POST 16 OPTIONS

A guide for Parent/Carers and Families of Young People with SEND.









South Midlands CAREERS HUB

THE CAREERS & ENTERPRISE COMPANY

This guide was produced in partnership with RESOURCEFUL CAREERS

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Welcome to Your Parent Guide to Post-16 Options



As a parent or carer, supporting your child through the transition from school to their next steps in education, training or work can feel both exciting and overwhelming. With more choices than ever before, it's natural to have questions — and this guide is here to help.

Whether your child is thinking about staying in school, moving to college, starting an apprenticeship, or exploring other training routes, the decisions they make now can shape their future pathway. But they don't have to make those decisions alone — and neither do you.

This guide has been created to give you a clear overview of all the main post-16 options available to young people in England. You'll find explanations of qualifications like A-levels, T-Levels, BTECs and Apprenticeships.

Inside, we'll cover:

- An overview of all the pathways after Year 11.
- Key facts about each option — what they involve, who they suit, and where they can lead.
- How these options can benefit your child or young person.
- Where to find reliable, up-to-date information and advice.

Every child is different, and there's no one-size-fits-all route. Our goal is to give you the knowledge and confidence to guide your child through this important stage, whatever their interests, strengths, or ambitions.

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What is preparing for adulthood?

Young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) are supported to think about what they want to do long-term from the earliest age possible. Working with families and professionals, the South Midlands Careers Hub encourage young people to think about the following:









Y7 to Y10 - PREPARATION TIMELINE

From Year 7 to Year 10 your child begins their careers journey, building confidence, exploring opportunities and preparing for future choices. This timeline shows what to expect at each stage. Talk with your child's Careers Leader about the school's programme and how it can help them explore their interests.

YEAR 7 - EXPLORING & DISCOVERING

- Discover your strengths, skills and interests.
- Learn about a wide range of jobs and how school subjects link to them.
- Meet role models and guest speakers.
- Take part in career-themed activities and assemblies.
- Start thinking about what you enjoy doing and how it could link to the future.

YEAR 8 - EXPANDING HORIZONS

- Explore different career sectors and pathways (college, apprenticeships, university, training).
- Learn how subjects connect to jobs in the real world.
- Take part in workplace visits, employer talks, or enterprise projects.
- Begin using online tools (like Morrisby, Unifrog, or Start) to explore your career interests.
- Reflect on your strengths and skills, building confidence.

YEAR 9 - MAKING CHOICES

- Learn about GCSE option choices and how they connect to future careers.
- Get support from careers advisers and tutors when making subject decisions.
- Explore Labour Market Information (LMI) to see which jobs are growing locally and nationally.
- Meet employers, apprentices and college/university reps.
- Build skills such as teamwork, problem-solving and communication through school activities.

YEAR 10 - PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

- Take part in meaningful work experience or workplace encounters.
- Learn about CVs, applications, and interview skills.
- Visit colleges, sixth forms, training providers, and apprenticeship events.
- Attend careers fairs and taster days.
- Reflect on your career ideas and set personal goals for Year 11.
- Understand the importance of resilience, exam preparation and backup plans.

Y11 - PREPARATION TIMELINE

Year 11 is when your child makes key choices and prepares for their next steps. This timeline shows what happens across the year, from exploring options and applying, to exams and moving on.

SUMMER TERM YEAR 10

- Think about your future strengths and favourite subjects.
- Find out more about careers that interest you.
- Think about how your strengths might fit with your career ideas.
- Discuss your ideas with people whose opinions you value.
- Do some online research into the local college and training options.

AUTUMN TERM YEAR 11

- Build confidence in strengths and favourite subjects.
- Go to information events and learn about all the different options.
- Book some taster sessions.
- Check college application deadline, Some colleges might require an application this term.
- Make contact with employers if seeking an Apprenticeship.
- Complete applications (key dates will be given out in Y11) but most application are complete by the end of January.

SPRING TERM YEAR 11

- Concentrate on exam preparation.
- Attend interviews.
- Attend additional taster events.
- Work hard to secure an Apprenticeship placement (if seeking an Apprenticeship)
- Make sure you have a back-up plan.

SUMMER TERM YEAR 11

- Continue to prepare for exams and revise in between exams.
- Finalise your placement if intending on starting an Apprenticeship.
- Attend any summer transitions days (after exams). Many college run welcome events.

What is Post-16 Education?



There are lots of exciting options available after Year 11 – this stage is called post-16 education.
It's your child's or young persons chance to choose a path that suits their interests, goals, and the way they like to learn.

After Year 11, all young people must continue in education or training until they turn 18. But this doesn't just mean staying at school.

This education could include:

Full-time education

like school, college or independent training providers.

Work-based learning

like an apprenticeship or supported internship.

Part-time education or training

if you are employed or volunteering at least 20hrs per week.

The information in this booklet is just one of the things that can help young people and their families to choose which post-16 education option is best.

Young people aged 16 to 18 who are not in education, training or employment are offered support to take up post-16 education by **Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire,** and **West Northamptonshire** local authorities.



Click to view

Preparing for Post-16 Transition



Support to develop ideas can come from many people including family members, school staff, school career leads, careers advisers and other professionals who might work with you. By starting early and working together, you can help your child or young person navigate this journey with confidence.

The following checklist offers practical steps to guide you through the preparation process, ensuring your child or young person's needs, interests, and aspirations remain at the heart of every decision.

Where do I start?



- **Start early** – begin in Year 7 and review regularly. By Year 9, focus on pathways.
- **Work with school staff** – keep in touch with teachers, SENCO, and the careers adviser.
- **Visit options** – arrange visits or tasters at colleges, training providers, and workplaces.
- **Listen to their voice** – make sure interests and aspirations guide decisions.
- **Explore pathways** – A-levels, T-Levels, apprenticeships, vocational courses, supported internships.
- **Track deadlines** – applications, interviews, and reviews.
- **Ask about support** – e.g. travel training, mentoring, transition programmes.
- **Link with professionals** – social care, health, and SEND services if needed.
- **Celebrate progress** – small steps build confidence.
- **Involve wider professionals where needed** – link with social workers, health professionals, or local SEND services to create a joined-up plan.
- **Celebrate progress** – recognise achievements and milestones to boost confidence and motivation.

What support is available?



Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs)

- If your child or young person has an EHCP this will outline the additional support that they need as they move into post 16 education.
- There will be annual review meetings to discuss progress and support needs as they move through school into post-16 learning.

Local Offer

- Every local authority has a Local Offer on their website. This provides a single place to go to for the information, services and resources that you might need as a parent or carer of a child or young person with SEND.
- This includes education, health, and social care services.

Transport

- Your local authority may provide travel training or assistance with transport to and from post-16 education settings. Some young people may qualify for the 16 to 19 Bursary which can also be used to help with travel costs.

Specialist Careers Advice

- Careers advisers trained in SEND can help identify suitable pathways.

Getting the most out of EHCP review meetings



If your child or young person has an EHCP, then you will be invited to attend annual review meetings. The school may also invite other people involved in supporting your child/ young person, for example the SEN case officer, a teaching assistant, a speech and language therapist, or a specialist advisory teacher. A Social worker or any health practitioners may be involved- in practice, who attends will depend very much on your child's needs and circumstances.

These meetings are an opportunity for yourself and your child/ young person where appropriate to discuss their aspirations for the future, and how they need to be supported to achieve this.The aim is for young people with SEN to be supported towards greater independence and employability.



SCAN ME!

From Year 9 onwards the annual review meeting must include a focus on preparing for adulthood and independent living. Outcomes will need to have a greater consideration of independence and planning for the future. This may include managing money, travel training, skills for independence, social opportunities and keeping healthy.

If it is likely that your young person will need support in daily life post 18 you may consider contacting Adult Social Care as they approach adulthood.

What is a local offer?

A local SEND offer is a guide that explains the support available for children and young people (aged 0-25) with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in a specific area. Every local authority in England is required to publish a Local Offer, which provides details about:

- **Education** – Support in nurseries, schools, and colleges
- **Health** – Services like speech therapy, physiotherapy, and mental health support
- **Social Care** – Help for families, short breaks, and support groups
- **Transport** – How children with SEND can get to school or college
- **Activities** – Clubs, sports, and leisure opportunities

The local offer is designed to help parents, carers and young people easily find information, services, and resources to help them understand their rights and where they can go for support.

