

Helping your child find the right career

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"What do you want to be when you grow up?" This may be the question adults most enjoy asking little children, since the answer is always cute. But when parents need the answer from a teenage child about to leave school, it's possibly the most important question they will ever ask, and the last thing they need is a cute answer.

Jobseekers who undertake no skills training or further study after leaving school have very little chance of finding gainful employment. In 2014, 57% of youths without matric and 38% of matriculants were unemployed. In the same year, unemployment of people with a university qualification stood at just 1% and only 4% of people with a non-university, higher education were unemployed (source: Stats SA's latest survey).

Most people probably associate higher education with universities. However, a university education is not a realistic option for the majority of young people, whether for lack of aptitude or interest, poor matric results or simply a lack of finance. Thankfully, there are higher education alternatives for these youth.

Public Technical Vocational and Training (TVET) colleges are possibly the most accessible avenues to higher education. The government has invested heavily in improving the non-university higher education system over the last fifteen years, with a particular focus on investing in skills training for occupations in high demand.

Aside from private colleges, there are 50 public TVET colleges throughout the country, offering a wide range of qualifications for careers in sectors such as information technology, engineering, education, business studies, boat-building, hospitality and tourism.

With government-subsidised fees and access to government and private bursaries, a TVET qualification is affordable. Companies and government employers work closely with the colleges to ensure that students learn exactly the skills that they need. This results in a high rate of job placement, with a particularly high demand for qualified artisans.

The six TVET colleges in the Western Cape together have 36 campuses in well-established communities, enabling most students to commute daily to their place of study, rather than incur accommodation expenses. All the colleges have informative websites and welcome visits from parents seeking advice or course information.

Some parents might want to research career and study options before approaching a college. They can get career training advice directly from the national Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), by contacting its Career Development Services helpline at 086 999 0123 (or sending an SMS to 072 204 5056).

Those with internet access can consult the National Career Advice Portal (www.careerhelp.org.za), a well-organised and comprehensive source of career and study information that is also funded by DHET. Career and job placement websites such as www.careerjet.co.za, www.thejobsportal.co.za and www.skillsportal.co.za, often feature articles on career options.

Another popular means of connecting youth with the necessary information are career exhibitions or expos. These are offered throughout the year by national and provincial government departments, local municipalities, universities, TVET colleges and non-governmental organisations, and are widely advertised in newspapers and on the internet.

With August designated as TVET Month, now is the right time for parents with children in their last year of schooling to help them take their first steps on that successful career path.

This column was contributed by False Bay TVET College. For comments and suggestions on future articles, please

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