

Helping your teenager with subject and career choices

Information and practical tips to help you support your teenager's decision-making.

Preparing for the future

Gaining skills and qualifications

Whatever your teenager wants to do in life, a good standard of education and training can increase their chances of success. Gaining skills and qualifications:

- helps them to make the most of their potential
- opens doors to employment and higher education
- improves their earning power.

Key stage 4 choices

What to study

All teenagers study English, mathematics and science during key stage 4, plus lessons in other essential subjects. They also study three or four optional subjects that they choose at the age of 13/14 before they start key stage 4. Some options lead to GCSEs. Others lead to work-related technical qualifications. If your son or daughter has additional learning needs and/or needs extra support to build confidence and skills or gain qualifications, their options may include a personalised programme tailored to their needs.

Where to study

In some areas, teenagers can also choose where to study at key stage 4. Their choices could include studying at:

- their current school
- A University technical college which specialises in subjects like engineering and construction - and teaches these subjects with business skills and using IT. Offers academic subjects as well as practical subjects leading to technical qualifications. The curriculum is designed by universities and employers who also provide work experience for students

- A Studio School which is usually a small school (around 300 students) that teaches qualifications through project-based learning. Students work with local employers and a personal coach, and follow a curriculum designed to give them the skills and qualifications they need in work, or to take up further education.

Post-16 options

The law says that all young people must continue to do some kind of education or training until they are 18. At 16, your teenager must decide what to study and where and how to do it. Their options include:

Full-time education

Your teenager could study full-time at a school, college or with a specialist provider. All study programmes will prepare them for higher level learning and employment and include opportunities for work experience and enterprise activities. They could work towards subject-based academic qualifications like A Levels, or the equivalent technical qualifications such as T Levels, or other technical awards. If they are interested in, but not quite ready for work they may be able to do a Traineeship or Supported Internship. All teenagers who do not gain a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths may be expected to continue studying these subjects post 16.

Apprenticeships

An Apprenticeship will prepare your son or daughter for skilled employment and higher level education and training. There are hundreds of types of Apprenticeships, suitable for over 1,400 job roles. They combine high-quality training with paid work. Apprentices

work towards qualifications that give them the theoretical knowledge and practical skills they need to do a job well. Careers advisers will advise your teenager that they ought to start looking and applying for Apprenticeship vacancies very early in the spring term of year 11, even though they can't start one until after the "official school leaving date" in June.

Part-time education or training

If your teenager plans to work full-time for an employer, for themselves, or as a volunteer, they must spend the equivalent of one day a week working towards approved and nationally recognised qualifications.

What, where and how your teenager learns will depend on the nature of their full-time work and whether the learning is organised for them or they organise it for themselves. They could, for example:

- work towards academic or technical qualifications that will help them to improve their future prospects, make their business a success and/or meet the needs of their employer or the organisation with which they are a volunteer
- study in concentrated blocks for one or two weeks at a time, or spread their learning over a longer period
- do a course in their workplace, at a local college, with a specialist training provider or online.



Getting Support

Support for your teenager

Making subject and career choices is an important part of growing up. It can be a challenge, so your teenager will receive a lot of support to help them choose well.

Careers education

Careers lessons will encourage your teenager to:

- think about and set goals for the future
- research their career ideas and explore their options
- make decisions and plans
- present themselves well in applications and interviews.

Careers advice and guidance

Teachers, tutors and other staff will discuss the pros and cons of different options including the career opportunities that studying certain subjects can open up. They will help your teenager to think through their ideas and offer them inspiration through work-related activities, including visits to and from employers or other learning providers.

The school must give your son or daughter access to independent, impartial careers guidance, including information on all available options.

Special educational needs

If your teenager has a disability or learning difficulty, there may be extra help with decision-making and transition planning. Ask the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in school or college, their tutor or their careers adviser.

Money matters

16 to 19-year olds whose financial situation might stop them from continuing in full-time education or training may qualify for financial support. The help available includes 16-19 bursaries. These are grants paid by schools, colleges and training providers to vulnerable young people and those in greatest financial need.

Whether your teenager qualifies for help depends on their personal circumstances. They can find out more from their tutor, the person in charge of student support, their careers adviser or key worker, and through the 'Education and learning' pages at www.gov.uk.

Support for you

You will also receive support to help your teenager make choices that work for them. As decision time approaches, you will receive information as well as invitations to attend events to help you understand the choices on offer. If you have any queries or concerns, you should contact your teenager's tutor. If they cannot help, they will put you in touch with someone who can – often a subject teacher or a careers adviser.

Outside school, many organisations and websites offer you and your teenager help and support including:

GOV.UK at www.gov.uk

The 'Education and learning' pages have information on young people's choices, financial support for learning and sources of help.

