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Be pragmatic about further and post-graduate studies

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A TODAY reader says that when deciding whether one should pursue further studies — such as a master’s degree or a PhD programme — pragmatism, in terms of cost, career prospects, and alternative opportunities, must feature. Photo: Cole Keister/Unsplash.com

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first"; Dec 9), for it reflects the diverse educational opportunities available, and the willingness of young people to seize these opportunities, either to develop specialised skills or to suss out personal interests.

However, when deciding whether one should pursue further studies — such as a master's degree or a PhD programme — pragmatism, in terms of cost, career prospects, and alternative opportunities, must feature.

Among these three factors, cost appears to be the most important consideration. This is even more so if the programme is based overseas, or if one still has outstanding student debts from the undergraduate education.

Notwithstanding parental support, the ideal post-graduate programme should be fully funded through fellowships or scholarships, or through teaching or research stints during the course.

Bear in mind the opportunity costs as well, in terms of the time or income lost, if one chooses to work instead. This concern explains the appeal of part-time degree programmes, though such an arrangement takes extraordinary effort when one has many commitments.

This is why potential applicants must be pragmatic about career prospects, too.

Among my friends who are giving thought to a post-graduate education, the main questions are: Where do you see yourself in one, three, and five years after the programme, and are those prospects rosier compared to where you might be, if you work instead?

In other words, knowledge of the academic programmes offered by the school must also be accompanied by knowledge of their career services, where their graduates end up after the degree in terms of their industries and their positions, as well as the distribution of their pay and benefits.

A year before graduation, while I was applying to different PhD programmes, a mentor advised me that it made the most sense to give oneself options. So I also applied for jobs in different organisations to evaluate alternative opportunities. Only with offers in hand would one be able to negotiate for better terms, too.



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... who is to say, for instance, that an overseas programme might not lead to continued opportunities abroad, or if working with a particular professor might not open doors to more options?

Eschew generalisations to forge one’s own path, but do so pragmatically, based on your individual abilities and trajectories.

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