



# Diplomas or a debt trap?

## Gifts luring students into trouble

### EXCLUSIVE

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COMPETITION to sign up students to expensive tertiary diploma courses is spiralling out of control, with offers of lavish inducements including free iPads, laptops and \$1000 shopping vouchers sparking fights among students trying to sign up.

The "incentives" targeting students in disadvantaged communities of Western Sydney even involve a \$200 spotter's fee for anyone who persuades another person to sign up for courses, which can cost up to \$25,000.

Concerned teachers in Sydney's West fear many young people are not aware of what they are committing to and report some of the electronic devices have already turned up in local pawn shops.

Jostling and fighting broke out in the queue at the Tregear

Community Centre when the Granville-based Unique International College held a promotional day to sign up students for diploma courses such as marketing, management or hairdressing.

The college expected no more than 30 or 40 applicants but four staff were overwhelmed when about 100 people turned up. They were forced to close the doors early and cancel a second session planned for the next day.

Community workers said they feared young people had signed up for programs they did not understand and that many believed they may never have to pay loans covering fees.

"I rang up and they (the college) said they had run out of laptops and were offering to deposit cash into bank accounts," one applicant said.

Blacktown TAFE student Pulwaiya Cameron said her friends signed up for a course but she was concerned they did not receive full details.

"People have been saying on Facebook they did not know what course they entered but they got a laptop," she said.

One local man complained to a TAFE teacher that a person had knocked on his door and told him he could get \$500 and a laptop if he gave them his tax file number, bank details and social security number and filled out some forms.

"He was told a few days ago he had been approved and he could come and pick up his laptop — he thought it might have been through TAFE," the teacher said.

Unique International College CEO Amarjit Singh said staff made it "very clear what people were signing up to".

"We had angry customers because we could not take them all," he said.

Mr Singh said the college was now telling people to apply by email for entry to courses and the incentives would still be offered until June 30.