Bedford Borough

The Bedford SEND Local Offer brings together information about support, services and activities for children and young people (0–25) with special educational needs and disabilities, plus guidance for families.

Central Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire's SEND Local Offer explains what support is available for children and young people (0–25) with SEND, covering education, health, care, activities and preparing for adulthood.

Luton

Luton's SEND Local Offer is an information hub for families of children and young people (0–25) with SEND. It lists local services, education and health support, activities, advice and events.

Milton Keynes

The Milton Keynes SEND Local Offer provides details of services, support and activities for children and young people (0–25) with SEND, helping families find the right help at the right time.

North Northamptonshire

North Northamptonshire's SEND Local Offer gives information about services, support and education for children and young people (0–25) with SEND, including advice on EHC plans and

West Northamptonshire

The West Northamptonshire SEND Local Offer sets out what support and services are available for children and young people (0–25) with SEND, including health, education, care and short breaks.

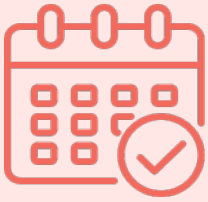
Transition from one setting to the next when your child has an EHCP

You can find information about moving into post-16 learning through your local offer pages, and there may be a local Preparing for Adulthood guide available in your area – but here are a few key pieces of information:

4 KEY POINTS

01

When moving from secondary school into post-16, your child or young person's plan must be amended and finalised by the 31st March.



02

When transition planning, this should include education, health and care needs.



03



If moving into an Adult Social Care setting your child or young person should have a transition assessment under the Care Act.

04



Post-16 transport support is discretionary. This means that not everyone will receive support and that there might be a cost to the family.

SCAN ME!

What is a Study Programme?

Post-16 education is known as a study programme.

This usually includes:

- **an academic qualification** (e.g A Levels) or a **vocational qualification** (T-Levels, BTECs) or a substantial work placement.
- **continuing to improve English and Maths** skills, working towards GCSE grade 4 and functional skills, where appropriate.

A young person who is taking a full-time study programme will usually be at their place of learning for an average of **16 hours per week**.

This might fit into **3 x full days** or could be spread over **5 x days.**

Some young people might be able to access up to 5 x full days of provision where appropriate. For young people with an EHCP this would need to be discussed and agreed through the annual review process and might include provision across education, health and care.



What types of post-16 education & training are available?

There are many post-16 education options, and young people can switch pathways. For example, a student might start at sixth form, move to a training provider, and later find a job.

Think of it like a journey: some take the bus, others walk or drive. The route can change, but the destination remains the same.

No option is better—it's about what works best for your child or young person.



Types of Courses

Courses after Year 11 usually fall into three main categories:

- **Academic**
- **Vocational and/or Technical**
- **Work-based**

Some young people might combine these options, depending on what suits their learning style and future plans. It's helpful to talk to your child or young person's careers adviser, teacher, or family members to explore what would be the best fit for them.

In the next few sections, we'll outline the differences between these types of courses to help you support your child or young person's decision-making.

Academic Courses

These courses are more focused on the study and theory of a subject:

- They include qualifications such as GCSEs (Secondary school), A-levels (Sixth form), and Degrees (University).
- Over 40 different subjects available at A level with thousands of different Degree subjects at University.
- These type of courses are usually delivered by schools, colleges, or universities.

Vocational and/or Technical

These are work-related qualifications designed to help learners gain the knowledge, practical skills, and experience needed for specific jobs:

- They range from Entry Level up to Level 8.
- Common areas include Animal Care & Land-based Studies, Business, Engineering, Health & Social Care, Hair & Beauty, Construction, and Digital Media.
- They are typically delivered by schools, colleges, or Independent Specialist Providers.

Work Based

These programmes take place in a work setting and focus on building skills and gaining experience. They include Supported Internships and Apprenticeships, both of which help develop work skills and increase experience.

- Apprenticeships are supported by training providers and employers.
- Supported Internships are usually supported by a college and an employer.

Types of Courses

Post-16 Pathways

16 YEARS OLD

ACADEMIC COURSES	VOCATIONAL / TECHNICAL	WORK BASED		
A levels, AAQs	T Levels, TOQs, V Levels, Foundation Certificates & Courses	Supported Internships	Apprenticeships & Inclusive Apprenticeships	Employment or Volunteering

Where can you find these options?

Further Education Colleges	Further Education Colleges	Further Education Colleges	Further Education Colleges	Local Businesses
School Sixth Forms	School Sixth Forms	Independent Training Providers	Independent Training Providers	Local Charities & Community Centres
Sixth Form Colleges	Independent Training Providers	Specialist Settings	Local Businesses	
	Specialist Settings			

Entry Requirements

If your child doesn't quite meet the standard entry requirements, please don't worry. Colleges and sixth forms are very used to helping students in this situation and will always take personal circumstances into account when recommending the most suitable course. The aim is to make sure every young person is placed somewhere they can succeed and feel confident.

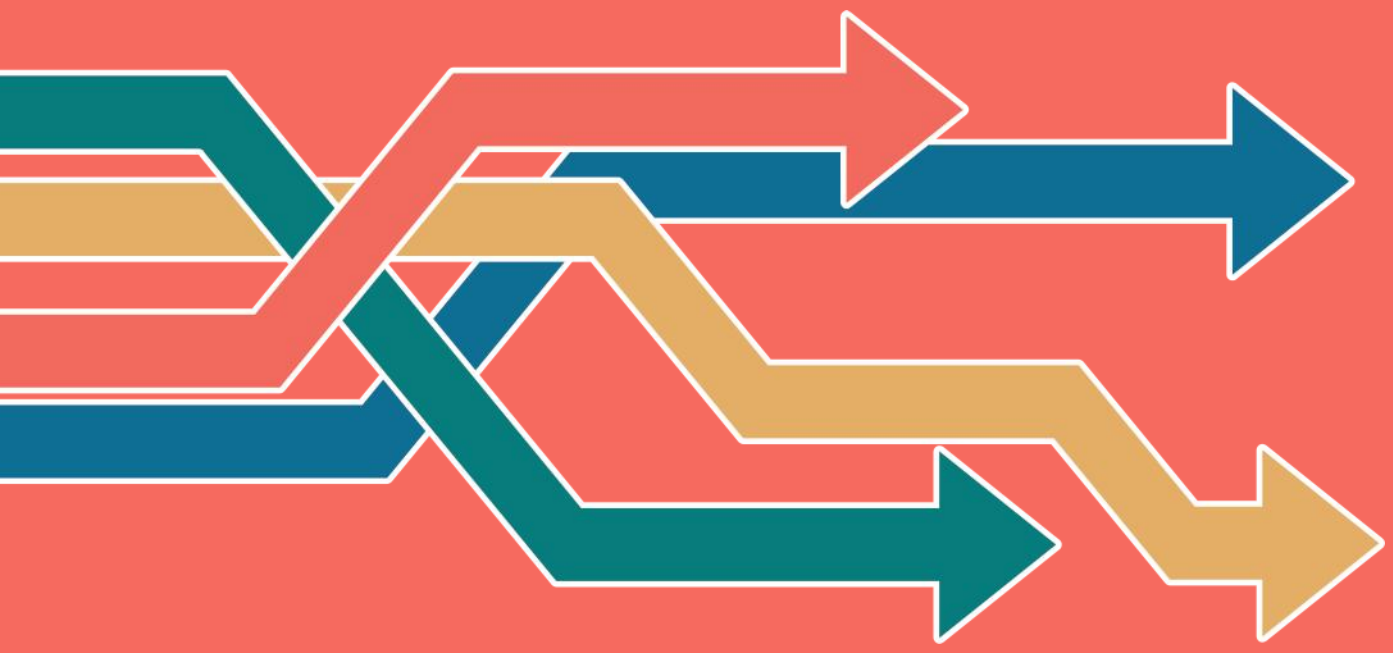
Achieving a Grade 4 or above in English and Maths is especially helpful, as it keeps more options open for the future. If your child doesn't reach this level straight away, they won't be held back. Instead, they'll continue studying these subjects alongside their main course, with plenty of support to help them improve.

