

CHAPTER 3

Further and higher education



Further education is education for young people usually between the ages of 16 and 19. It includes school sixth forms, sixth form colleges and further education (FE) colleges. Higher education is provided by universities and similar institutions that offer degrees and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs).

Further education is often the first option for our young people when they leave school. There can seem to be an overwhelming range of choices, but in practice many of us found they quickly narrowed down to just a few possibilities. This chapter will

examine those options in more detail, tell you about the kinds of additional support available in further and higher education and give you advice about how you and your child can make the best choice.

LEAVING SCHOOL – WHAT HAPPENS?

When do they leave?

Officially, pupils in Year 11 stay at school until the end of June, but mainstream secondary schools often assume they'll leave as soon as their exams are over. Some young people may want to leave as soon as they can, but others could benefit from staying on and joining a school leaving programme that helps them prepare for further education. It's worth checking the leaving date with the school at the last annual review before your child leaves.

What about your child's Statement of SEN or EHC plan?

As we explained in Chapter 1, there have been some big changes to the SEN system and this will affect what happens when your child leaves school.

From September 2014, instead of Statements of SEN, there are now Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans that bring together all the support a child or young person needs in a single plan. EHC plans or EHCPs will go from 0 to 19 and, in some cases, up to 25 years whilst a student remains in education. So, if your child's Statement has not been changed to an EHC plan, you should ask the council's Casework Officer from the SEN team when you can expect this to happen. This will ensure that the support they require once they've left school will be documented in the EHC plan, which is a legal document like a Statement, and will go with them to their

college or training provider. Like a Statement, the EHC plan must be reviewed once a year.

When it's been decided what further education provision and support a young person needs and this has been agreed by the local authority, the Education Funding Agency (EFA) pays for it. However, funding for more significant needs (additional support) is funded via the local authority.

FURTHER EDUCATION (16-19)

All young people are entitled to free full-time education until they are 19 and they **have to** stay in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. They may be able to:

- Stay on at school if the school has a sixth form
- Go to a sixth form college
- Go to a further education (FE) College
- Go to Downs View Link College (DVLC) if they have complex needs
- Go to an independent special school or college which could be residential
- Do work based training like apprenticeships
- Combine part-time accredited education and training with work or volunteering that lasts for 20 hours or more per week.

Some young people may want to leave education behind and look for a job, but remember they now have to combine this with education or training until they're 18.

We cover all the different options in more detail on pages 47 to 55 but you may want to bear in mind that full-time education in a further education college is usually only 16 hours per week, although this may vary slightly depending on the course chosen. If your child is not able to study or look after

themselves independently in the free hours this may feel far from 'full-time', so you may also want to think about what they will be doing the rest of the time.

'I didn't know Beth had a right to full time education until she's 19. No-one explained it to me.'

Every young person who reaches the age of 16 or 17 is entitled to an offer of a suitable place, by the end of September, to continue in education or training the following year.

Thinking about post-16 options

Year 9 annual reviews kick-start the planning for adulthood process. The school should provide information on post-16 options as your child moves through Years 10 and 11.

Most parents find that getting good information helps. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, every local authority has to publish a Local Offer that sets out all the services and support they expect to be available in the area for children and young people with SEN and disabilities. Brighton and Hove's Local Offer is on their website at www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/localoffer and it is a mine of information. Each local authority also has to make sure parents and young people can get impartial information, advice and support about SEN and disability when they need it, to make sure they can participate fully in decisions. Amaze is the Information, Advice and Support (IAS) Service for Brighton and Hove.

Questions to ask to help you consider options:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of staying on at a school sixth form or opting for a sixth form college?
- What do local FE colleges offer?
- What courses are available and will they meet my child's needs?

- Are courses full-time, and what does full-time mean?
- What additional support arrangements are provided?
- When should we apply for the course and will it definitely run?
- Will my child need transport to and from the college and who will arrange it?
- Will my child be eligible for financial help to go to college and how can I apply for it?
- If local choices aren't appropriate and I want to consider an independent residential college, who will pay the fees and how do I find out more?
- What are apprenticeships and traineeships and how do they work?

