

Minor Issues

# Dear daughter, sorry we were a bit negative about poly last year

It is a good thing that you stuck to your guns, and Daddy and I are now looking forward to a fulfilling education ahead for you.



Jill Lim

Hi, daughter.

So you're done with your O levels. And you'll be starting at a polytechnic next month.

Sorry if Daddy and I were still nudging you towards a junior college even up to the second half of last year.

Yes, even while we were claiming it was up to you. "Your choice, entirely." Hah.

Why did we do that? Why were we so hesitant about polytechnic education?

First, junior college was what we knew. It was familiar. Maybe we even saw ourselves being able to guide you through JC and its familiar subjects like general paper, mathematics C and economics.

I admit, we hadn't read up much about polytechnic options at that stage. Were we close-minded? A bit.

Second, you said you liked history and, in our minds, history = JC.

Third, going by conventional thinking, the best and "safest" route to university was through a JC.

So, we wondered, would we be disadvantaging you by letting you opt for a polytechnic instead of a JC?

But anyway, you had made your mind up. And you chose poly. And you know what? Good for you.

IT'S YOUR LIFE

You – and only you – will be the one going through the next three years of your life. Or two, if you had gone to JC.

And if you had not felt connected to any of the subjects offered in junior college, I think the two years would have been very painful and miserable ones for you. And for us too.

After all, you weren't enjoying either maths or science in secondary school. And it's near impossible to have a JC subject combination without either



maths or a science subject.

Looking back now, I'm glad you stuck to your guns and said: "No JC."

It's not that there will be no maths in your chosen polytechnic course. Your first year will have business accounting, business economics and principles of management, among other subjects.

Stick this up on your wall: There. Will. Be. Maths.

Somewhere.

But I hope and believe that you will find that kind of maths more interesting and worth spending time slogging away at because you will see its relevance, not just to your course, but to the real world as well. To working. To running a business. To managing a project.

These business skills will stand you in good stead for the rest of your life.

WIDE RANGE TO CHOOSE FROM

One thing I'm quite excited about on your behalf – possibly more excited than you – is the range of choices you had and will continue to have ahead of you.

Remember when you were submitting your application in the Ministry of Education's Joint Admission Exercise (JAE) in January?

We looked at all the polytechnic

courses listed in the JAE information booklet and I was awed, mainly because of my conventional JC background and because I had not kept up with the changes.

Speaking quite conservatively and counting courses of the same name as one, I estimate that there are at least 125 unique courses offered by Singapore's five polytechnics.

I was the one exclaiming, every time I turned a page: "Ooh, look, do you want to try this?"

Arts Business Management. Arts and Theatre Management. Biology & Process Technology (from its course write-up online:

"Using living cells to produce vaccines and life-saving medicines").

Environmental and Water Technology. Landscape Architecture. Psychology Studies. Sustainable Built Environment.

It took longer than it should have to submit your application because I kept getting distracted by these fascinating courses and making us visit the individual polytechnic websites to read up more about them. My bad.

You were pretty focused on your areas of interest.

Even within a particular course, there may be more decisions to be made by Year 2, such as choosing between architecture and product innovation within the design course, or getting to pick from five diploma courses including medical biotechnology, and food, nutrition and culinary science at the end of one year of the common science programme.

The opportunities you will have aren't just about studies, but also extend to social activities.

From what the polytechnics describe on their websites, there are many co-curricular activities available, from traditional ones including band and swimming to more unusual ones like lifesaving, B-Boying and krav maga (an Israeli self-defence technique).

So, take the chance to join an activity and try something you've never tried before.

Make use of everything your school has to offer, from squash courts to Olympic-size swimming pools, right here on campus. Immerse yourself in student life.

As for your interest in history and the fact that you won't be doing history as an A-level subject: You don't have to be a history student to be knowledgeable and passionate about history any more than you need to have studied literature to be a lover of books or the classics.

Just keep up your love of history and the arts on your own. It can be a lifelong interest no matter what you did or didn't do in school.

FOCUS ON THE HERE AND NOW

One last point, about getting into university.

You may have seen the report in The Straits Times in March 2023 that four in five A-level and International Baccalaureate graduates enrol in the six local universities, compared with one in three polytechnic graduates.

It sounds like JCs give a better chance, right?

But Singapore has opened up its educational pathways a lot in the past few years and the A levels are not the only route to university.

Some polytechnics have tie-ups with universities for specific courses, where students might complete their degrees in a shorter time or receive credit exemptions.

The report said that the Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT) and the Singapore University of Social Sciences cater more to polytechnic graduates.

SIT, for example, took in about 3,200 undergraduates in 2022 and about 90 per cent of them were polytechnic graduates.

And there are options for people to work for a few years before trying for a university place later as adult learners.

In any case, while a degree may give you an early advantage in terms of job search and starting pay, it's not the answer to everything.

Things can change after you graduate. You may end up not wanting to work in your field of study after all. (Just google "lawyers who quit, Singapore".)

The job situation or outlook for specific industries can change. A person's performance and attitude count for a lot too.

So don't fret about what kind of job you might or might not be able to get, or whether you will end up being in a less lucrative career than your peers.

Get through these three years first. Focus on the here and now. Grow as a person. Enjoy your course and do as well in it as you can. We can think about your options after that, when it's time.

And, yes, if Daddy and Mummy are less than encouraging again about your preferences, channel your red-haired 16-year-old self and tell us (but you don't have to shout):

"No, this is what I want."

Love, Mum

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