

## TERTIARY EDUCATION

# Why and what should I study further?

Choosing what to do after school is not an easy decision, **Anthony Sharpe** weighs up the considerations students should take into account



For students accustomed to the structure of school, taking the great step forward into the distinctly more independent realm of tertiary education can be incredibly daunting. Perhaps one of the greatest stumbling blocks is understanding just what the options are.

Most prospective students will find themselves choosing between state universities, private colleges, and technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges, says Natalie Rabson of Boston City Campus and Business College.

"However, there's only one body in South Africa that accredits higher education: the Council on Higher Education (CHE). So on paper, if you do a BCom at Boston, University of Johannesburg or Wits University, it should be the same quality and value." Nevertheless, says Rabson, prejudices do exist at some companies towards certain institutions. "Wherever you study, you need to make that qualification work for you. If you want to work in South Africa, make sure your qualification is accredited," she adds. "It doesn't have to be CHE-accredited if it's not a degree; if you study to be a plumber or an electrician or a beautician, it still has to be an accredited trade."

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT FIT

"There's no one-size-fits-all approach," says Professor Kobus Maree of the University of

Pretoria's Faculty of Education. "I strongly suggest that all learners who can afford it consult a career counsellor. Don't set your heart on one particular institution. I understand that university degrees typically lead to higher salaries, but university is not the be-all and end-all. There are many diplomas and certificates for which students can enrol."

A higher certificate is also an option for students, says Rabson. "Not all South African students have three years of time or fees to study a full degree before getting a job. A higher certificate is a one-year complete qualification. It won't get you into management, but it will give you entry-level skills for an appropriate job. It's also a way to get into a degree if your matric result did not meet the entry requirements."

### SOFT SKILLS

Maree says that students must become adaptable and employable. "They also need to understand that soft skills such as dealing with people, controlling their emotions and stress management are vital."

Rabson concurs and says that in general tertiary institutions are teaching more soft and entrepreneurial skills. "We should neglect the backgrounds of our students. Many of our students don't come from backgrounds where they might naturally learn skills such as arriving at an interview

on time, how to dress, how to behave in an interview, how to present a CV, and other general job-related behaviours." She says Boston runs training programmes for students after graduation, even helping to secure interviews, practise via mock interviews and obtain feedback from companies afterwards.

### AIMING FOR EMPLOYMENT

Practical skills remain important, nevertheless, and it's important to match one's interests to a practical understanding of the job market.

Maree says the world is moving in the direction of an integrated, qualitative approach. "We ask students about their role models, what they enjoy doing, what they regard as their strengths. We look at their life purpose – to give every person a chance to find employment that will give them meaning in life."

That being said, students should not enrol for something that won't help them become employable, adds Maree. "This country is in dire need of people with technical qualifications, mathematics, scientific skills. We desperately need people who can drive the economy. We can't have so many people flocking to the humanities because they're not employable at a time when the fourth industrial revolution is in full swing and the fifth is looming."

Those interested in technical qualifications should also investigate the large number of Sector Training and Education Authorities (SETAs), adds Maree. "If you want to become a pharmacist, for example, go talk to your local chemist, link up with the appropriate SETA, do your practicals, and if after several months you're successful you can get a qualification." ■

### MORE INFORMATION

Kobus Maree encourages learners to access the links available on [kobusmaree.org](http://kobusmaree.org) – these offer a wealth of further insight on the issues raised in this article.