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ Discuss education or apprenticeship and traineeship options with your child's school and your SEN Casework Officer or LDD Adviser
- ☺ Look at the Local Offer on Brighton & Hove City Council's website to find out about Post 16 options for young people with SEND
- ☺ Identify who can help at each college and get their details
- ☺ Have a look at the colleges and ask about the additional support they can provide, as well as course content
- ☺ Find out about all the choices. Think about what the young person needs, what they like doing and what the particular option they choose will offer them - does it all match up? And what happens after the course?
- ☺ If you think what is offered locally is unsuitable, consider looking at colleges further afield

'Some things are excluded if they don't get good GCSE grades. My son only got lower Fs and Ds so he wasn't entitled to go on this particular media course, but we insisted and wrote letters to the college. The tutor was very good and said he would give him a try on the strength of his

portfolio. But the course was National Diploma level which is quite high, equivalent to A levels. I would have liked him to start at a lower level but there wasn't a lower level course.'

Getting the information you need to choose

School visits

Special schools and mainstream schools usually invite local colleges to visit and explain what they offer. Some pupils will also have done a Key Stage 4 Engagement Programme, where they've attended one of the local colleges while they're still at school and done a course at the college.

Taster days

Local sixth forms and colleges offer taster days, open days and open evenings each year. Check web sites for details.

'I was talking to another mother and she had her son down for the Link College. That's where she thought he could go but he has been with the school to visit Sussex Downs College in Lewes and now he insists he goes there.'

Inspection reports

Sixth forms and colleges are inspected by Ofsted. You can read the reports on the Ofsted website at www.ofsted.gov.uk. They can be quite wordy, but they give useful information on strengths and weaknesses, as well as indicating how establishments support students and measure quality.

Other info

Sixth forms and colleges have prospectuses which provide information about courses and facilities. Call the Admissions Office. It's also worth looking at sixth form and college web sites.

The National Careers Service website for both adults and young people has information and advice about education, training and work. Visit www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk. Or young people and parents can speak to a qualified adviser by contacting their helpline, which is available from 8am to 10pm, seven days a week on 0800 100 900, or for text messages on 07766 413 219.

Independent FE Colleges

The Natspec Specialist College Directory and College Finder has details of independent specialist colleges on their website together with information about applying for a place. Visit www.natspec.org.uk.

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ Find out what level the young person is working at before the college interview so you're sure you are asking about a place on a course pitched at the right level
- ☺ Check the extra or specialist support that's available - it can vary between establishments
- ☺ Students with emotional or behavioural difficulties were not mentioned in the brochures we read. Ask whether and how the colleges cater for this type of special need
- ☺ Ask what previous students went on to do next
- ☺ Make sure you have contributed to your child's EHC plan or, if they are not transferring to one, their Preparing for Adulthood Plan
- ☺ Take copies of their Statement or EHC plan and other relevant information to support your discussion with the Learning Support Coordinator at the sixth form or FE college
- ☺ Don't assume school reports or the young person's Statement/EHC plan will automatically be forwarded to the college. Make copies yourself and send them to the

college before you meet and take more copies with you when you visit

- ☺ Ask the college for permission to look around when the students are in lessons
- ☺ Students may not be timetabled to attend lessons for a full day every day of the week and class sizes vary. Check what support is available when lessons aren't running

'One of the reasons I picked Sussex Downs College in Lewes is that I don't have to go up any stairs.' (Andrea 17)

COURSE LEVELS AND QUALIFICATIONS

Course levels and qualifications are confusing, but it's important to choose one that's the right level for your child. Ask your child's teachers and the SEN Casework Officer/ LDD Adviser for their input. College websites can also be helpful.

'I think what I found really hard was there are loads of options out there, but you have to do all the work. You know, you've got to find out what they are and then try and get your head around them all.'

Foundation Learning is available for 16-18 year olds all year round and is an individual programme to help young people overcome barriers to further education, training and/or employment. The programme is aimed at young people who aren't ready for formal further education or training.

