

• Visit www.aoy.co.za for more information.