Some courses may ask for particular GCSEs at Grade 4 or above, depending on the subject. For example, a science course might ask for at least a Grade 4 in Science, while creative subjects may look for evidence of practical work or a portfolio. Tutors will explain any specific requirements during the application process and will also talk through alternative options if a different course might be a better fit.

Entry requirements do vary, but the guide below gives a useful overview of what's usually expected. Remember, there are always routes forward, and staff will work with your child to make sure they're on the path that suits them best.

Level	P16 Pathways	What you'll need...
Level 3	• **A-Levels** • **T-Levels** • **BTECs / V Levels** • **Apprenticeships**	You typically need to have **five GCSES or equivalent grade 9-4,** inc English & Maths grade 5/4.
Level 2	• **BTECs** • **Foundation Certificates** • **Apprenticeships**	You typically need to have three to **four GCSEs grade 9-3.**
Level 1	• **BTECs** • **Introductory Courses** • **Inclusive Apprenticeships**	You typically need to have **three to four GCSEs at grades 1-2.**
Entry	• **BTECs** • **Introductory Courses** • **Supported Internships**	No GCSEs.

ACADEMIC COURSES

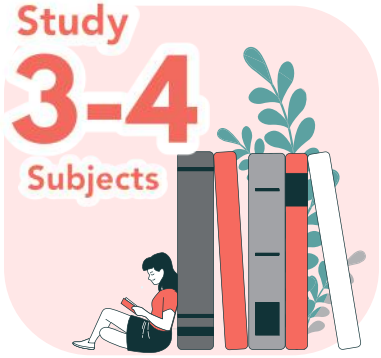


ACADEMIC COURSES

A-LEVELS

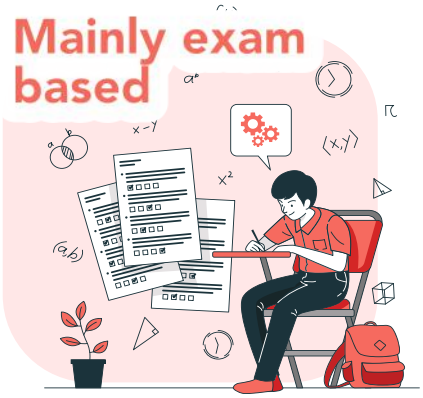
Scan the QR code to find out more.

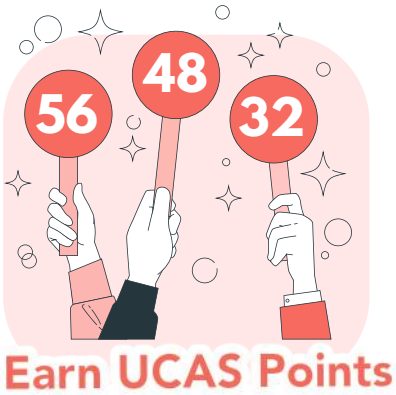


















Academic Courses



Whether your child studies at a school sixth form or at a college, A-Levels remain one of the most popular post-16 pathways. They are highly valued by both universities and employers, offering a well-recognised academic route that can lead to a wide variety of careers and higher education opportunities.

A-Levels allow young people to specialise in subjects they enjoy or want to explore further. Most students take three subjects over two years, with choices ranging from traditional academic areas like maths, sciences, and history to creative options such as art, drama, or design. This flexibility means students can shape a programme of study that reflects their interests and future ambitions.

Alongside subject knowledge, A-Levels help young people develop essential transferable skills — including **independence, time management, research, and critical thinking** — all of which are crucial for success in further study and the workplace.

Assessment is mainly exam-based, giving students the chance to demonstrate their understanding under structured conditions. This prepares them well for university, where independent study and self-discipline are key expectations.

Choosing A-Levels provides a **strong, flexible foundation** that keeps doors open, whether a young person decides to progress to university, an apprenticeship, or directly into employment.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Develop independence and communication skills.

During the course

The option to gain an in-depth knowledge of a range of subjects.

Afterwards

Earn qualifications to advance in education and access higher studies.

Scan or click the QR to explore all the Sixth Form Colleges and School Sixth Forms across the region.

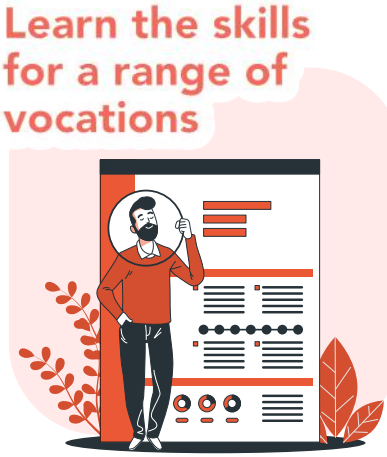
ACADEMIC COURSES

ALTERNATIVE ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS (AAQs)

Scan the QR code to find out more.

Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) are a new generation of career-focused qualifications designed to offer the same progression opportunities as traditional A levels and BTECs, while placing an even stronger emphasis on real-world knowledge and skills.

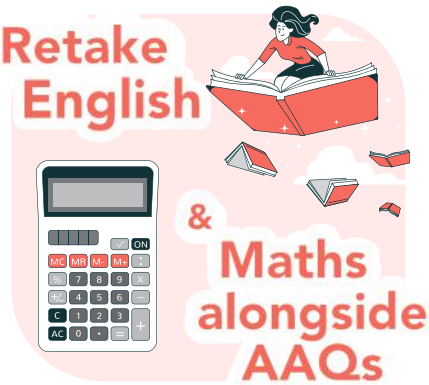


















AAQs

Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) are **Level 3 courses** that combine academic study with a focus on a particular subject area, such as health, business, IT or applied science. Many have replaced older BTECs and Cambridge Technicals.



AAQs come in different sizes. Some are **the same size as one A Level** and can be taken alongside A Levels, while larger ones, **about the size of two A Levels**, make up most of a study programme. Most take two years, and your child can continue English and maths alongside if needed.

Learning mixes classroom study with applied projects and assignments, and assessment is spread across the course through a combination of **exams and coursework**. This can suit young people who do well with a mix of assessment types, and the support in your child's EHCP or support plan still applies.

AAQs **carry UCAS points** and can lead to university, a higher or degree apprenticeship, or work. As new V Levels arrive from 2027, AAQs in the same subjects will **gradually be replaced**, so check with each school or college which courses they will offer.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Explore a subject area they enjoy.