Entry level awards and certificates – including Edexcel Entry Level Certificates, entry level awards from the Open College Network and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) - are courses that focus on independence skills and they offer a range of subjects including functional skills in English and Maths.

All other qualifications fit into a national framework that goes from Level 1 (e.g. a GCSE at grades D to G or a Level 1 NVQ) through to postgraduate study at Levels 7 and 8. They can be more academic and subject based or vocational and linked to work.

GCSEs and A levels cover specific subjects like History, Maths or English. These are sometimes referred to as ‘academic’ qualifications.

Other courses like NVQs and BTEC focus on a particular work area like engineering, floristry or child care. These ‘vocational’ (work) qualifications teach job skills that are defined by employers.

NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) can be studied by people in employment, or by school and college students who are on a work placement or working part-time. NVQs don’t have to be completed in a set length of time. There are five levels – from Level 1 which covers basic work activities and Level 2 which is on a par with GCSEs, all the way up to Level 5, which is designed for senior managers.

BTEC is a vocational qualification, often studied by 16-19 year olds. The Foundation/Introductory Certificate is equivalent to NVQ level 1, the BTEC First Diploma is equal to NVQ level 2 or four GCSEs at grade C and above, and the BTEC National Diploma is equivalent to NVQ level 3 or three A levels.

Apprenticeships lead to work-based qualifications. They’re open to 16-24 year olds who are not in full-time education. Young people doing apprenticeships have a contract of employment, usually for at least 30 hours a week and they work towards a vocational qualification. There are limited placements in Brighton and Hove for young people choosing this option – but young people can find their own work placements.

Some young people will follow **vocational or work-related learning** at school instead of a traditional GCSE programme. Make sure the units and certificates they've achieved at school are taken into account for the post-16 course they choose. These students could go on to Edexcel Entry Level Programme Life Skills or Edexcel Entry Level Vocational Courses at FE colleges.

If a young person over 18 has missed out parts of their education because of periods of ill health for example and doesn't have traditional qualifications, they could do an **Access Course** to get into higher education. Access courses usually last for a year.

Most young people are expected to have English and Maths GCSEs at Grade C or above by the time they are 16. Whatever course they choose to do after 16 they may also need to continue to study English and Maths.

Finding out more

Go to the government's website at www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ Find out the level the young person is working at before choosing a course – preferably in writing. Ask the school, the Educational Psychologist or the SEN Casework Officer/LDD Adviser
- ☺ Find out the level of the courses on offer and ask if appropriate support will be available for your child

'It was suggested that as he hadn't got good GCSEs he would have to start college at foundation level which is learning English and Maths at a very basic level. I couldn't see how this would improve him at all

because he is quite severely dyslexic. They also offered things like doing a bit of woodwork or gardening but these weren't the things he actually wanted to do. He's intelligent, it's just that he's dyslexic, but they just regarded him as not able to do anything.'

SIXTH FORMS

Sixth form is effectively years 12 and 13 (and 14 if required). There are two types of sixth form: those that are attached to a secondary school and sixth form colleges.

If your child wants to move from secondary education in a school into its sixth form, you'll need to discuss this with the school in advance, but if the courses they want to do are on offer, the transfer should be simple. If they want to move to a sixth form at another school, contact the new school direct early on; the school will have its own application procedure in Year 11. Sixth form colleges in the city also have an application process. Your school can tell you about this.

School sixth forms in Brighton and Hove

- Blatchington Mill School
- Brighton Aldridge Community Academy (BACA)
- Cardinal Newman School
- Hove Park School
- Portslade Aldridge Community Academy (PACA)

Sixth form colleges in Brighton and Hove

- BHASVIC (Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College)
- Varndean College

School sixth forms and sixth form colleges cater for 16-19 year olds doing full-time courses. Some only offer courses suitable for young people with five A* to C grades at GCSE, but others have a wider range. Young people with special needs attending

sixth forms will be expected to join mainstream courses, although there's learning support available to help them do this. If your child has physical disabilities or sensory impairments, check the access is suitable for them.

"When his GCSE results came out we were gutted and not sure where to turn now he couldn't go to sixth form college as planned. But Hove Park Sixth Form welcomed him and have been amazing."

