

Int'l colleges attract average Chinese

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With only six months to go before he graduates, the senior student from Beijing Information Science and Technology University said he doesn't want to end up at a small private company, earning a 2,000-yuan monthly salary like most of his classmates. Instead, he has turned his eyes toward vocational education in Canada.

"I have never been good at academic studies but I do have nimble fingers. I can be a good technical worker if I receive proper training," he said.

Studying overseas is no longer a privilege for students from wealthy families or those with outstanding scores. With a wider scope of appeal, parents and students can now be more rational when it comes to choosing a school.

"The public has realized that the best universities are not necessarily the most suitable. Growing numbers of students select universities in accordance with their interests and abilities," said Jiang Bo, secretary-general of the China Education Association for International Exchange.

As a result, vocational and technical schools in foreign countries are climbing up the list of study destinations for many Chinese students.

During the 2010 China Education Expo, which took place on Oct 16-17 at the China World Exhibition Hall in Beijing, a large number of delegations for post-secondary colleges and institutes of technology in Australia and Canada made their appearance.

Some 20 out of 58 colleges affiliated to the NSW Technical and Further Education Commission from Australia, known as the TAFE NSW, set up booths at the expo.

"There are 4,000 to 6,000 Chinese students currently studying in TAFE colleges," said Martin Riordan, chief executive officer of TAFE Directors. "That number is expected to see a double-digit increase in the years to come." Paul Brennan, vice-president of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), attributes bright employment prospects to the popularity of post-secondary colleges and institutes of technology, noting that more than 93 percent of students from community colleges find employment shortly after graduation.

"We have employers sit on our board and give advice on our programs," he said. "The programs we provide are really adapted to the labor market." Brennan said the most

popular majors are in business studies, informatics, and tourism and hospitality sectors.

About 50 out of 150 community colleges under ACCC have connected with their Chinese counterparts and are actively recruiting students from China. Brennan said the number of students enrolled is expected to hit 8,000 in only a few years.

Moreover, factors such as being placed in an English-speaking environment with shorter total periods of study and fewer class hours are also attracting Chinese students, said Mike Tang, manager of the East Asia International Office of Niagara College - a community college in Canada.

Tang said college tuition varies according to course and program, but in general it can be as much as 50 percent less than at a university. Additionally, the number of years needed to complete a course is two rather than the four required at university.

However, a specialist who has been working for overseas studying programs for more than 10 years is advising Chinese students to be careful when selecting a school.

Xie Hangdong, manager of EduGlobal - an education agency in Beijing - told METRO that most students and parents are not familiar with overseas education and often trust the recommendations of agencies that purposefully over-promote institutions.

"It is better if parents don't send their children to private or less mainstream institutions in foreign countries," he said.

Five private schools, run by the Global Campus Management Group, closed their doors in Australia in November 2009. And more than 10 other colleges have also shut up office in Australia since May 2009.

As a result, as many as 3,000 international students - including 1,265 Chinese students - could not continue their studies.