

Options at 16

As Year 11 approaches, your son or daughter will need to start thinking about their options when they leave school at 16. As you help them through this process, you should discover a range of choices relating to education, training or work.

Precisely what's on offer depends on where you live. You could start your search at GOV.UK (www.gov.uk/browse/education/find-course) where you'll find out more about qualifications, apprenticeships and post-16 financial support. This article focuses on options available in England.

Post-16 options and the law

The raising of the participation age in England means that, whatever your child's next step, some form of study or training is compulsory until at least the age of 18. They won't have to stay in full-time education, but they will need to opt for some part-time learning if they choose to work or volunteer. Elsewhere in the UK, students can leave education at 16, although there are many benefits to continuing with post-16 learning or training.

Whether your young person is aiming towards a specific career, aspires to a leading university, wants to go straight into work or keep an open mind, there should be something to suit. From nursing cadetships and apprenticeships in space engineering to university technical colleges and studio schools, there are many exciting opportunities to explore.

The first step is to discover which options could suit them and their future plans. Start by helping them to consider how they prefer to learn. Are they happiest learning in a classroom, do they prefer to apply their learning to real-life problems or do they learn best through doing?

If your son or daughter is happy to spend some or most of their time in a classroom, take a look at school sixth forms, sixth form colleges or further education colleges and training providers.

Sixth forms and colleges

As a rough guide, sixth forms tend to focus on academic qualifications for under 19s, with further education colleges offering vocational options to students aged 14 or 16 and over. So a sixth form might offer qualifications in physics and psychology, while a further education college might offer engineering and health and social care. You will find some crossover between what's on offer and it's always worth a visit to get a feel for the place. Post-16 students won't necessarily be in lessons every day, leaving time for independent study and the opportunity to develop a range of skills through other activities.

New educational options

University technical colleges (UTCs) and studio schools are newer options in the 14 to 19 education landscape. They offer academic qualifications and practical activities combined with contributions from businesses and the feel of a workplace. Studio schools use enterprise projects to support learning, while UTCs offer technical education sponsored by a university.

Apprenticeships and traineeships

Young people who prefer to learn through doing a job might favour an apprenticeship, finding work, setting up their own business or volunteering. The most common option to learn through work is an apprenticeship, where formal learning is combined with work. Apprentices earn a minimum of £3.50 per hour (April 2017), with some earning substantially more. It is a popular option and entry can be competitive, although the opportunities are growing in number and in the range of job areas available.

To cope with an apprenticeship, your young person will need to be mature enough to work nine to five and follow the rules of the workplace. They'll also need to have a career direction in mind, at least for the next year or two. If they need more experience, confidence or additional skills to find an apprenticeship or a job, then a traineeship might help them to prepare.

Finding the right fit

The main consideration when making post-16 choices is about finding the right fit for your child so they end up somewhere they will thrive. You can help them to work out what they would enjoy, what would suit them, and how their choices fit in with any future plans. Talk to the staff at your child's school about how they can support with this process.

If you want to know more, read our articles on [apprenticeships and traineeships](#), [choosing A level subjects](#) and [what to expect from a further education college](#).

You can find out more about post-16 options using the following websites.

GOV.UK

www.gov.uk/browse/education/find-course

National Apprenticeship Service

www.getingofar.gov.uk

University Technical Colleges

www.utcolleges.org

Studio Schools Trust

www.studioschoolstrust.org

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