'It's more of an open environment in sixth form college. You're left to your own devices more.' (Lucy 17)

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ Check the deadline for applying for sixth forms – your child will get priority if you apply by the right date
- ☺ Sixth forms offer a range of academic and vocational courses: including 'A' levels; BTECs; and the opportunity to take (or re-sit) GCSEs

FE COLLEGES

Like sixth forms, FE (Further Education) colleges also have a wide range of academic and vocational courses and there is a full application process when your child is in Year 11. FE colleges also offer some higher education courses too. They tend to have a broader range of vocational courses than sixth forms; these courses equip students for particular types of work including engineering, childcare, catering, hairdressing, IT or games development.

They also offer specific courses for students with special needs. These courses can run alongside mainstream classes for young people who have additional needs, or they can provide a stepping stone to more mainstream opportunities. As we said

earlier, some of us were taken aback to find out that full-time courses at FE colleges usually mean around 16 hours a week.

FE colleges in Sussex

- City College, Brighton and Hove
- Sussex Downs College (Lewes and Eastbourne sites)
- Plumpton College, near Lewes
- Northbrook College, near Worthing
- Chichester College, including Brinsbury Campus in Pulborough
- Sussex Coast College, Hastings
- Central Sussex College (Crawley and Haywards Heath sites)
- Worthing College

Students can apply to go to any FE college. There will be extra travel costs if they opt for a college further from home, but it may be worth considering if the course is right. For example, Plumpton College offers courses and training in specialised areas like farming and forestry, animal care, floristry and zoo keeping. Their 'Rural Pathways' course is a practical entry level programme for school leavers with additional needs.

'It seems to me that the competition to get into City College is enormous. Everyone wants to come to Brighton. Whereas, if you go to some of the other places, the competition doesn't seem to be as much. It doesn't mean that the course isn't as good and in a lot of ways there are courses in other places like Eastbourne which actually are better, but Brighton is the place to be!'

Downs View Link College (DVLC)

For some young people with complex educational needs - especially those with profound and multiple learning disabilities or severe learning disabilities including autistic

spectrum conditions - moving to a mainstream FE college might not be appropriate. In some circumstances the young person may want to consider Downs View Link College which provides three years of specialist school sixth form education and is on the site of Varndean Sixth Form College.

Most of the pupils from Downs View and Hillside schools move on to the Link College and a few places may be offered to pupils who attend other schools and need a high level of support. Students at the Link College follow a range of nationally accredited courses according to ability. These include the Open College Network and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programme. Students can also do the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, a voluntary, non-competitive programme of cultural and adventurous activities for all young people, whatever their background or ability.

Alternative providers

There are some other organisations that provide courses post 16 that may suit a young person whose needs or interests can't be met at a local college or sixth form. For example DV8 offer courses from level 1 to 3 and apprenticeships in music, fashion and digital marketing. Other alternative learning providers are Albion in the Community, Access to Music and NACRO.

Independent FE colleges

If a young person's needs can't be met at a local college or sixth form, a specialist college may be an option and funding needs to be agreed with the local authority, the Education Funding Agency and, in the case of a residential placement, social care. There's a range of residential and independent FE colleges across the country and they specialise in post 16 education for young people with special educational needs. There can be waiting lists of up to three years for places, so it's best to apply early.

Independent FE colleges in Sussex

- St John's College, Brighton
- Mount Camphill Community, near Wadhurst

Getting a place at an independent FE college isn't straightforward. Fees are high and you need to prove that funding them is an "efficient use of resources" which in effect means showing the young person's needs can't be met in the maintained FE sector. You need to show evidence that local colleges have been consulted before a specialist college can be considered and the young person themselves must want to go to the college.

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ You'll need to collect evidence that the young person's needs as described in their Statement or EHC plan can't be met in local state provision
- ☺ Researching and compiling evidence is important and it's helpful to include the young person's views
- ☺ Seek help from the SEN Casework Officer/LDD Adviser – the procedures are complicated. The adviser has to prepare the application for funding and present the case on your child's behalf

Getting funding for an independent specialist college is more complicated if you're applying for a residential place. Funding guidance is updated every year, usually in December. The SEN Casework Officer/LDD Adviser should be able to provide you with details. The adviser will complete the application form and provide supporting information like professional reports and your child's EHC plan.