During the course

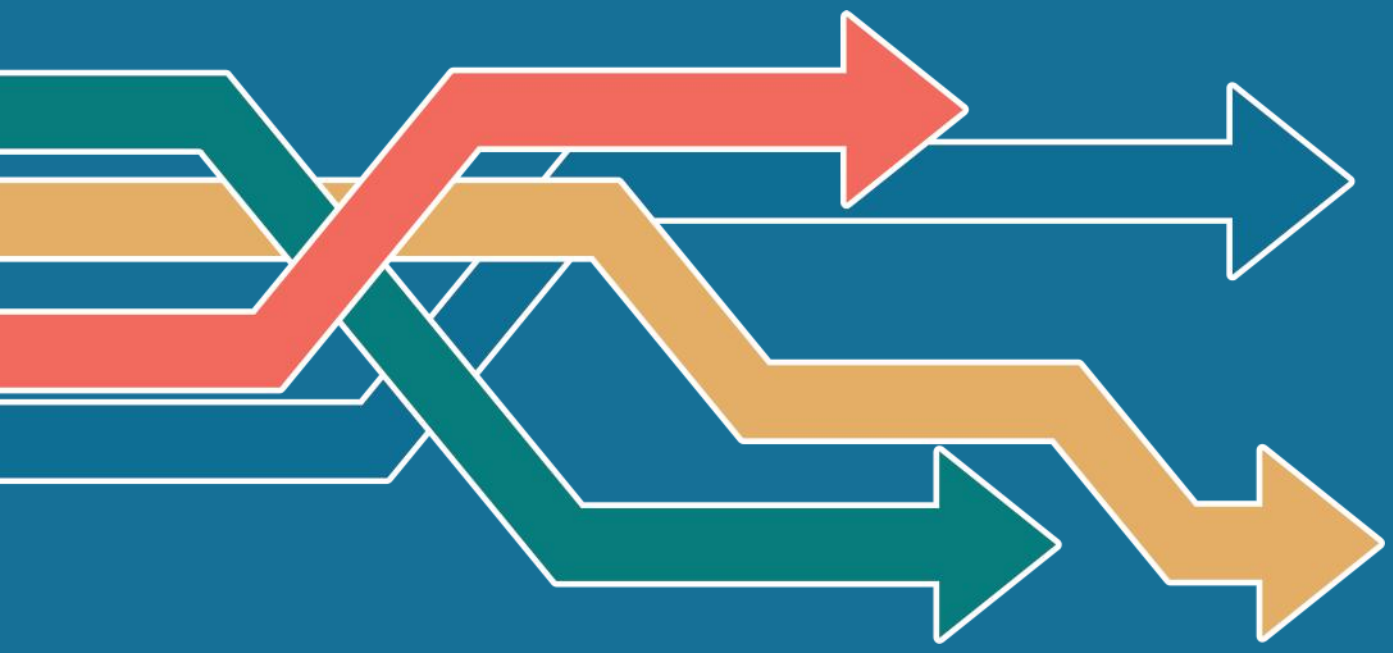
Mix study with practical projects.

Afterwards

Leads to university, apprenticeships or work.

Scan or click the QR to explore all the Sixth Form Colleges and School Sixth Forms across the region.

VOCATIONAL / TECHNICAL

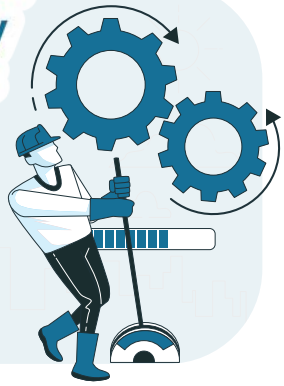


VOCATIONAL / TECHNICAL

VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

Scan the QR code to find out more

Focus on industry specific skills



Move onto further study



Get work ready



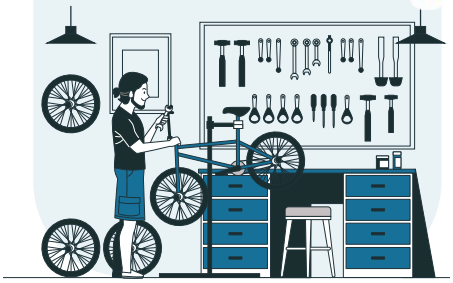
Develop transferrable skills



Gain Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3 Qualifications

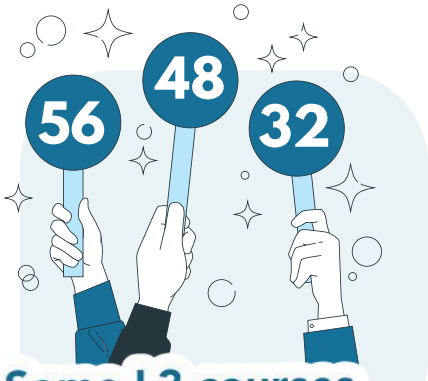


Mainly practical with some classroom activity





Progress into a Higher or Degree Apprenticeship



Some L3 courses attract UCAS Points



Go to University

Vocational and/or Technical

Vocational qualifications (also referred to as BTECs) are designed to give young people the chance to learn in a way that combines **practical skills with classroom learning**. They are most often studied at college, but may also be available through some school sixth forms or independent training providers. Many courses include opportunities for **work experience or industry projects**, helping students see how their learning applies in real situations.



These qualifications are available at different levels (1, 2 and 3), with entry requirements depending on the course and level of study. At Level 3, vocational qualifications are often taken as an alternative to A Levels and can be studied full-time or alongside other subjects.

As well as developing **specialist industry knowledge**, vocational programmes support the growth of **independence and life skills**. Assessment usually involves a mixture of coursework and practical projects, with some courses also including exams.

Vocational qualifications provide a **flexible pathway to the future** — many students move on to **skilled employment, apprenticeships, or university-level study**. At Level 3, some vocational qualifications carry UCAS points and can be used to apply directly to higher education.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Explore different careers or develop skills for a chosen job.

During the course

Gain a qualification relevant to a specific industry or job.

Afterwards

Leads to career opportunities or further training or higher education.

Who offers Vocational Courses near me?

This page lists some vocational providers in Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, and West/North Northamptonshire. Courses vary, so check with each sixth form or college for current and new subjects.

Bedford Borough

Bedford College

The Bedford Sixth Form

Kimberley College

SCAN ME!

Central Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire College

Shuttleworth College

SCAN ME!

Luton

Luton Sixth Form College

Barnfield College

My Guide at 16 (Luton)

SCAN ME!

Milton Keynes

MK College

SCAN ME!

North Northamptonshire

Tresham College

Corby Sixth Form

SCAN ME!

West Northamptonshire

Northampton College

Moulton College

National College for Motorsport

SCAN ME!

VOCATIONAL / TECHNICAL

T-LEVELS

Scan the QR code to find out more.

T-Levels are short for 'Technical Level' and give you a mix of learning in the classroom and on the job. Businesses and employers helped design T-Levels to teach you the skills you'll need.

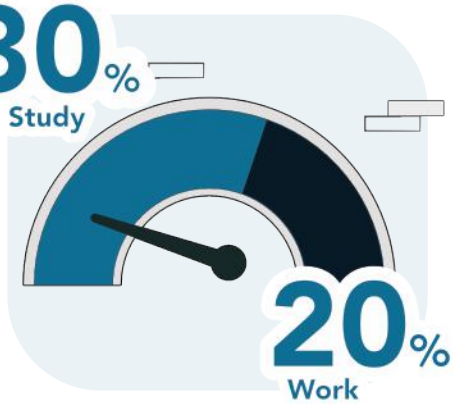


Alternative to A-Levels





Level 3 Qualifications













Progress to University

Vocational and/or Technical

T Levels are a **high-quality, career-focused alternative to A Levels**, designed for young people aged 16 to 19 who want to develop practical skills and real workplace experience. Each T Level is a **two-year programme**, broadly equivalent to three A Levels, and was developed in partnership with employers, universities, and training providers.



Students spend most of their time in the classroom, learning technical theory and developing industry skills, alongside a **45-day industry placement** that provides real-world experience. This mix helps learners apply knowledge in practice, build confidence, and make professional connections.

Courses are available in a range of sectors — including **digital, healthcare, construction, education, and business** — and all include training in problem-solving, teamwork, communication, and professionalism, as well as continued development in English, maths, and digital skills.

T Levels are recognised by employers and universities, offering clear routes into skilled employment, higher apprenticeships, or further study in higher education.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Builds confidence with support.

During the course

Develops skills through real experience.

Afterwards

Opens doors to work or study and higher education.

Who offers T-Levels near me?

T Levels are now offered by more colleges and sixth forms, giving students extra choice after GCSEs. Each provider has different subjects – from Health, Digital, and Education to Engineering, Science, or Business – so always check with your local college or sixth form, or visit their website, to see what's available now and what may be added in future.

Bedford Borough

Bedford College

The Bedford Sixth Form

Kimberley College

SCAN ME!

Central Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire College

Shuttleworth College

SCAN ME!

Luton

Luton Sixth Form College

Barnfield College

My Guide at 16 (Luton)

SCAN ME!

Milton Keynes

MK College

SCAN ME!

North Northamptonshire

Tresham College

Corby Sixth Form

SCAN ME!

West Northamptonshire

Northampton College

Moulton College

National College for Motorsport

SCAN ME!

TECHNICAL PATHWAY

TECHNICAL OCCUPATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (TOQs)

Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs) are designed to help you build the knowledge and practical skills needed for a specific job or career area. They are created to support progression into employment, further training, or the next step in your chosen sector.

