

BURSARIES FOR AFRICA (Article 1)

by Estelle du Toit

Nowadays everyone tells you about the millions of rands of government money available to people from disadvantaged communities who want to pursue their studies. What they don't tell you is how confusing the choices can be.

There are at least four types of tertiary institutions at which you can further your education. Apart from **universities** such as the University of Pretoria, North West or the Western Cape, there are technikons, now known as **universities of technology**, such as the Vaal or the Cape University of Technology. But what is the difference in the type of education offered by the traditional universities and that offered by the new universities of technology? A good place to find out more about it is on the Internet at www.technikons.co.za, where all the details of all the universities of technology in South Africa are also available, or at www.youthportal.org.za, which contains an excellent document "Finding the right institutions and the right courses" that gives a step-by-step explanation of the different tertiary education options in South Africa.

In short, what it amounts to is that learners who achieve good marks (A's and high B's) at school, are interested in ideas and research, and are willing to study for three to four years, will typically opt for studying at a university. In order to be admitted, they will need matric with university exemption, and sometimes also minimum symbols for specific subjects. Screening for admission must be expected, as there are more applicants than the number admitted. Dentists, musicians, engineers, doctors, architects and accountants are still mainly the products of university studies - although the dividing lines are no longer as clear, and universities of technology also award honours, master's and even doctor's degrees in selected fields of studies nowadays.

However, at universities of technology the emphasis is less on research and theory and more on the transfer of job-directed and applied skills. Those who want to start a career immediately and are practically oriented will in all likelihood prefer to go to a university of technology. Matric is again a minimum requirement for admission, but obviously university exemption is not. Minimum symbols in specific subjects are again required for certain courses, but the period of study to obtain a certificate is only one or two years, although it is three years in the case of a diploma.

The designing of products, advertisements or fashion is an example of an interesting and popular field that does not require Art as a school subject and is open to learners who have passed grade 12, have obtained a degree or a diploma and who have a keen interest in the world around them, have good ideas and are artistic. However, design courses need not be followed only at universities or universities of technology. Such courses are also offered by **private institutions for specialised tertiary education**, such as the

Stellenbosch Academy (information obtainable from mpumi@stellenboschacademy.co.za). One can follow studies in food, art, beauty, photography, advertising design and many more at one of literally hundreds of private educational institutions in South Africa. These institutions usually work closely together with the professional institutes and organisations in their field of training.

A complete list of all registered private tertiary institutions is available on the web at www.nqf.org.za. Click on "Registered Institutions" and a long list with contact details will be displayed. In order to be included in the list, these institutions must meet the standards set by a national qualifications watchdog, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Talking of design, it is also possible to start working in this field after only two years of study, by completing a national certificate course, the N6, at a college. For learners who have difficulty in learning, training with an emphasis on practice is available at no fewer than 50 **colleges of tertiary education and training**. A list of Western Cape campuses can be found at www.tecsat.org.za, and in Gauteng there are eight of these institutions. For information on the colleges in your area, you can contact the Department of Education's call centre at 012 312 5250 or the toll-free number 0800 202 933.

Previously, these institutions were called technical colleges. A college education does not take as long as studying at a university of technology and also costs less. It is without question training in specific practical skills and also makes provision for learners who want to leave school after grade 9, although matric is required for study in certain fields, such as Management. The campuses in a region specialise in various fields of study, such as engineering-related fields (motor mechanics, boilermaking, plumbing etc.) on one campus and commercial fields (from marketing to secretarial and financial management) on another campus in the same region. Specialist fields of study that are also popular are art and design, hairdressing and beauty, catering and tourism, and early child development. National technical certificates are awarded at the end of the course and vary from N1 to N6 level.

These colleges can also be a bridge to tertiary education in that they have a division for matric coaching.

If you want to help a young person prepare for a career, the best advice is to listen to his or her aspirations and to make sure that they are realistic. If the learner is not an academic achiever, help him or her to focus on a technical course. Make sure of the admission requirements of the college or other institution at which the learner wants to study, and contact the institution's bursary department or Financial Advice Bureau in good time to obtain information on the bursaries available and the prerequisites.