

How to persuade your parents of your tertiary study choices

The choice about what to study and where can be cause for great conflict between parents and young adults preparing to enter higher education when expectations and aspirations of a chosen career clash. The reason for this is often a lack of knowledge and understanding about new and emerging fields on the part of parents, who struggle to visualise their child's prospects and chances of success outside of the "traditional" path.



Image source: Getty Images

“If parents and their children disagree about the child’s study choice and choice of institution, it can make the already stressful situation of applying and entering higher education even more fraught, so it is essential that this issue is sorted out head-on and pro-actively,” says Natasha Madhav, senior head of Programme: Faculty of ICT at The Independent Institute of Education, SA’s largest private higher education provider.

She says parents must make an effort to understand where their child is coming from, and not dismiss their choice out of hand.

“Young people are often more informed about new and emerging careers, particularly in technology-related fields. Couple this with the growing range of higher education institutions, especially those good ones with strong industry connections and work-focused curricula, your child may well be better positioned to make a call on the best road for them for the future,” Madhav says.

However, given that there are also chancers in the higher education marketplace, whose offering on paper differs wildly from the actual study experience, and the fact that every year there are bogus colleges popping up, whose qualifications are not worth the paper they are written on, parents and learners must ensure they jointly make a researched, informed call about what to study and where.

Madhav says there are three questions learners should be able to answer convincingly, which will give them and their parents peace of mind: the *what*, the *why* and the *where* of further study.

What?

The first step is to determine which qualification is the best fit for the prospective student. This can be determined by looking at the passion and the aptitude of the individual.

“The biggest mistake you can make, is to study for a qualification because everyone else is doing it. Down that road lies a lot of heartache, frustration and potentially financial knocks,” she says.

Those learners who don’t have a clue what they want to do, should speak to career counsellors and student advisors at a respected institution, who will help them refine their options. Additionally, these professionals will be able to provide them with more information about high-in-demand qualifications geared for the future, which may even be qualifications and careers one didn’t know about before.

“Make sure that you explore all your options, and only once you have a solid grasp of the offerings within your field of interest, then you can make a call about which qualification is the right one for you,” says Madhav.

Why?

Secondly, it is important to understand and be convinced in your own heart why a qualification and the envisioned career makes sense, Madhav says.

“You can’t just look at what is a good career today. You have to look at the entire mosaic of what the career entails, and how it is likely to evolve in future. Importantly, whatever you choose, your institution and qualification must have a strong focus on transferable skills, so that you don’t become a one-trick pony.

“The future of work will require resilience and adaptability from anyone who wishes to remain highly employable beyond the first two or three years after they graduate, so make sure that a qualification’s curriculum, as well as the institution reflects this.”

In essence, learners must be able to explain why a qualification and career is a good idea, how the field is expected to grow and evolve, and how likely it is that demand for skilled professionals isn’t just currently present, but is likely to grow in future.

Where?

The second biggest mistake someone can make – after that of following their peers into a qualification because everyone is doing it – is following their peers to an institution because everyone is going there, says Madhav.

“A big complaint from employers is that young graduates aren’t work-ready. This is because, too often, there is a wholesale focus on theory and academics without work-integrated learning or an industry-aligned focus woven into the

curriculum.

“If the approach of your public university or private institution is for students to spend 98% of their time listening to lectures, studying and writing tests, with only the occasional nod towards work-readiness thrown in, you are going to have a problem making the jump from the whiteboard to the boardroom.”

It is therefore essential for prospective students and their parents to interrogate representatives of higher education institutions to determine how in-demand their graduates are, how much work-focused learning the curriculum incorporates, and how much support there is for students before, during and after graduation.

“So if you have done your homework and the legwork, and you are able to properly pitch your choice to your parents using the above guidelines, everyone can rest assured that the chosen path is the best fit for the individual, rather than a potentially costly stab in the dark or a futile walk down the road most travelled.”

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