Post-16 option at Level 2 or 3





Linked to real jobs

Designed with employers



Supports skilled work





Practical & relevant

Clear progression route



Can also lead to further study



1-2 YRS to complete



Great for students with a clear career goal



Vocational and/or Technical

Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs) are **practical, job-focused courses** for young people who already know the kind of work they want to do. They are offered at **Level 2 and Level 3**, usually at a college or training provider, and take **one to two years** to complete.



Each TOQ is built around the skills employers have set out for a particular job, in areas such as construction, engineering, catering, and hair and beauty. Students spend much of their time in **workshops and practical settings**, learning the hands-on skills the job needs, and the support in their EHCP or support plan still applies.

A TOQ helps young people get ready to start work in that occupation, and can lead **into a job, an apprenticeship or further training**. Some may need extra training on the job to become fully qualified.

TOQs are changing: from September 2027, new Occupational Certificates start to replace them at Level 2, so check with your local college which courses they will offer.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Learns hands-on skills for a chosen job.

During the course

Practical training linked to real work.

Afterwards

Leads to work, apprenticeships or training.

Who offers TOQs near me?

TOQs are mainly offered by further education colleges and some training providers, often in areas like Construction, Engineering, Catering, or Hair and Beauty. Courses and levels vary, so always check with your local college, or visit their website, to see which TOQs they offer and what may change from 2027.

Bedford Borough

Bedford College

The Bedford Sixth Form

Kimberley College

SCAN ME!

Central Bedfordshire

Central Bedfordshire College

Shuttleworth College

SCAN ME!

Luton

Luton Sixth Form College

Barnfield College

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Milton Keynes

MK College

SCAN ME!

North Northamptonshire

Tresham College

Corby Sixth Form

SCAN ME!

West Northamptonshire

Northampton College

Moulton College

National College for Motorsport

SCAN ME!

VOCATIONAL / TECHNICAL

V-LEVELS

Scan the QR code to find out more

V-Levels are a new post-16 option being introduced in England. They are designed to give you broad vocational knowledge in a subject area, helping you keep your options open while still building useful skills for future study or work.

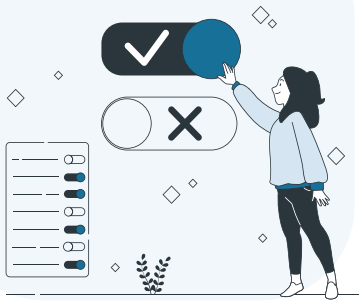
New vocational pathway available from **2027**





Level 3 Qualifications

Mix with other qualifications like A levels & AAQs



Similar size to an A level





Develop sector knowledge & transferable skills



Applied learning with some practical assessment





First subjects: Education, Finance & Digital



Designed to prepare you for future jobs & further study

Vocational and/or Technical

V Levels are a **new vocational qualification** for 16 to 19 year olds, starting in September 2027. They suit young people who enjoy practical, applied learning and want to explore an area of work without choosing a specific job straight away.



Each V Level is a **two-year Level 3 course**, **the same size as one A Level**. Your child could take V Levels on their own, mix them with A Levels, or study them alongside English and maths if they are still working towards a Grade 4.

Learning is linked to real jobs and industries, mixing classroom study with **practical tasks and projects**. Assessment is being designed to be as accessible as possible, and the support in your child's EHCP or support plan still applies.

The first subjects in 2027 are **Accounting & Finance, Digital, and Education & Early Years**, with more such as health, engineering and sport from 2028. V Levels earn **the same UCAS points as A Levels** and can lead to further study, apprenticeships, university or work.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Try a subject area without choosing one job.

During the course

Builds practical skills alongside other studies.

Afterwards

Leads to work, apprenticeships or university.

VOCATIONAL PATHWAY

FOUNDATION CERTIFICATES

Foundation Certificates are new one-year Level 2 courses, starting from September 2027. They introduce you to a vocational area and build the knowledge, skills and confidence you need to move on to Level 3, such as V Levels, T Levels or A levels.

Available from 2027



Level 2

Prepare for Level 3



Practical & Vocational





Work Experience



CV Writing

Boost your confidence





English & Maths





Develop Life Skills

Vocational and/or Technical

Foundation Certificates are a new **Level 2 qualification** for 16 to 19 year olds, starting in **September 2027**. They are for young people who are not quite ready for Level 3 but want to keep studying. Students with SEND are among those expected to benefit most.



What does the course include? Usually a **one-year, full-time programme**. Alongside the main subject, students study **English and maths** if needed, build employability skills, and get pastoral support and a taste of Level 3 learning. EHCP support still applies.

Which subjects? The first, from 2027, are **digital** and **education**. From 2028, more are planned, including **business, construction, engineering, health and care, science, and sport**.

Where can it lead? On to **Level 3 study** such as **V Levels, T Levels or A Levels**. Unlike two-year **Occupational Certificates**, they are not tied to a specific job. Over time, they will replace the T Level foundation year. Ask your local college which subjects they will offer.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

A clear next step if Level 3 isn't right yet.

During the course

Builds subject skills, English and maths.

Afterwards

Leads on to V Levels, T Levels or A Levels.

VOCATIONAL / TECHNICAL

INTRODUCTORY COURSES

An introductory course is a great way to boost your confidence, enhance your knowledge, and develop essential skills. You can pursue these studies at a college or with an independent training provider.



Wide range of courses

Boost your confidence





CV Writing

Supported Learning





Interview Techniques

Entry Level 3 to Level 1



Move onto further study





English & Maths





Develop Life Skills

Vocational and/or Technical

For young people who need a bit more support as they start college, many providers offer a wide range of foundation courses. These are designed to help students settle into further education, build confidence, and prepare for the next step.



The exact courses available will vary between colleges. They might have different names, cover different learning levels, and set different entry requirements. Some courses are designed to link directly into other programmes within the same college, giving learners a clear pathway forward once they are ready.

Most foundation courses include:

- **Employability skills** – building confidence for the workplace
- **English and maths** – improving essential qualifications if needed
- **Work experience** – or practical activities that develop workplace skills
- **Personal and social support** – helping learners overcome barriers, stay engaged, and achieve their goals

What all of these programmes have in common is the extra support they provide. They are designed to act as a stepping stone — giving young people time, guidance, and the chance to succeed before moving onto the next stage of their education or training journey.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Experience a range of jobs or learn skills related to a preferred job.

During the course

Gain qualification relevant to a specific industry or job.

Afterwards

Learn practical skills related to real life work.

Who offers Foundation Courses near me?

Below are some examples of local providers that offer foundation programmes. This is not a full list, so we recommend parents and carers also contact their local authority or their child's school careers service to find out about all the opportunities available in your area.



Ask yourself...

- Does my child or young person need extra support with learning?
- Would my child or young person benefit from smaller class sizes?
- Are they unsure about their next steps?

Foundation Courses

SCAN or CLICK the QR codes for more information

Bedford College Group

Full-time programme (16-18) for those who've just left school and need extra support; focuses on confidence, independence, employability. Adds English, Maths, independent living, work placements and subject areas like Art, Sport, Animal Care etc.

Milton Keynes College - Skills Academy

Full-time foundation courses including Level 1 and Transition Pathway; builds essential skills in English, Maths, employability, plus vocational pathways in different industries; prepares students for Level 2, employment or further study.

Moulton College - Foundation Learning

Offers a range of foundation learner courses for students aged 16-24 with SEND; focus on tailored support, life skills, employability, preparing for work or further education.

Foundation Courses near me cont...

SCAN or CLICK the QR codes for more information

Northampton College

Foundation Programmes for students whose GCSEs didn't go as well as hoped, or who are out of education/ training. Offers a range of academic, personal and social skills development, work experience, English & Maths, and support built in to boost confidence, resilience, and readiness for next steps.

Barnfield College

They have a Skills for Life programme for students working at entry level who need extra support, including those with learning difficulties. It includes vocational courses, English, maths, and additional learning support.

5 TIPS FOR CHOOSING THE RIGHT FOUNDATION PROGRAMME

✔ **Find the Right Fit**
Consider how the course aligns with your child's personality, learning preferences, and any support they might benefit from.

