

Lifelong learning and career choices

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Some young people know from an early age exactly what they want to do when they grow up.

The vast majority, however, do not have such certainty, and when the time comes for them to make a decision about what to study, making a choice can be a difficult and anxious time. This process can be made less intimidating by following a few guidelines. A decision about further studies becomes important during the last few years of school: first when it's time to make subject choices in Grade 9, and again during Matric, when you need to finalise your plans for what to do after school.

Choosing a career can be scary, and many people take a long time figuring out what it is they want to do with their lives. It is quite normal not to be a hundred percent sure which direction to pursue – even if your friends are!

The most important thing for you before deciding is to do a lot of research about the different fields and careers that interest you, and then to consult with education professionals about your options. Start by making two lists: the first about things that interest you, things that you enjoy doing, and the school subjects that you perform well in. The second should list the things that you don't find stimulating or interesting.

Next, you should start researching careers related to these fields of interest – on your own and, if possible, with the assistance of a student counsellor at the potential institutions you may want to study at. By doing your own research, you will get a better understanding of careers that could be a good fit for you and you can narrow down your list of options easily.

Once you have given this some thought, get assistance from educational advisors to guide you in the right direction. Reaching out to people working in the careers or industries that interest you is also a good idea, as they will be able to give you hands-on advice and information when it comes to what the roles you're interested in are really like.

It can also be helpful – and fun – to do a personality quiz to see how your personality and interests can be matched with potential careers. You can, for example, identify whether you are a *Doer*, *Thinker*, *Creator*, *Helper*, *Persuader*, or *Organiser*, and the traits of your dominant personality type may provide additional career guidance.

Remember that a career choice made in your late teens does not mean that you need to stay in that field for the rest of your life. Many people change careers during their lifetime – either by upskilling within a certain field or by studying a completely different field while they remain in their current employment. Committing to an approach of lifelong learning instead can take the pressure off and will enable you to make the best decision for you for now.

Wits Plus offers full-time applicants an additional opportunity to get a sought-after place at the University of the Witwatersrand as a part-time student in selected undergraduate degree programmes. We also offer short courses in various business fields as well as different options to learn, teach, and improve language skills.

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