



competition commission
south africa

THE PROCUREMENT OF SCHOOL UNIFORM & LEARNING MATERIAL

A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS, PARENTS AND SGB'S



a growing, deconcentrated and inclusive economy

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This guideline on the procurement of school uniform and learning materials aims to:

Over many years the Competition Commission has investigated several complaints from parents and guardians against schools and against suppliers of school uniform. Parents complained mainly about two things:

1. the **high price of school uniform**; and
2. that some schools compelled parents to **buy uniform and learning-related material from only one supplier**.



This conduct left parents out of pocket at the start of each school year and had them feeling frustrated because they couldn't source a cheaper supplier for school uniform.

- help schools, parents and SGB's understand the benefits of competition in the sale of school uniform and learning material;
- help schools foster competition between school uniform and learning material suppliers;
- encourage parents to get involved and to exercise their right to choose value for money; and
- encourage SGB's to develop policies that promote pro-competitive procurement practices.

Working together, schools, parents and SGB's can lower the price of school uniform and learning material.

Why does competition matter in the procurement of school uniform and learning material?

When suppliers of school uniform and learning material compete with one another for customers, they are constantly encouraged to improve their quality and lower their price in order to attract sales. Unfortunately, the opposite is also true: when suppliers don't compete and are guaranteed to get customers from a school – either because the school's uniform requirements are unique or because the school has an exclusive agreement with one supplier – then they lose the incentive to consistently improve on quality or to find ways to lower their prices.

Over time, competition has thus proved an effective way to keep suppliers innovating for the best quality at the lowest possible price. The Competition Commission is here to keep the wheels of competition turning in this market and ensure that customers ultimately reap the benefits of competition: the best quality at the lowest price.

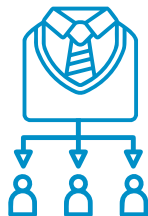


What can schools do to lower the price of school uniform and learning material?

Include, don't exclude



Spread the opportunities



Reduce, reuse and recycle



Bid and rotate



- **Include, don't exclude:** schools should make their school uniform as generic as possible so that parents don't have to source them from only one supplier;
- **Spread the opportunities:** schools should appoint or designate as many school uniform suppliers as possible so that customers have more choices;
- **Reduce, reuse and recycle:** the number of exclusive items appearing on

a school uniform should be limited to the bare necessities and should, where possible, be reusable so as to minimise repeated expense and waste. This option is however not encouraged during the uncertain times of the Covid-19 pandemic; and

- **Bid and rotate:** if schools must appoint exclusive service providers, they should do so after a competitive bidding process and they should regularly rotate suppliers.



What can parents do to lower the price of school uniform and learning material?

Shop around



Advocate and agitate



Be vigilant



- **Shop around:** parents should exercise their right to choose and actively pursue comparable quality at the lowest price;
- **Advocate and agitate:** parents should actively encourage their schools to implement the Competition Commission's guidelines on the procurement of school uniform and learning material and to sign an undertaking in this regard. These documents are available on the Competition Commission's website; and
- **Be vigilant:** parents should report to us any schools that flout these guidelines and continue to sign exclusive agreements with school uniform suppliers.



What can SGB's do to lower the price of school uniforms and learning material?

Comply



Be vigilant



- **Comply:** SGB's should ensure that their schools implement the Competition Commission's guidelines on the procurement of school uniform and learning material. They should encourage schools to sign a voluntary undertaking in this regard, as a public pledge of their commitment to pro-competitive compliance. These documents are available on the Competition Commission's website; and
- **Be vigilant:** SGB's should report to us any schools that flout these guidelines and continue to sign exclusive agreements with school uniform suppliers.

HOW TO REPORT

Complaints can be lodged with the Competition Commission in one of two easy ways:



Fill out a short Form CC1, which you can get on www.compcom.co.za, and attach a brief description of your concerns. Mail the form and description to ccsa@compcom.co.za; or



Send a WhatsApp to 084 743 000 with a brief description of your complaint.