✔ **Explore Available Help**
Ask about the support options—such as learning assistance, wellbeing services, or specialist equipment—that could make a difference.

✔ **See It for Yourself**
Attend open events, speak with tutors, and chat to current students and families to get a clearer picture.

✔ **Think Logistically**
Look into how your child will get there, how long the journey takes, and whether the campus environment suits their needs.

✔ **Look to the Future**
Find out what previous students have gone on to do—whether it's another course, an apprenticeship, or stepping into a job.

Specialist Settings

There are different types of setting which would be described as **Specialist**. A possible placement at a specialist setting would normally be discussed through the EHCP annual review process, as young people considering a specialist setting for their post-16 education would usually have an EHCP. The offer of a placement at a specialist setting will need to be agreed by statutory SEND teams based on a young person's Special Educational Needs.

There might be a range of academic and vocational courses on offer as well as a focus on independent living skills, personal development and employability. Different settings will cater for different age ranges.



Use this link for a detailed explanation of education setting types:
[Types of schools and other settings | (IPSEA) Independent Provider of Special Education Advice]

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Access to a high level of support within a structured environment.

During the course

Develop skills through study alongside preparation for adult life as appropriate to need and abilities

Afterwards

Build independence and move into work or supported living.

Specialist FE College / Specialist Post-16 Providers

Specialist Further Education Colleges/Specialist post-16 providers cater for young people with more complex or specific needs. Different providers are equipped to support certain levels and types of need and may have a particular specialism. This can include severe and complex needs, physical disabilities, neurodivergent conditions and behaviour that challenges.

The links overleaf are for Specialist Further Education Colleges/Specialist post-16 providers that are located within north east and south east London and are currently on the Section 41 list.



To get the most up to date information and to find out more about specialist provision across a wider area including all **open specialist schools and colleges**, you can also talk to your local authority SEND team and check:

- Your local offer pages - **Page 10**
- The Natspec college search tool **Search - Natspec**
- The current Section 41 list **Independent special schools and post-16 institutions - GOV.UK**
- The full list of special schools and colleges in your local authority area. **Get Information about Schools - GOV.UK**
- Your local SENDIASS service is also a good source of information and

On the next page you'll find some examples of local specialist settings for young people aged 16 and over. This isn't a full list, so parents and carers are advised to also speak with their local authority or their child's school careers service to find out more about the specialist support and opportunities available in your area.

Specialist settings near me

Local Special Schools/Academies/ Free Schools with 16+ Provision

SCAN or CLICK the QR codes for more information.

Sense College East (Bedford & Northamptonshire)
A specialist college for young people aged 16–25 with complex needs, offering foundation learning, employability, and independence pathways.

CANTO Learning (Northamptonshire / West Northants)
An independent specialist college for 16–25 year olds with SEND, providing vocational qualifications, personal development, and supported internships.

RISE SPACE (Bedford Borough)
A small specialist post-16 provision for young people with SEND who need a highly supportive environment to build independence, confidence, and life skills.

SSG Community College (Bedford)
An independent college for learners aged 16–18 (up to 24 with EHCPs), offering personalised foundation study programmes and work preparation.

MacIntyre No Limits
(Milton Keynes & Northamptonshire)
A community-based post-16 programme for young people aged 16–25 with EHCPs, focusing on life skills, independence, and personalised education.

Creating Tomorrow College
Daventry & Corby (North & West Northants)
A specialist college for 16–25 year olds with EHCPs, combining classroom learning with work experience and supported internships.

Refer back to **page 23** featuring some of the largest local providers who may have a specialist or high needs offer. As some providers are very small and what is on offer can change - always remember to check your local offer pages and to discuss with SEND teams and Specialist Careers Advisers to get a full picture of what is available in your area.

Independent Training Providers

Here are some examples of local independent training providers that work with young people aged 16 and over. This is not a complete list, so parents and carers should also check with their local authority or their child's school careers service to explore the full range of training opportunities available in your area.

Supportive Study Programmes

SCAN or CLICK the QR codes for more information

SSG Services – Community College
(Bedford)

A small independent college offering study programmes, sports, apprenticeships and foundation learning for young people who need a supportive alternative to mainstream FE.

ASES (Active Support Education Services)
– Luton

An independent training provider delivering foundation learning, vocational tasters and employability skills for 14–19 year olds (up to 24 with EHCPs).

Juniper Training (Northampton, Wellingborough, Kettering, Milton Keynes)

A national training provider with local centres offering study programmes, traineeships, apprenticeships and employability training for 16–24 year olds.

Learning Curve Group
(Northampton & wider region)

An independent training provider offering study programmes, apprenticeships, and vocational courses for 16–24 year olds, with specialist support for those with additional needs.

Statutory SEND teams may sometimes be able to discuss bespoke study programmes using smaller providers for young people facing significant and complex barriers to learning.

Interview Questions

Here are some key questions you can ask during college interviews and when exploring other post-16 options. These will help you and your child make informed decisions about their future education, training, and career pathways.

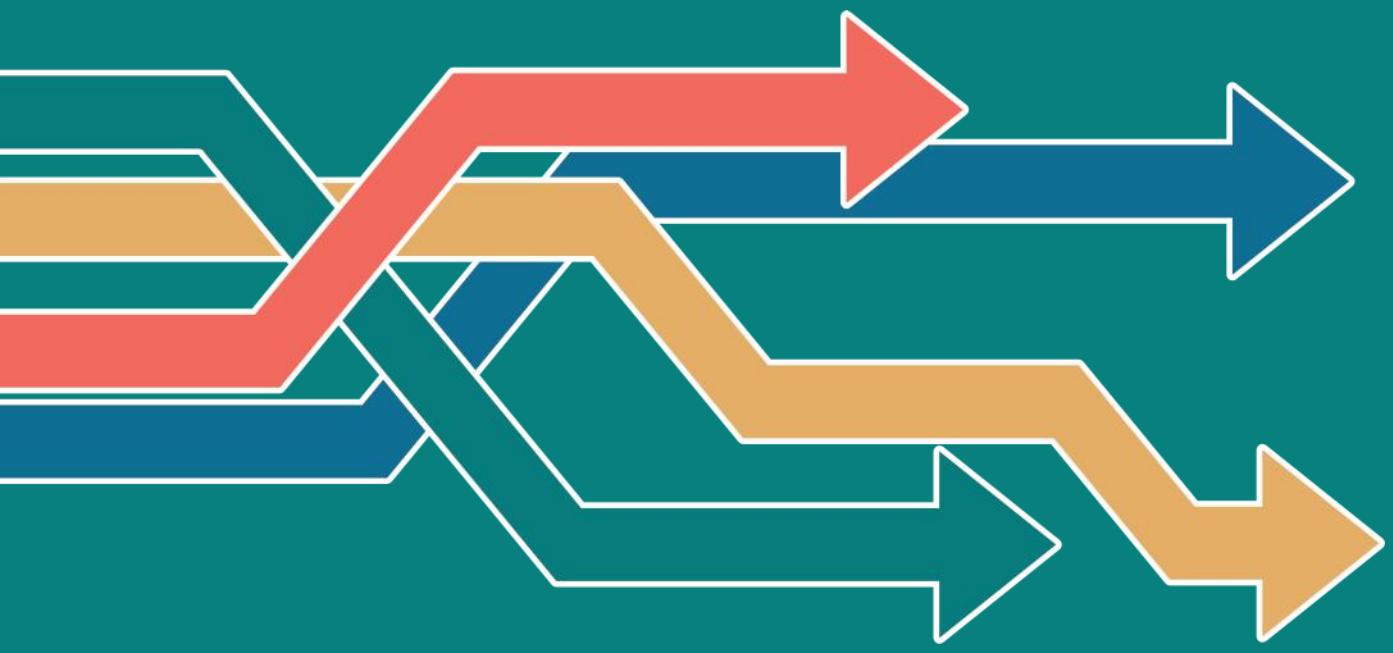
- How is the course assessed? (e.g. exams, coursework, practical)
- How will my child or young person get feedback on progress? (e.g. annual reviews, daily/weekly communication)
- What can my child progress onto?
- What support is available for students with Special Educational Needs?
- What resources, equipment and facilities are you using on the course?
- What does the college day/curriculum look like? Ask to see a sample timetable
- What work experience placements can you offer students?
- If appropriate could the young person progress to a supported internship?
- What links do you have with local companies/employers?
- Will I need to buy any books, equipment, or special clothing for my child? Costs?
- What financial support is available for support with travel, equipment, safety clothing or books?
- What enrichment activities are available?
- Can my child or young person get to college by bus/train?

