



Prof Kobus Maree

Degree, diploma, or certificate: which of these qualifications offer students the 'best' chance in the occupational arena?

By Prof Kobus Maree

It is always difficult for prospective students to choose which qualification they want to pursue after school. Further studies, whether for a degree, diploma or certificate, are essential for having a successful career; they can open many doors on one's career journey.

Prof Kobus Maree, educational psychologist at the University of Pretoria, says that even though there is a hierarchical distinction between the three qualifications, each needs to be evaluated on merit.

In some instances it costs more to study for a specialised diploma programme than it costs for a generic degree programme at a university. That is, however, not always the case. To apply and study for specific specified diplomas can cost more than applying and studying for some general degrees. Whatever you choose to study will be associated with particular career opportunities. It, therefore, requires proper research into specific disciplines and institutions to determine what would be suitable **for you**.

An assessment by and a conversation with an experienced psychologist, whose approach is grounded in science and the art of providing career counselling, can be invaluable. (Please note: You cannot expect them to give you 'counsel' or 'advice'. On the contrary, it is their task to provide you with the necessary information to empower yourself to decide which discipline and career would

be most appropriate for you. You are, after all, the only one who will ever be an expert on yourself. Psychologists can simply guide you towards making those critical choices yourself.)

It is also beneficial to talk to current students and graduates about their experience regarding study fields and the careers associated with them.

One should not be set on a particular tertiary institution, whether it is a university, university of technology, college or private training institution. Research has shown time and again that people with degrees commonly find employment more easily and earn a higher salary than their competitors. However, one should not underestimate the value of non-university study. Each study discipline and tertiary training institution (public or private) should be rated on its own merit. A diploma in film studies or a technical qualification can suit you as a person very well and help you to achieve **your** specific key life themes.

Moreover, it can be enriching on a personal level. Several specialised diplomas and certificates facilitate

a range of career opportunities that can make a person highly employable and provide him or her with more opportunities than some common degrees. A handy tip is to thoroughly research career opportunities for students who have already graduated—both now and in the future. Ask yourself regularly whether you will still be employable in five, ten, or fifteen years' time. Remember: Your focus should be on study fields that will help you to become employable and to achieve **your central life themes**, rather than to simply focus on finding a job with a good salary.

The tuition fees should not prevent one from pursuing further studies. Give your all to your studies, be the **best possible version of yourself** (rather than merely trying to be 'better' than someone else) and apply for bursaries. There are many bursaries available. You are simply required to look for them on the internet (feel free to visit my website (www.kobusmaree.org), where you will find multiple bursary opportunities). Also keep an eye out for careers that will always be in demand, such as teachers, nurses, psychologists, software developers, game developers,

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data analysts, financial advisors, solar energy technicians, robotics technicians, electricians, plumbers, etc. It is, of course, difficult to generalise, and this list purely serves as a general guideline.

There are for example people who feel that those who are trained in the theory and practice of working with blockchain and bitcoin, and those who are qualified as wind turbine technicians, will become very sought after. Once again: Stay abreast of new developments. It is critically important that you do a thorough job analysis before deciding on what to study. The situation is changing almost daily as new careers develop and others wither or even disappear.

Only programmes that comply with the requirements set by the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) may be presented by an Institution of Higher Education—whether public or private. Moreover, all private suppliers of higher education and training have to be licensed and registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). It is advisable that you contact the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to find out about specific institutions and especially whether the particular course that you are interested in, is accredited. Don't let yourself be caught by an institution that isn't registered or a course that hasn't been accredited. It will only waste your precious money.

If you want to enrol for a graduate programme, but your matric results do not allow you to, it is by no means the end of the world. For example, I know of a student who wanted to study medicine, but whose marks were not good enough. The student did not even study Mathematics or Physical Sciences at school. He took a 'detour' by registering for Mathematics and Physical Sciences at a post-school training institution, then enrolled for a general degree at a university, and, after performing brilliantly, gained admission to study medicine. Today this student is a fourth-year medical student. Everything is possible if you want to achieve your dream and if you **do** everything in your power to achieve success. Don't merely work to pass. Do more than that. Find out from the institutions where you want to study what you can do to qualify for studying a specific discipline, and then do your best to take measures that will allow you to gain admission.

Lastly, one must continuously re-empower yourself; one must be a lifelong learner, improve your qualifications, and do whatever you can to develop yourself further. Various short courses also have specific benefits in further empowering one for a career. Never allow yourself to stagnate. Do continuous research into what is available to you and what is possible **for you**. The motivation is that students ultimately enter a career where their

talents are realised, a career that suits their personality—where their key life themes can be achieved, where they can experience personal significance and can make social contributions—and especially, a career that gives meaning and purpose to their lives.

However, it all starts with the following question: **Are you prepared to study hard, and more importantly, what motivates you to want this? What is your ultimate goal?**

Surely it's not just because your teachers or parents want you to succeed or do well. As a student once put it: 'I want to become a nurse. We grew up very poor and our family couldn't afford a medical aid. We often had to experience severe pain and discomfort without being able to do anything about it. Every time I start to become discouraged with my work, I think about the satisfaction I will experience as my personal goal (to work in an environment where I can study the human body and practically apply my knowledge) and my social goal (to help people in pain, to make up for the times when people were sick and I couldn't help them), because it will help me to experience meaning and purpose in my life.'

Contact information

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You are advised to download the Register of Private Higher Education Institutions at www.dhet.gov.za if you plan to apply at a private training institution. You will also find all the information you need about universities, universities of technology, TVET Colleges, and institutions of private higher education on this website.



Students on the Hatfield Campus of the University of Pretoria

Here are the URLs of a few more websites that you may want to visit for information regarding universities, universities of technology, TVET Colleges, and institutions of private higher education:

- **All TVET qualifications:** http://www.tvetcolleges.co.za/Site_CollegeCourses.aspx
- **Examples of diploma qualifications and minimum entry requirements for degree courses:** [https://www.mandela.ac.za/Apply/Admission/National-Certificate-Vocational-\(NCV\)](https://www.mandela.ac.za/Apply/Admission/National-Certificate-Vocational-(NCV))
- **Diploma qualifications:** <https://www.colleges.co.za/what-is-the-difference-between-a-certificate-diploma-and-degree>
- **All about TVET Colleges:** <https://www.news24.com/You/Archive/everything-you-need-to-know-about-sas-tvet-colleges-20170728-2>
- **SAQA—The SA Qualifications Framework:** <http://www.saqa.org.za/list.php?e=NQF>
- **What is the difference between a certificate, diploma, and degree?** <https://www.colleges.co.za/what-is-the-difference-between-a-certificate-diploma-and-degree>.