

# SUBJECT SELECTION SIMPLIFIED

by Gillian Handley

Once your child enters high school, time moves at warp speed. By the time your child reaches Year 10, you both need to be considering life after school. Research from Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) studies throws up some interesting points about students' post-school success and happiness.

Parental influence is critical for raising the educational and occupational aspirations of students, and students' aspirations affect educational outcomes as they influence whether or not a student will complete Year 12 and go onto further study. Interventions such as career planning programs should help lift aspirations of all young people. Similarly, students who recognised the value of their studies to their future success were more likely to achieve this success.

## 'It is important that the subjects engage your child'

Enjoying school and feeling safe and secure is important as a positive school experience influences students' lives after they have left. The immediate post-school years have particular importance. The majority of those who find a job or enrol in further study continue in those activities, while for those who do neither of these activities, the future is less certain. Strategic planning is also important. Young people who consider their futures and make strategic plans are more likely to be engaged and content with their lives further down the track.

'Low performing' academic status 'has little impact on future success'. Success in this case is defined as satisfaction with life, together with the level to which young people are fully occupied with education, employment or both. It is also important to realise that your child's future happiness is not determined by academic achievement. An LSAY report finds that undertaking vocational qualifications such as an apprenticeship has a positive impact on happiness both during the training period and after completion. For university graduates, however, happiness declines following completion of their study. The LSAY data showed that happiness levels converge so that by age 25, there is almost no difference in the mean reported levels of happiness by educational achievement.

## Tips for selecting subjects

In Year 10, students select subjects for Years 11 and 12. As a parent, don't underestimate the importance of your role at this time. Subject selection is part of the process of determining a student's future career pathway. Research shows that parental involvement is one of the biggest factors influencing the development of a child's sense of the world of work.

Discuss career options with your teens – and listen! Be positive about their dreams, ambitions, ideas and opportunities for finding a satisfying career path. Help them identify their achievements and analyse what these achievements tell them about their abilities. List their strengths, abilities, skills, knowledge, experience and interests.

Gather as much information as possible. Talk to the school's course counsellor or careers advisor. Find out if there are Year 10 subject selection events being held at a university near you. Look at different courses at university and TAFE, and make a note of any prerequisites required. Keep an eye out for any career expos in your local area. Find out about Vocational Education and Training (VET) options available at your teen's school.

## Guidelines

Your teen's subjects will need to be relevant to the career choices that they have in mind, but it is important that the subjects engage your child. 'If you support your child to choose subjects they are good at, interested in and can see themselves using in the future, your child is not only more likely to do better in the HSC, but to achieve a higher university admissions ranking,' says Board of Studies Liaison Officer Cheryl Russell.

Even if your child is unlikely to go to university, it is wise to include subjects that will keep their options open. Choose a manageable study load with a balance between theoretical and practical subjects. Ensure that the choices they make are theirs and no one else's.

The Universities Admissions Centre (UAC) processes applications for admission to most undergraduate courses at participating institutions (mainly located in NSW and the ACT). Among other activities, they also calculate and provide the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) to NSW HSC

