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Move over armchair, service jobs, technical stuff is top-dollar deal

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In Summary

- Highly skilled welders can easily pull down six-figure salaries and look forward to lifetime job security.

During a Republican presidential debate, Florida Democratic Senator Marco Rubio said the US needed to focus more on equipping young people with practical skills and less on sending them to four-year colleges.

"Welders make more money than philosophers," said Mr Rubio. "We need more welders and less (sic) philosophers."

Some diligent fact checkers have chimed in to say that philosophy professors, on average, make more than welders.

But then, there are precious few career openings for philosophy dons while we have a critical nationwide shortage of welders — expected to hit 400,000 by 2030.

In any event, highly skilled welders can easily pull down six-figure salaries and look forward to lifetime job security.

PRESSURE

Unfortunately, few secondary school students seem aware of this. Pressure from their schools and parents to pursue four-year university degrees results in throngs of graduates saddled with huge Helb loans flooding a job market with little use for them.

Welding is a skill that is in huge demand in advanced manufacturing, which is constantly complaining about the dearth of job applicants with the right skill set. Modern manufacturing is exciting, challenging work mostly in clean, attractive workplaces and paying better than typical jobs in service industries. However, too many students have outdated notions — no doubt inherited from their parents — of a dark, dismal factory floor performing repetitive tasks without end.

There is a fascinating array of potentially lucrative careers awaiting bright young people, who are more inclined to physical activity than armchair intellectual pursuits: Carpenters, electricians, ironworkers, machinists, masons, mechanics, steamfitters, plumbers, plasterers, tailors, dressmakers, drywall mechanics, medical technicians...

EXCELLENT PAY

Careers in fields such as these offer excellent pay and benefits and bright prospects of regular employment in years to come.

But there is progress. For example, the National Industrial Training Authority (Nita), in partnership with Toolkit Institute and Base Titanium Kwale Sand Resources, is working to attract young people to lucrative manufacturing careers through its Dream It, Do It programme, a series of public-private partnerships in three counties.

Young people can enter these fields straight out of secondary school or vulnerable youth as apprentices and earn decent money while they learn on the job, not just running up Helb loans while attending academic classes.

Many of the more promising practical careers do entail some additional classwork, usually at the national industrial training centre level, but guess what — many of the students are not eligible for Helb loans to cover the cost of a course at the county youth polytechnic.

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