If the application is successful, funding will usually pay fees for up to three years (depending on the young person's progress)

and could require joint funding with social care and/or health services. After 19, the Education Funding Agency will approach local health and adult social care services to share the cost of the 'accommodation' or 'care' component of the placement.

If funding is turned down, the local authority will advise on next steps and you can ask for the decision to be reviewed.

APPLYING TO SIXTH FORMS AND COLLEGES

Your child's school may manage the application process if you're applying to a college in the city. Check with them.

If you're applying for a place outside the city, or the school isn't managing the process, make sure you get a prospectus for the institution you're interested in. It usually has an application form at the back which you can fill in and send off. Or you will be able to find one on their website.

Apply as early as possible as courses may fill up and you may need to build in time for a transition programme from school. Some education providers may start taking applications up to a year before the course starts.

If your child hasn't heard back from the sixth form or college within a month of sending the application form, offering an interview date, follow this up with the college admissions department.

Interviews and offers

Some sixth forms or colleges offer an initial interview that includes guidance for choosing the appropriate course, especially if the student is unsure or has unrealistic expectations before the course interview.

At the interview, the college fills in a report which is signed by the student and the interviewer. The report recommends a place on a particular course and the young person may be verbally offered a definite or provisional place at that point (depending on their exam results). A registration fee may be charged.

A copy of the report is sent to the student formally offering a place on the course. They are asked to complete an acceptance form and return it within two weeks. An offer of a place may be made subject to getting certain GCSE results, but unconditional offers can be made for Foundation Level courses.

The colleges arrange 'Introductory Days' for students to meet tutors and other students. It's a good idea to attend these.

Preparing for the interview

Most parents don't know what the 'etiquette' is and worry about whether or not students can attend with their parents. You could ask your child and be guided by what they want. Colleges often expect young people to discuss the details and arrangements directly with them.

Colleges will make reasonable adjustments to their interview process and this is more likely if requests are made in advance. Check if the interview is 1:1 or in a group and whether there are other activities planned, such as literacy assessments, so that changes can be made if necessary. If a young person could feel overwhelmed by attending a busy interview day the college may be able to arrange an appointment for another time.

'We hadn't prepared Beth for this because we had got used to it being second nature to interpret for her, or to think on her behalf. Suddenly this person was talking to her and she was just blank. We knew she was nervous and although she'd written out a list of questions to ask, it was just as well we went because he didn't ask her if she had any questions so she just didn't ask any.'

Questions to ask (before or at the interview)

- What size are the classes?
- Will there be support for your child in class and at what level?
- Will learning support be in place from day one and how long will it be offered for?
- Is there an opportunity to meet support staff before the course starts?
- Do tutors have experience or training in the young person's special need?
- What does the course involve e.g. theory classes, writing essays, group discussions?
- How is the course assessed?
- What homework is given?
- What's the timetable like for each day?
- How many hours of independent study are expected each week? Is there any support available for this e.g. a learning support assistant available to all students working in the library?
- What happens between classes? Is there any supervision?
- Will your child be expected to take Maths and English classes in addition to their main course?
- How are work placements arranged?
- Is transport to college or to work placements arranged?
- Is there support if the young person is struggling emotionally?
- Will speech and language therapy support be available?
- What days of the week and times will the programme run? (full time courses don't always run every day)
- Will the course definitely run even if only a few enrol?
- What are the progression routes from this course? If the next step is another course is it available within the same college?

'The woman said they would get the tutors to only require him to do the minimum so that he didn't fail and lose his confidence. They said if he needs extra learning support, they will try to provide it as he has missed

seven years schooling due to his ME. They were really accommodating at Varndean.'

SUPPORT IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Your child's EHC plan or Preparing for Adulthood plan should list the support and equipment they need at sixth form or college. Make sure you check it over carefully. If they have been at a special school you may have relied on the school to provide what they needed without worrying too much about the detail in their Statement or EHC plan. If they are moving to an FE college you need to be sure the right information is in the plan for the college to meet their needs.

