

6 tips for parents considering their children's higher education options

Selecting what to do for the 'rest of your life' is never an easy choice for those students nearing the end of their high school career. The world, economy, and job market is constantly changing and evolving. Fortunately, a bit of research and sound advice from parents can assist youngsters in their choices for the future. Here are some tips for parents guiding their children through these difficult and important decisions.



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1. Find out which skills are essential in our changing world and economy

As time goes on, society changes, and technology and the economy evolve, there will be changes in which hard and soft skills will be essential to industries and careers. Cambridge university alumnus and founder of Southern African tech education provider, HyperionDev, Riaz Moola says that figuring out which skills will be essential to most, if not all careers, is the key to enabling a student's future success.

"In the mid-2000s, there was a boom in internet technologies, which was echoed across related tech industries across the world. Back then, the skills to work with internet communication technologies quickly became in high demand, and attracted high salaries in incredibly lucrative careers. In 2020, with what is potentially history's largest adoption of digital and remote tools for business operations, we're seeing similar patterns emerge, where tech skills are going to be vital to almost every industry. If you can learn the tech skills that are vital to the shifts in our world economy, you can almost guarantee yourself a successful career, and job security, even if you work in fields that are only somewhat dependent on technology."

2. Make a list of possible career qualifications

Moola advises parents to start by listing potential avenues to in-demand skills, especially those which suit their child's personality and ability.

"Most scholars get to the time of application for their post-matric year still being unsure what they want to study. Some kids have access to career counsellors to help them navigate this process, but in the absence of this, parents need to be spending time researching qualifications with their child. Spend time searching for information about in-demand

qualifications that are geared for the future. Remember that these might even be qualifications and careers that you weren't aware of," says Moola.

3. Consider the financial implications

Statistics South Africa reported in 2019 that more than half of youth aged 18-24 claimed that they did not have the financial means to pay for their tuition. A South African undergraduate degree costs on average R65,000 per year, putting it out of reach of the vast majority of young South Africans. While bursaries exist for those scholars boasting academic or sporting ability, for the rest, the only option is to rely on their family for the funds, or consider a student loan.

"With the cost of traditional education, students often need assistance in the form of a loan. With the cost of university education, it's a large 'handicap' to start your studies with," says Moola.

He added that if students pursue a traditional education they remove themselves from the world of work for a minimum of three years, which requires one to put off earning money and valuable work experience. "Depending on your needs, a years-long university programme might not be viable, so it's good to weigh the pros and cons of a different range of educational options," says Moola.

4. Job abundance

Moola says that an important factor to consider when looking at future careers is the abundance of opportunities in the sector or profession. "At any point in history, it's clear what jobs or roles were in demand, and the same is true of today. This situation has also shifted somewhat with the onset of a major global pandemic and the unprecedented move to a work-from-home culture."

Some of the traditionally largest providers of employment, such as the petrochemical, hospitality and services industries have been drastically affected by the events of the last year, with significant decreases in job availability in these sectors.

In contrast, however, professions within technology and IT – industries that were in high demand even before the outbreak of Covid-19 – have seen a wave of expansion and intensified hiring over the past year. The pandemic has been touted as a catalyst for much needed digital transformations in companies in a desperate attempt to enable their workforce to be more resilient to disruptions. Moola says that in the future, all jobs will require a relatively advanced understanding and daily use of technology.

5. Shifting mindsets

Parents of teens often call on their own experiences and knowledge in the process of handing down good advice. In 90% of cases, it's the most trusted method of advising children - but in the process of assisting your child to choose his or her career path, be aware that there are new and emerging fields that might be out of your own frame of reference. Moola says that it's natural for parents to struggle to imagine the opportunities available to their child outside of a path similar to that that

they might have followed.

“The world is changing fast, specifically in the areas of medicine, technology, agriculture and science. The dependable answers to these difficult career questions that you grew up with are probably no longer applicable, especially with the rise of the ‘gig economy’, which might lead your child to opt for a vocation that gives him or her the chance to consult outside of permanent employment. You need to take a long, hard look at the fast-paced and tech-dependant world around us and think about what skills will serve your children best in the next 10 to 15 years.”

6. Career outcomes

Ultimately, the choice of what to study rests with the student, which can be hard for parents to accept, given their own ideas of what would be the “best decision”. The debate is often a cause of conflict as the expectations of parents and the dreams of the scholar do not align. What helps the process is for the family to research whether a certain institution is able to assist the scholar with reaching their end goal. Does the school assist in finding internship opportunities, or even employment once you’ve graduated? Moola says that parents should look at job placement rates and even starting salaries as a guide.

He also advises parents to look for SAQA accreditations, meaning that students gain NQF-aligned credits which can contribute towards existing qualifications. SAQA accreditations are also sometimes a must for companies looking for candidates.

Moola says that this year has highlighted the need for scholars to consider a qualification in technology and he encourages them to do so.

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