Top Tip:

Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions during the visit. College staff expect and welcome this—it shows you're thinking ahead and want the best fit for your young person. Bring a shortlist of what matters most to them and use these questions to find the answers that really count.



WORK BASED



APPRENTICESHIPS & INCLUSIVE APPRENTICESHIPS

Scan the QR code to find out more

80% Work

20% Study

600+ Apprenticeship routes



Available from Level 2 to Degree Level



A real contract



1500+ Apprenticeship job roles available



1-4 YRS to complete

Earn a salary



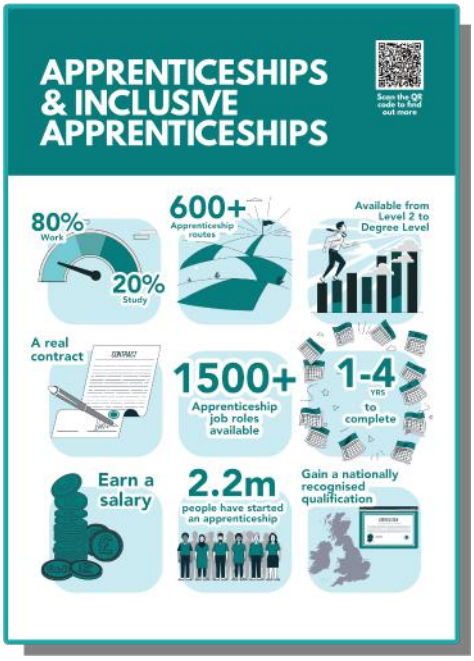
2.2m people have started an apprenticeship



Gain a nationally recognised qualification



Work Based



An apprenticeship allows a young person to **earn a salary while working towards a nationally recognised qualification**, all while gaining valuable hands-on experience in the workplace. They are a great option for those who want to start building their career straight away, rather than studying full-time at college or university.

There is a **wide range of apprenticeships** available across many different sectors — from health, construction, and digital, to creative industries, business, and engineering. Apprenticeships are offered at different levels, from intermediate (Level 2) right up to higher and degree apprenticeships (Levels 4–7), meaning they can provide progression opportunities all the way to university level and beyond.

Most apprentices split their time between working with an employer and completing study or training with a college, university, or independent provider. This style of learning suits young people who prefer **practical, applied learning** and who are motivated by earning while they learn.

Training providers offer support for learners with additional needs, and those with an **Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)** may be able to take an **Inclusive Apprenticeship**, with adjustments made to ensure their needs are met.

Choosing the right apprenticeship means considering both **career goals and learning style**. With the right match, apprenticeships can provide a strong pathway into skilled employment, professional qualifications, or further study.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Earn a wage while learning.

During the course

Gain recognised qualifications and train for future careers.

Afterwards

Earn £100k more on average than unqualified workers over your career.

Search and apply for apprenticeship vacancies at: **www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship.**

WORK BASED

SUPPORTED INTERNSHIPS

Scan the QR code to find out more

16-24 with an EHCP





Supportive Job Coach





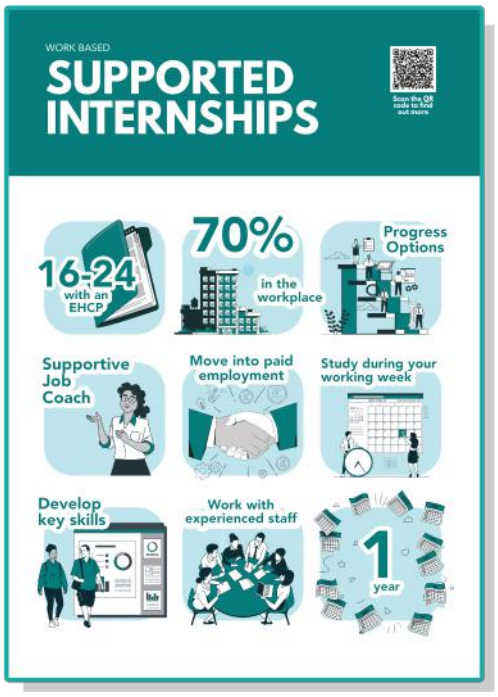








Work Based



Supported Internships are designed specifically for young people who have an **Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan** and who want to move into **sustainable, paid employment.**

These programmes are highly personalised, giving each young person the chance to **learn directly in the workplace** while receiving the support they need. Alongside time spent with an employer, students may also work towards relevant qualifications at a suitable level, depending on their individual needs and goals.

A Supported Internship typically lasts for around a year and includes at least six months of meaningful, **unpaid work experience**. The key difference from an apprenticeship is the **additional support provided** — for example, many interns are supported by a **job coach** who helps them develop the confidence, skills, and independence needed for work.

By combining real-world experience with tailored support, Supported Internships help young people build the skills and confidence to progress into paid jobs and achieve greater independence in their adult lives.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Improve communication skills.

During the course

Develop confidence and a wider social network.

Afterwards

Progress towards life goals and aspirations, such as getting a job.



The Access to Work fund (page 47) can be used to provide additional support/equipment, including a job coach and/or the extra costs of transport if it is not possible to use public transport.

Work Based

Who offers this near me?

In the South Midlands region, these are currently being offered by mainstream colleges, training providers or specialist colleges. Often suitable as a progression from another course.

SCAN or CLICK the QR codes for more information.

Bedford College Group
Bedford & Central Beds)

Runs supported internship programmes for 16–24 year olds with EHCPs, combining workplace placements with job coach support and employability learning.

Milton Keynes College – Inclusive Learning Supported Internships

Offers supported internships for young people with EHCPs, including workplace training, job coaching, and development of English, maths, and employability skills.

Northampton College

Provides supported internships to help young people with EHCPs transition into employment through structured workplace placements and in-college support.

Mencap (Training & Employment)

National charity offering supported internships, job coaching, and employment training for young people with learning disabilities and EHCPs.

Creating Tomorrow College
Daventry & Corby (North & West Northants)

A specialist college for 16–25 year olds with EHCPs, combining classroom learning with work experience and supported internships.

Work Based

Employment or Volunteering



Young people must remain in some form of **recognised, accredited education or training until age 18**, but this doesn't mean they have to stay in school or college full-time. For those who would rather be in the workplace, it is possible to combine **paid or voluntary work (at least 20 hours per week)** with study towards a **nationally recognised qualification**. This option can suit young people who are ready for work and want to keep learning in a more practical, flexible way.

How can this benefit my child?

Now

Gain valuable work experience.

During the course

Work towards nationally-recognised qualifications.

Afterwards

Develop communication and interaction skills for jobs.



Your child or young person can become self-employed and still count as participating, as long as they are doing part-time accredited education or training as well.

Helping your child to find an Apprenticeship

Use the below step by step guide help your child secure an apprenticeship – whether through a college, a training provider, or direct with an employer.

STEP 1: START YOUR SEARCH

Look on these sites:

- Find an Apprenticeship (gov.uk)
- Get My First Job
- Not Going to Uni
- Rate My Apprenticeship
- Careermap



TOP TIPS

Set up alerts for your area and your chosen industry so you never miss a new opportunity.

Colleges and training providers often **help match students** with local employers – **don't be afraid to ask!**



STEP 2: HELPFUL EXTRAS TO BOOST YOUR PLAN

1 Apply Direct to Employers

- Make a list of companies in their chosen industry.
- Visit the websites/social media channels and check any careers pages.
- Help your child email their CV, course details, and enthusiasm.
- Follow up if you don't hear back in a week or two.