It's helpful to know about the extra assistance offered to students when thinking about college options. Sixth forms and colleges cater for young people with special educational needs, but the way they do it varies.

Colleges and sixth forms need to take into account the Equality Act 2010, which says they must make 'reasonable adjustments' so disabled students are not treated less favourably and not discriminated against. Colleges and sixth forms have a Single Equality Duty. Ask them how they put this into practice for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

What kind of additional support is available?

An Education, Health and Care Plan will state the specific provision for your child but learning support is also available for young people who do not have an EHC plan. Those young people are categorised as "SEN Support". Post-16 educational providers receive additional funding for these young people so a wide range of support should be available from Learning Support departments.

Services offered by Learning Support teams in colleges could include:

- In-class support from learning support assistants, note takers and communication support workers
- Use of specialist software and equipment
- Help with literacy or numeracy for individuals or in small groups
- Sessions with mental health workers for learners with mental health difficulties
- Specialist support for learners with dyslexia or dyspraxia
- Provision for specialist services
- Access arrangements for exams e.g. additional time or a separate room

'I said "what level of support would you give, these are her problems" and they said "oh well you apply to the college and then we'll tell you". I said "no, I want to know what sort of support you will give before I apply". So I had to make another appointment to see a learning support person. We had a whole hour with them and it went quite well.'

Student Support teams may also offer information and help on things like financial assistance, welfare services, accommodation, careers advice, health issues, study problems and personal difficulties. Counselling services in colleges can help with more personal matters.

What is not available?

It is unlikely services like educational psychology, speech and language therapy or physiotherapy will be made available at mainstream further education colleges, although this may shift as EHC plans carry on into FE. Talk to someone from the college's Learning Support Team to discuss your child's support needs and find out what support the college can offer them.

'They said "I can't really tell you what level of speech and language support we can give until we get a copy of the Plan.'"

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ If your child's staying on at a school sixth form talk to the school SENCO to see what support they'll get
- ☺ Don't assume appropriate support will automatically be in place for the young person. Make contact with the Learning Support Coordinators at the college or sixth form and arrange a meeting to discuss how the needs of the young person can be met
- ☺ Ask for written confirmation of the level of learning support available before the start of the course
- ☺ In your child's final year of school make sure your child has an updated EHC plan, if your child is going on to college or training. Discuss the equipment or extra support you think your child will need
- ☺ Ask whether the college or sixth form has access to specialist support and if not, whether they'll buy it in

'A tutor seems to have time to help him and he is very understanding. He said "If he wants to put something on tape instead of writing I'll let him do that". That makes all the difference.'

We can't stress enough the importance of doing your own research. Professionals will tell you about special courses offered at different colleges - but it's unlikely they'll pass judgement about the quality of them. Find out as much as you can about the courses your child is interested in and the support available to them, and that way they are more likely to work out well.

'I think the most useful thing was actually speaking to other parents who have already gone further down the line.'

What if things go wrong?

Even with all the preparation and good intentions in the world, things may still go wrong and you will have much less contact with sixth form or college than you were used to having with school so it can be difficult to see how they're doing.

If there are problems, talk to staff at the sixth form or college. They may be able to find a solution. Contact Learning Support as well as your child's tutor.

If your son or daughter is struggling with their course, you may be able to find other courses they can transfer to quite quickly, but it's not always so simple. Get back in touch with the SEN Casework Officer/LDD adviser if it looks like the college placement may break down. They should be able to help look for alternatives.

'When it was obvious he was finding the City College course too challenging, we tried to find out if any other colleges did that course. Both Lewes and Chichester colleges were ones I didn't know about originally. They were very welcoming. They saw the work he had done and were very impressed.'

If the worst happens and your child leaves the college, they don't lose their right to further education and training to 19. The Youth Employability Service have a worker whose job it is to help young people who become NEET (not in education, employment or training).

