

Choosing a Career

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A majority of college students change their main degree subject at least once in their college careers; many change their decision several times during their years in college. All of these changes, while valuable in terms of personal growth and development, are often costly in terms of time and money spent.

More than 1,000 freshers drop out of university every year in Wales, sparking concerns that failures in the academic system could hinder rather than help revive the economy.

Personal problems and academic failures were among the main reasons for students walking away from their undergraduate courses in the first year of study, the most recent figures available from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reveal.

Business experts have warned that during the recession universities have to do even more to ensure the country has a skilled workforce to meet the needs of a changing economy and not add to the dole queues in towns and cities across the UK in the meantime.

In Ireland at Dublin City University, regarded as the State's leading "hi-tech" university, 39 per cent of students who began a science and technology degree course failed to progress to second year in their chosen course. In the UK, an £800m drive to reduce the number of university dropouts has had virtually no effect, according to a report from a committee of MPs. The proportion of students who fail to complete their degree has remained at 22% for five years, it reveals.

Neil started university at 17, feeling sure about the law course he was studying because he wanted to join the police. He quickly felt that he'd made a mistake. He found the lectures weren't what he was interested in and he couldn't adjust to the change in culture between school and university.

He spoke to his careers adviser in his fourth week at university, who informed him that no specific degree subject was required for his chosen career. Having looked at other possibilities, Neil found a course in criminal justice. He spoke to the lecturer concerned and had transferred courses within a week! He was also able to discuss things like the timetable of his new course, and find out exactly what would be expected of him. Neil knew his reasons for choosing a law course, but had not researched other possibilities. He admits he was lucky, because he had considered just stopping attending lectures and hunting for a job. Taking early advice meant that he found a course he enjoyed and one that suited his future career ambitions.

New research published today shows that children at 11 have very high aspirations, with 75 per cent saying they want to go to university. Schools and parents need to work together to build on this level of ambition and get children thinking about higher education, especially those from homes where no members of their family have been to university before.

It is vital that parents and schools are setting out the options for children and young people whether they are academic and are looking to go to university or are more practical and want to do an apprenticeship.

Effective careers guidance is needed to keep pace with a changing economy - many of the types of jobs that will be in demand in 2010 did not exist in 2004. That means giving young people the most accurate and up to date advice.

Good careers advice is a vital element in children being able to take control of their own futures. The primary age is the ideal time to introduce children to the wide variety of jobs there are available, and new assessment measures will open their eyes to jobs they might not have considered, and to the idea that colleges and universities might be perfectly within their reach.

New from the United States is the Self Directed Search (SDS). The SDS is a simulated career counselling experience. Based on Dr. John L. Holland's RIASEC theory that both people and work environments can be classified according to six basic types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (RIASEC), the SDS

enables individuals to choose careers and fields of study that best match their self-reported skills and interests. The theory behind the SDS was an outgrowth of John Holland's practical experience in the fields of job classification and career choices. As a classification interviewer with the army, Dr. Holland realized that many people seemed to be examples of common personality types. This led to his first formulation of the six basic categories in a person-environment typology.

Over the next 25 years, the typology was revised several times and was the basis for numerous research studies that documented its predictive power. The SDS was designed to help people make career and educational choices that match their own interests and abilities.

In 1995, Dr. Holland received the prestigious American Psychological Association Award for Distinguished Contributions to Knowledge for his theory of careers that "provided an intellectual tool for integrating our knowledge of vocational intentions, vocational interests, personalities, and work histories."

Extensive research has also shown that people whose job and work environments most closely match their personal style and interests tend to consider themselves satisfied and successful with the occupational choices they have made.

The SDS has been used by over 22 million people worldwide and has also been translated into 25 different languages. SDS results have been supported by over 500 research studies.

The SDS is available to psychologists and is a comprehensive career exploration tool that allows people to gain insight into the world of work and, with their new self-understanding, discover an occupational "match." Individuals answer questions about their aspirations, activities, competencies, occupations, and other self-estimates and discover occupations that best fit their interests and skills.

Taking the Self-Directed Search will determine a candidate's 3-letter Holland code to help them find the careers that best match their interests and abilities. A list of occupations (and college degrees) with codes identical and/or similar to the candidate's own will be given.

The candidate can then explore the careers he or she are most likely to find satisfying based upon their interests and skills. The SDS report will also give them recommendations about how to proceed through their career development and decision-making process.