2 Apply via a College or Training Provider

- Apply for an apprenticeship subject their interested in.
- Ask if the college helps match students with employers.
- Complete an application for a full-time course too (as backup).
- Attend open days or taster sessions.

3 Start a Full-Time Course First

- Choose a course linked to your future apprenticeship goals.
- Build confidence and skills in a classroom or workshop.
- Improve English, maths, and employability skills.
- Look and apply for apprenticeships during the course.



What If You Don't Find an Employer Right Away?

- Join the course anyway — colleges & training providers often help you find an employer.
- Keep applying for apprenticeship vacancies.
- You can switch over once you find an employer.

YOUR SAFETY NET CHECKLIST

Have you:

- **Applied for more than one route?**
- **Got a backup full-time course offer?**
- **Asked about employer help?**
- **Used Find an Apprenticeship?**
- **Spoken to a careers adviser?**

What if my child doesn't get the grades?

There's always a next step - heres what to do:

Results Day

Did they get the grades for their chosen course?

Yes

Go ahead with enrolment at college or sixth form.

Enrolment Day

Confirm place, finalise options, meet tutors and support staff.

Preparing for College / Sixth Form

Plan travel, organise equipment, check timetable and induction details.

Settling In

Attend induction week, explore clubs and enrichment and meet the pastoral/careers team.

Looking Ahead

Explore future pathways: university, apprenticeships, or work with ongoing careers support.

Ongoing: English & Maths

No

Don't worry - here are a few suggestions that can help.

1. **Resits & Foundation**

   Ensure English/Maths resits are built into the programme. Consider Entry Level or Level 1 courses.

2. **Apprenticeship**

   Learn on the job, earn a wage, build skills and confidence in a job that your child is interested in.

3. **Vocational Courses**

   Start at the right level and progress upwards this can include BTECs, City & Guilds, T-Levels and V-levels.

4. **Alternative Training Providers**

   Explore smaller training centres to help develop practical skills, employability, and confidence.

5. **Ongoing: English & Maths**

Must be studied until age 18 if not yet at Grade 4.
Always included in college study programmes.

Where to go for more help...

Supporting your child if they have learning difficulties or disabilities

Helping your child plan their career is an essential part of their post-16 journey.

Here are some ways to support them:

Explore Interests and Strengths



- Encourage your child or young person to talk about what they enjoy and what they're good at.
- Use tools like interest questionnaires and skills assessments tailored to SEND students.

Research Career Pathways



- Explore how different pathways align with your child or young person's interests and strengths.
- Investigate progression routes from entry-level roles to advanced opportunities.

Encourage Work Experience



- Work experience can provide valuable insight into different careers and help build confidence.
- Supported work placements are often available for SEND young people.

Teach Employability Skills



- Focus on communication, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving skills.
- Encourage activities that build these skills, such as volunteering or group projects.

Promote Independence

- Encourage your child or young person to take an active role in their career planning and decision-making.
- Support them in building confidence and self-advocacy skills.



Set Realistic Goals



- Help your child or young person set short-term and long-term goals based on their abilities and aspirations.
- Break these goals into manageable steps to track progress.

Utilise Support Networks

- Work with your child or young person's school, SENCO, and careers adviser to explore opportunities.
- Connect with local charities or organisations that specialise in supporting young people with SEND.



TALKING FUTURES

Talking Futures is a national campaign that helps parents and carers support their child when it comes to thinking about life after school or college. It's full of free, practical resources designed to help you feel more confident having those all-important career conversations – even if you don't know all the answers.

Why Conversations at Home Matter

Research shows that young people **trust their parents and carers most** when making big life decisions. Whether you're exploring sixth form, college, apprenticeships or training, Talking Futures helps guide the conversation.

What You'll Find on the Talking Futures Website

- **Conversation Starters** – Easy ways to open up career discussions at home
- **Planning Tools** – Create a shared action plan for their next steps
- **Interactive Activities** – Fun and thought-provoking prompts for families
- **Real Stories** – Watch how other families are supporting their young people
- **Information on Pathways** – Understand what options are available post-16 and beyond

Top Tips for Parents & Carers

- **Be curious, not controlling** – Ask questions that invite reflection
- **Keep it positive** – Focus on strengths, interests and potential
- **Use resources together** – Sit down and explore the Talking Futures tools as a team
- **Be honest** – It's okay to say, "I'm not sure – let's look it up together!"

Try This at Home



Ask: "What's something you've enjoyed doing recently – and why?"



Explore: Use the Talking Futures Planning Tool to map out options together



Reflect: "What skills do you think you've developed this year?"

USEFUL WEBSITES

Use the following websites for information and support to help inform your decision.

General Careers Information & Post-16 Information

National Careers Service - Providing information, advice and guidance to help you make decisions on learning, training and work. https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

Skills for Careers - use this site for a clear overview of the different options that are available to young people.
Young People | Skills for Careers (education.gov.uk)

Careers Pilot - Careers information and tools for 11-19 year olds.
https://www.careerpilot.org.uk

Icould - Find inspiration and explore your ideas using real-life career videos.
https://icould.com/

BBC bitesize careers - a really good range of articles and information from the BBC with career stories, videos, quizzes to help young people with their careers ideas.
https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/careers

Careers Advice for Families (Youth Employment UK) – Guidance for parents and carers to support young people in making career decisions. https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/careers-advice-for-parents/

T Levels - use this site to learn more about what T Levels are and how they work.
https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/

Prospects – a great source of information mainly aimed at young people who might consider university graduate level careers in the future or for those who are already at university. www.prospects.ac.uk

UCAS - Universities and colleges admissions service, offering support and advice so you can make informed decisions about your future. www.ucas.com/further-education

Informed Choices - The tool created by the Russell Group of universities to help you link University ideas to your A level choices. https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/

Careers Advice & Resources Aimed at Parents

Talking Futures - A parent-facing resource offering guidance on how to have career conversations with your child. https://www.talkingfutures.org.uk

Talking Futures - A set of prompt cards to help parents and carers talk to their teens about career ideas. https://www.talkingfutures.org.uk/conversation-cards/

The Parents Perspective - an exciting podcast series for parents and carers, helping them to support their children with careers advice and guidance.
https://amazingapprenticeships.com/the-parent-perspective-podcast/

Careermap - If you're a school leaver, graduate or job seeker, we have lots of options! Search & apply for apprenticeships, graduate schemes & jobs.
https://careermap.co.uk/career-advice/careermag

Youth Employment Parent Link - Supportive careers advice and resources to help parents guide their children through education and employment choices.
https://www.youthemployment.org.uk/careers-advice-for-parents/

Information About Support at University for Students with SEND

Disabled Students' Allowance – GOV.UK - Support with study-related costs if you have a disability or health condition.
https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowance-dsa

Disabled Students – UCAS - Advice on applying to university, including accessibility, support, and adjustments.
https://www.ucas.com/applying/applying-university/students-individual-needs/disabled-students

Scope UK – Support for Disabled Students in Higher Education - Funding and practical advice for students with SEND at university.
https://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/education/funding-for-college-and-university

Office for Students – Disabled Students - Research and resources to support inclusive university education.
https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/equal-opportunities/disabled-students/

Information About Work-Based Pathways

What Are Supported Internships? - NDTi - An easy read guide to supported internships, explaining what they are and how they can help young people with SEND gain work experience.
https://www.ndti.org.uk/resources/publication/what-are-supported-internships

The Government information and guidance on Supported Internships - Official government guidance on supported internships for young people with additional needs.
Supported internships - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Supported Employment (BASE-UK) – An overview of supported employment and how it helps individuals with additional needs find and retain work. https://www.base-uk.org/page/What-is-Supported-Employment

DFN Project SEARCH - A national organisation partnering with local providers to offer high-quality supported internship programmes for young people with SEND.
https://www.dfnprojectsearch.org

Access to Work (GOV.UK) – Government support available for individuals with disabilities or health conditions to help them succeed in the workplace.
https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Apprenticeships for All – Animation - A short and accessible animation explaining how apprenticeships can be adapted to be inclusive.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5JgMIFZsVy0

Apprenticeship Guide - Use this site as a tool to discover your perfect Apprenticeship role.
https://apprenticeshipguide.co.uk