'The Youth Employability Service has been really useful over the last year. Oliver went and did a year at Lewes at Sussex Downs College, and the transition from Patcham House to Lewes was fine, but then when he didn't get the grades at the end of the year, they fell apart, they had no back up plan, and that was a real, real mess and the service was fantastic at that stage, absolutely brilliant.'

FINANCIAL HELP WITH EDUCATION 16-19

All young people between 16 and 19 years have a right to free full-time or part-time education, provided they satisfy national residence conditions, but additional financial help is available to some students.

16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16-19 Bursary Fund may offer bursaries of up to £1200 a year to young people aged 16-19 if at least one of the following applies:

- They are in care or are care leavers,
- They get Income Support or Universal Credit
- They are disabled and receiving both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

There are also limited discretionary bursaries which can be used to support students facing genuine financial barriers like costs of transport, food or equipment. Sixth forms and colleges decide how much is paid and how often.

Speak to Student Support services or a tutor to find out whether your child is eligible. You can also call the Government's Learner Support helpline on 0800 121 8989 for more information.

Other financial help

See Chapter 9, 'Travel and getting about' for information on help with travel costs to and from post-16 education.

There may be other funds available from the college to help with the cost of fees, equipment, child care or travel. Students don't have to be on benefits to get financial help – but funds are

limited and do run out, so you should apply as early as possible. You'll need to fill in forms and provide evidence and financial details. Read through the institution's Guidelines on Financial Assistance before making an application.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER 18/19?

In the last year of formal education, decisions about your child's future learning or working life need to be made. The school or college programme includes links with local options for education, care or supported employment.

Young people don't have an automatic right to staying on in education after they reach the age of 19, but there are options and in some cases they may be able to stay in education until they're 25. You'll need to get individual advice; ask your child's SEN Casework Officer/LDD Adviser. For some young people this may be the moment you consider specialist FE colleges (see page 53).

'After the Link College I'll be looking for an FE college like Plumpton. I would like him to stay in education until the last day, as long as possible.'

Young people who have done A levels or equivalent qualifications at sixth form or FE may want to move onto higher education at 18 or later.

HIGHER EDUCATION

FE colleges often provide some higher education options - Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), higher level NVQs and Foundation degrees in partnership with universities for example. For part-time courses, you apply direct to the college, for full-time courses, the application process is through UCAS (see below).

Going to university or a college that offers higher education (including FE colleges and specialist institutions like art colleges) gives young people over the age of 18 the chance to acquire more academic qualifications. Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) can offer financial support – see page 67.

Students who want to do a higher education course apply through the Universities Central Application Service (UCAS) while they are at sixth form or FE college. Just like the process of deciding on post-16 options, research is really important in making the right choice. Don't encourage your child to apply for a place until they've visited the university and considered the course carefully. Changing courses later can affect funding.

The range of degree and higher national diploma or equivalent courses on offer is detailed in university prospectuses. Your child can search for courses on the UCAS web site wwwucas.com which also has a wealth of useful information.

Additional support in higher education (HE)

The young person should contact the Disability Coordinator or Learning Support Coordinator for the university they are interested in to discuss access and support arrangements.

Under the Equality Act, it's unlawful for universities and colleges to discriminate against disabled students. They have a legal requirement to make 'reasonable adjustments' so disabled students are not put at a substantial disadvantage. All higher education institutions should have a Single Equality Scheme that sets out how they intend to improve disability equality across their organisation.

Most universities and colleges have disability coordinators or advisers. They can tell your child what support is available and help set up a visit. This is an opportunity to talk to staff about

adaptations your child may need and to talk to academic staff about specific course information. It's worth taking a list of questions to ask members of staff and students. What you want to ask depends on your child's disability, but these are some examples.

- Are all the buildings physically accessible?
- Are there any particular facilities for disabled students?
- Are there any current students with a similar impairment?
- What support do they receive?
- Who will help organise support?
- Is there help to apply for additional funding if needed?
- Are methods of teaching and assessment appropriate?
- What would happen if there's a problem after starting the course?
- If the young person will be leaving home does the college/university offer any student accommodation that is suitable for your child's needs?

