

Invest in education to halt mid-career crisis

Today's working adults, who often find themselves on the wrong side of a precarious economy in the workplace or have simply become stuck in a rut, frequently do not know how to boost their CV and skills. For them, short learning programmes are a quick and effective way to beef up their CVs with up-to-date and marketable skills in a reasonably short time, an education expert advises.

"In buoyant economies, spending money on yourself is easy to justify," says Dr Felicity Coughlan, director of The Independent Institute of Education, "but we are observing a concerning trend of consumers forgoing exactly those investments that would enable them to improve their skills, certification and ultimately career prospects."

Alternately, compromises are being made in terms of which short courses are being undertaken and mid-career students are as vulnerable to quality and credibility gaps as school leavers, she says.

"Short courses are largely unregulated and consumers therefore are left with very few of the traditional indicators by which to measure the value of the training they are to undertake."

The Independent Institute of Education (IIE), a leading private provider of higher education which operates through more than 20 campuses nationally, advises prospective students to carefully evaluate the reputation of short course providers, as well as the institution's additional activities in the field of education and training, to make an informed decision about whether or not to enroll.

"Price is obviously a factor but is in itself not a clear indicator of the value of the learning," says Coughlan.

"Good short learning programmes enable students to immediately apply new skills or knowledge to their current positions or to demonstrate mastery of new skills when applying for new positions. Currency of curricula is therefore a key indicator of appropriateness."

Develop future prospects

Coughlan says students sign up for short learning programmes because they can continue working while studying, and because these programmes are generally a more affordable way to improve one's skills, qualifications and ultimately career prospects. Additionally, there is a host of short courses available which will allow further study without drastic changes such as resignation or taking out massive student loans.

"Career crises can hit at any age, but instead of viewing the realisation that you are unhappy in your current situation as a disaster, it should be viewed as an opportunity to develop future prospects," she says.

"Like all education, it is an investment. And while short term sacrifices may be needed to finance the course, if the right selection is made, the return on the investment will come."

Courses available are wide-ranging, meaning that those seeking a mid-career change can head in a completely new direction, study to bolster their current qualifications, or simply study to gain some fresh insights, stimulation and energy. Many mid-career people also enroll in short courses for the networking opportunities they provide.

"Small steps can be taken in the direction of a new career while new skills can often be applied in one's current position while studying, for example financial accounting, introduction to PR, business management, HR management, or operations management as just a few of the many courses offered by Varsity College. Or Rosebank College's management and finance-focused courses," Coughlan says.

"A whole new direction can also be taken by signing up for a creative course, such as dressmaking and interior design with the Design School of South Africa, or design, photography, editing and copywriting through Vega."

Coughlan advises those who are considering a mid-career education boost to spend some time weighing their options before taking the plunge.

"Imagine where you want to be and what you want to be doing in a decade from now. Then look at the available courses and see which of them ignite a little flame of excitement. Identify your strengths and weaknesses and throw all that information together to see which courses could take you down the road you want to walk.

"Additionally, there are many online tools available to assist you in sorting your personal career option wheat from the chaff."

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