The **National Careers Service** at

<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

This has careers information and a helpline. Anyone over the age of 13, or their parents can speak to a qualified adviser by contacting the helpline on 0800 100 900. See: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/contact-us> for other ways to contact them. They will also be able to help you as an adult if you are looking for support with your own learning and career plans.

The **Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS) Network** at <https://cyp.iassnetwork.org.uk/>

This gives details of local services that offer free impartial information and advice on a range of issues to parents and carers of children and young people who need extra help with learning.

For information on apprenticeships:

For more information on apprenticeships: Amazing Apprenticeships has a wealth of free up-to-date information, including Parent Packs.

(<https://amazingapprenticeships.com/resources/?parents-packs=1>). See the Resources section of the website and choose the Parents section



Tips on how to help your teenager choose well

Encourage them to find out as much as they can about their options

Discuss with your teenager the options information they receive and any material, such as prospectuses, that they find online. Encourage them to go to information and other events. Go with them if you can. Help them to make a list of questions about the options that interest them and where they lead. Check application deadlines, especially post 16, as popular options can fill up quickly.

Help them to identify their interests and abilities

Your teenager is more likely to succeed if they choose options that fit their interests and abilities. Help them to identify these by encouraging them to discuss how they feel about different lessons, spare time activities, tests, exams and practical projects. You could also work with them on the activities in Which Way Now? that covers key stage 4 choices or It's Your Choice that looks at post-16 options.

Encourage them to consider the consequences of their choices

If your teenager has a particular career in mind, they may need specific experience, subjects, qualifications and grades to do it. Encourage them to find out. Help them to research the careers that interest them – they could use the job profiles on <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk> Look at course entry requirements in options information and prospectuses and, for higher education courses that interest them, on www.ucas.com and <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk> If your teenager has no clear career plans, encourage them to opt for a broad range of courses that will give them plenty of choice in the future.

Remind them that learning pays

Remind your teenager that education and training count. Better qualifications bring better job prospects, higher earnings and more job satisfaction. There is still a big pay gap between people with qualifications and those without. If your teenager starts their

working life in a low skilled, low paid job without training, they may find it difficult to move on to something better. If they are deciding what to do after year 11, encourage them to choose an option that offers structured education or training. They can speak to a careers adviser for help to find an education or training opportunity that suits them.

Gently challenge any choices that concern you

For example, you might want to challenge a choice because you feel that your teenager has not done enough research. Or you may feel that they have over or underestimated their ability in a subject. Or that they have been too heavily influenced by whom they think will teach the course, what their friends say or fear of being the only person of their gender in that group.

Support their decision

Try to give in gracefully if you disagree with your teenager's choices. Show them that you want the best for them by accepting that it is their choice. If they realise later on that they made the wrong decision, they will need your support to deal with the consequences. Should this happen, remain positive and encourage them to learn from their mistakes – discovering that something is not for them is a positive step that will help them to identify an opportunity that will suit them better.

Encourage them to make a back-up plan

Practical reasons may prevent your teenager from doing what they want to do. Having a back-up plan will make them feel as though they still have some control over what happens.

Be ready to help them deal with personal problems

At some point, most teenagers have concerns that make it hard for them to cope with other parts of their life. You can help them to tackle these concerns by:

- offering your support as soon as you spot a problem – it is always better to get involved earlier rather than later
- listening to what they say and trying to see the problem from their point of view
- working on a solution with them, involving others if needed
- showing that you believe in them, helping them to recognise their successes and supporting them to achieve new things – for example, by encouraging them to make the most of opportunities such as mentoring, coaching, volunteering, work experience and schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh Award.



Checklist for action

- Read the options information your teenager receives.
- Look at the content of online materials such as prospectuses.
- Check the dates of options events and put them in your diary or calendar.
- Encourage your teenager to research their options, discuss their choices with you and share any concerns they may have.
- Help your teenager to think about how well different options match their interests and abilities.
- Encourage your teenager to consider the consequences of different choices and discuss who else could help them with this.
- Make a list of questions to ask at options and information events.
- Attend options and information events.
- Check that option/application forms are completed and handed in on time.
- Help your teenager to make a back-up plan in case things do not go the way they hope.

And for post-16 options...

- Remind your teenager to make and track applications, meet deadlines and check regularly to see if they have been offered a place or called for interview.
- Encourage your teenager to seek help from their careers adviser if they are unsure about what they want to do or are interested in getting a job, working for themselves, or doing some voluntary work.
- Encourage your teenager to find out about possible sources of financial and other help.

This supplement is produced and published by Optimus Education. All information was correct at the time of publication (July 2021)

Optimus Education is not responsible for the content or reliability of the websites listed in the publication and does not necessarily endorse the views expressed within them. Listings shall not be taken as an endorsement of any kind. We cannot guarantee that these sites will work all the time and we have no control over the availability or content of the sites listed.

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of this supplement. Please email comments to **customer.services@optimus-education.com**

© Optimus Education 2021-22