Telling the institution about your child's disability in advance can help them arrange support in time for the start of the course. Disability Rights UK publishes a comprehensive range of factsheets and guides including a booklet called 'Into Higher Education' that covers everything we've looked at here in more detail. You can download it from their website at www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/education. They also have a helpline on 0800 328 5050.

The young person's EHC plan may also help with explaining their needs when applying for university disability support.

Student Unions and other help

Every university and most colleges have a Students' Union that's affiliated to the NUS. They also have welfare services and can be a useful source of information and support when you are considering applying to a university, or when you have been

offered a place there. The Students' Union office contact details should be included in the information you get on the institutions your child is interested in.

Most universities will have other support services for students such as a Student Counselling Service.

PARENT TIPS

- ☺ Ask if it's possible to speak to a student at the place you are interested in who has similar needs to the young person. This can help the young person assess whether the course or place is right for them
- ☺ If contact goes well, it can be useful for the parent to talk to the student's parents for practical information and perhaps support in 'letting go' and helping the young person develop and enjoy their new independence
- ☺ Have an honest discussion with your child about how prepared they are to live away from home. Do you and they need to do some work on this before they go? It may be good to consider a university that is not *too* far away.
- ☺ If they need all their energy now to complete their studies a gap year could be a chance to practice more life skills.

Funding for higher education

Going to university or college is a big investment. Most students don't need to pay any tuition fees up front; they're covered by a Tuition Fee Loan. The highest amount an English university can charge for tuition fees is currently £9,000. You may also be able to apply for a loan to help with living costs like rent, food, books, transport and entertainment – and specific support for disabled students through DSAs (see next page). Maintenance grants for students from poorer backgrounds no longer exist – they were abolished by the Conservative government in

January 2016 – though you may be able to get some extra help from your university or college's hardship fund.

Student Finance England provides loans which a young person will have to pay back after they graduate, once they earn over £21,000 per year. The way to apply for student finance support is online at www.gov.uk/student-finance. Your child shouldn't wait until they have a confirmed place; they need to apply as soon as they accept an offer.

Make sure you do your financial homework before applying. There is a calculator www.gov.uk/student-finance-calculator to check what support your child should get.

If your child has a disability or specific learning disability, it's a good idea for them to contact universities and colleges to discuss their requirements before sending their application to UCAS.

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

Disabled Students' Allowance or DSA is a grant to help meet the extra costs students can face as a direct result of a disability, ongoing health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. They help disabled people study on an equal basis with other students. They are paid on top of the standard student finance package and don't have to be paid back. The amount your child may get depends on the type of extra help they need – not on your household income. The government is proposing changes to DSA but at the moment DSA can be used for:

- Specialist equipment needed for study – computer software for example
- Non-medical helpers, like a note-taker or reader
- Extra travel costs because of your child's disability
- Other costs – tapes or Braille papers for example

It's best to apply for DSA as early as possible; don't wait until your child has a confirmed place at university. Only limited support may be available from the university until the DSA has been organised. Visit www.gov.uk/disabled-studentsallowances-dsas/how-to-claim to find out more. If your child wants to be considered for DSA they'll need to provide up to date evidence of their disability or condition (for example, a letter from a doctor or specialist or a 'diagnostic assessment' from a psychologist or specialist teacher). If they've had an assessment when they were under 16, it will need updating.

You'll have to pay for any tests to establish whether your child qualifies for DSAs. If you can't afford it you may be able to get financial help through the university or college's hardship fund so ask.

If your child qualifies for DSAs, Student Finance England will advise whether your child has to attend an assessment centre to work out the help they'll need. The centre will write a report setting out all the help they think they'll need and will send it to Student Finance England. The centre should also send a copy to your child.

Bear in mind that DSAs do not cover help with personal care. If your child will need this to live independently at university it would need to be funded by adult social care. You will need to ask for a Child's Needs Assessment as part of the transition planning process as they approach 18 to see if they will be eligible for help such as direct payments to pay for personal assistants. See Chapter 6 for more on social care.

PARENT TIP

- ☺ To reduce any delay, visit www.gov.uk/studentfinance and apply as early as possible for DSAs, loans and grants