



Disability support in further education

Further education at college or sixth form can be a great way to pick up new skills, open up new career options or prepare for higher education.

Further education and your prospects

Whether you are 16 or 60, a huge variety of courses is available. Options range from entry level courses covering the basics of reading, writing and numbers, through level 2 courses such as GCSEs and BTEC first diplomas to level 3 courses such as BTEC national diplomas and AS/A levels. There are also opportunities through NVQs and apprenticeships to get into work-based learning.

Being disabled or having a specific learning difficulty need not limit your choices, but you will need to take special care choosing the course and institution that are right for you.

Support at college or sixth form

Colleges and sixth forms have to make 'reasonable adjustments' so that disabled people don't suffer a substantial disadvantage. They might, for example, provide one-to-one support, a sign language interpreter or copies of documents in other formats.

The type of support available varies, so it's important to check beforehand. It's a good idea to visit the place so you can see what's available for yourself. The college's Learning Support Adviser or Special Education Needs Coordinator will be able to give you details.

You can also get a copy of the college or school's Disability Equality Statement. This sets out how it plans to promote equal opportunities for disabled people. If you require support that is not covered in the Disability Statement the college may be able to provide it, so you need to ask.

Going to a specialist college

If your local college cannot offer a course to suit your disability-related needs, you may be able to get a place at a specialist college. Most of these colleges are independent and cater specifically for students with disabilities or learning difficulties. They are often residential.

You will need to get financial support from the Learning and Skills Council, based on an assessment of your needs. The assessment is carried out by the **Connexions** service. You can also get advice about the application process from the service. Contact your Connexions personal adviser or Connexions Direct if you think this might be an option for you by Freephone 0808 001 3219, Text phone 08000 968 336 or via email from the website:

www.connexions.gov.uk

Advice on your options after 16

If you are disabled or have a learning difficulty, you can get support, advice on learning, careers and more up to the age of 25 from Connexions Direct.

If you are over 25 the government website '**Directgov**' has information on benefits you may be able to claim if you're a disabled student on a low income, such as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

From the link for disabled people, select education and training and choose from the menu which includes a section on your rights and learning in relation to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA).
www.direct.gov.uk

The Learner Support Fund helps students who may struggle to make ends meet at college or university. Colleges and universities set their own rules on who qualifies but students with disabilities often receive help. If you don't get any help from the Learner Support Fund you could apply to educational trusts and charities through the educational grants advisory service:

www.egas-online.org.uk

Careers and educational advice are available from the national nextstep service:

www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk

Claiming benefits while you're in further education

Skill is the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities. They are a national charity promoting opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of impairment in post-16 education, training and employment. For a detailed guide to claiming benefits as a disabled student, see the Skill website:

www.skill.org.uk