How to choose the right course for you?

With Year 12 students beginning to look at selecting university courses for 2016, choosing what to study and where to study is a weighty, often life-changing decision. Studying is after all, an investment in your future. You’re also investing your time and money. So when it comes to picking the right course for you, it pays to do your homework.

But where do you start? How do you know which course is perfect for you? And with endless study options out there, how do you make sure you’re making the right choice? Think of it as a checklist that’ll help guide you to study success!

1. First things first, know your end goal

This one’s simple. Just ask yourself, ‘What do you want out of studying?’

If you’re fresh out of high school, chances are your goal is to simply gain a qualification that’ll help kick-start your career, and land you a job. If you’re a working professional, however, you might be after a qualification to help you gain a promotion or specialise in a new field.

Knowing the purpose of your studies is really important. It’ll help keep you focused in your search for the ideal course, and will help you prioritise what you ‘must-have’, and what’s ‘nice-to-have’.

Career changers and school leavers

If your end goal is to start your career, you should look for courses that provide:

- Work placements and internships to build up your industry connections and improve your employment prospects.
- Access to industry-standard technologies, resources and practices to ensure you graduate with job-ready skills.
- A culture that fosters ambitious, like-minded students. Once you graduate, your fellow students will become valuable industry contacts – potential colleagues, employers and business partners.
- A nationally recognised and accredited qualification, so you can be assured your future employers will recognise your certification.

2. Now get practical

Now ask yourself, ‘How much time and money am I able to invest in my studies?’

Considering such practicalities is a simple but effective way of figuring out whether you need to study part-time or full-time, or whether an online or on-campus course is best for you.

Time

If you’re able to commit to a full-time study load, then full-time or even fast-tracked qualifications are definitely the best way to go. But if you’re time-poor and need to juggle work or family (or both!) with your studies, your best bet is to study part-time or look for a course that provides flexible learning. This might involve studying online, attending night classes or learning at your own pace.

Money
There’s no doubt about it, getting an education can be very expensive. So it’s important to consider how much a course costs, and what the return-on-investment will be for you. In most cases, having a degree or VET qualification will improve your employment prospects and earning potential.

If you can’t afford to pay your tuition fees upfront, you can consider:

- Studying a course that is eligible for a government study loan – allowing you to study now, and pay your fees back later. The HELP assistance scheme can be pretty confusing, so we’ve nutted it all out here for you.
- Asking your workplace to foot the bill. If the course bolsters your skillset, and adds value to your company, there’s a high chance your boss will be more than happy to pay for your professional development.

**Travel**

For those of you living in remote or rural regions, picking a course to study will inevitably bring up questions such as, ‘Are you willing to move?’ and if not, ‘How much of a commute are you willing to endure?’ A simple solution to these questions might be studying by distance or online – study options that a lot of reputable providers offer these days.

For city dwellers, the issue of travel time is just as relevant, especially if you’re a time-poor working professional. If the course you’re interested in is widely available, look for providers that have nearby campuses, or consider studying online.

**3. Research, research and research some more**

Now that you’ve built up a clear idea of what you want out of your studies, and know exactly what your course ‘specs’ are, it’s time to start researching!

How to do this:

**Attend open days and career expos**

They’re a great way for you to get a feel for the campus, connect with current students and chat to course lecturers and coordinators. School leavers might especially enjoy the HSC and Careers Expo – an annual expo that connects students to Australia’s best universities and education providers.

**Talk to people**

It might sound simple, but the best way to get an insight into a course is to just chat to people about it. Ask lecturers, students (both present and past), and industry professionals about their thoughts on a course, and how it’s run. A provider’s student centre might also be a handy place to get your questions answered.

**Do a taster course**

If you’re still on the fence, studying a short course is a great way to test the waters before you commit to completing an entire course. Open Universities Australia even offer single units that can be completed in just 13 weeks, and any units you complete will be recognised if you choose to continue studying with the full degree. Some of their most popular units include:

- Introduction to Criminology and Criminal Justice
- Nutrition Principles
4. What to look for To aid the research process, here’s a checklist of things you ought to be looking out for.

Pay attention to:

- Whether the course is offered by a qualified education provider.
- If the course is supported by a government study loan such as HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP or VET FEE-HELP.
- What eligibility criteria there are. You may need to meet certain prerequisites to gain entry into some courses.
- Whether the course syllabus is up to date and relevant. Check to see if it lets you specialise or is a generalist program.
- Whether the provider has strong industry ties, and the course involves work placements or internships.
- Who the teaching staff are. Google tutors and heads of departments to see their credentials and industry expertise.
- What the graduate employment rate is. How quickly graduates snap up jobs compared to other institutions will speak to the calibre of the training.
- If there are any notable alumni who completed the course. This is a good indication of how highly regarded the course is.

BE AWARE OF

- Providers that tell you a course is ‘government-funded’ and therefore free. This just isn’t true.
- Being lured by incentives like free laptops and iPads. This is a common practice by high-risk training providers.