

Walsall Virtual School

Your Future School Booklet



Walsall Council





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Introduction

This booklet is to help you to think about what you want to do once you finish your GCSE's and what your next steps might be. It can be a daunting prospect and difficult to know what you might want to do! This booklet is to help you along the way and provide you with information about all the important things you might need to think about whilst deciding and what to expect once you move into post 16 education.



Options

There are lots of different paths you can take for years 12 & 13, you don't just have to stay at school. The next few pages tell you about each of the different paths you could take.

Sixth Form

You can stay at your school if they have a sixth form, or apply to another school sixth form if you wish. Normally you will study A Levels, AS Levels or BTEC subjects. What each school offers in the way of subjects will be different so you need to find out what your school can offer you, and whether they offer the subjects you want. You will usually have to attend an interview, and be required to meet set targets in your GCSE results to study A Levels. You are usually required to achieve a minimum of 5 GCSEs above a grade 4.

College

Colleges offer a huge range of vocational courses, from hairdressing, to engineering, animal care, health and social care and many more! Usually these courses range from Entry 3 to Level 3 and the level you are able to study will depend on your GCSE results in Maths & English. You will have to attend an interview for the course, and you might also have to sit extra tests, write a short essay or show your portfolio for creative subjects in order to get onto the course. If you don't pass your English and Maths GCSE at a grade 4, you will have to continue to study these at college, resitting your GCSE or taking functional skills depending on your results.



Specialist Provision

Depending on your level of need a specialist provision may be the right option for you. If you have a medical need, EHCP or SEN and have been attending a specialist school to meet your needs, you may still require this high level of support post 16. You might be staying at your school into years 12/13 or you might be moving to a specialist sixth form. You could also consider a supported internship (where you study whilst working for an employer), a supported apprenticeship, supported volunteering or supported employment. Most colleges also offer foundation learning courses for young people with SEN or who have an EHCP.

Training Providers

These are usually much smaller than a college or a school, and offer a smaller range of qualifications for you to study. If you have found the school environment challenging, a training provider may be for you. If you have found Maths and English challenging and are working at functional skills level they can support you to work on these, and usually also support young people with employability skills and personal skills. Different providers offer different courses at different levels, so you have to check what they can offer you. Courses could include GCSE's, functional skills and a range of vocational pathways such as work experience or apprenticeships.



Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is a job that comes with on the job training. You will be paid a salary and you will do training either on the job, or at a college or training provider. You will need to have passed your English and Maths GCSE's to at least a grade four to apply for an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships are quite competitive to get into but do cover a wide range of subjects from construction to teaching. If you are more of a practical learner then an apprenticeship may be the right path for you. You will have a recognised qualification at the end and there is the possibility that your employer may be able to offer you a position working with them. You have to apply in the same way as a job, and will need an up to date CV and covering letter. You will be expected to attend an interview and perhaps sit some tests.

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship>

Traineeships

These are designed for young people who don't yet meet the criteria for an apprenticeship; and will help you gain the skills and experience so that you can apply for an apprenticeship in the future. You will attend college or a training provider, alongside doing some on the job training or work experience hours. You won't get paid on a traineeship, but there can be support for meals and travel. Normally they last for less than 6 months and you will carry on learning Maths & English if you didn't get a grade four at GCSE.

<https://www.gov.uk/find-traineeship>



T Levels

These are quite new and are the same as doing 3 A levels. They involve on the job training and also teaching, which usually takes place in a college or school. You will get a specific technical qualification that gives you the skills and experience you need to find employment. There is a wide range of subjects you can study from accounting, construction, hairdressing and many more! Most T Levels will ask for a minimum of 5 GCSE passes at grade 4, including English and Maths, but you need to check the individual T Level you want to do. You won't get paid by the work placement employer on a T Level.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/introduction-of-t-levels/introduction-of-t-levels>



Employment

You can go straight into full-time employment after year 11, but this should have some sort of training attached to it. You need to be working for at least 25 hours a week, and have an appropriate contract in place with your employer. You will be earning at least the National Minimum Wage if you are in employment.

How do I know which path is right for me?

You don't have to apply for one option, in fact it is important to apply for more than one just in case you don't get the one you want. If you are unsure which one is right for you, it is OK to apply for a combination of different ones and see what they offer to help you make a decision. You will be expected to attend an interview, attend tests, or perhaps write a short essay. You might also be expected to show your portfolio (creative subjects) or take part in a group activity as part of the selection process. To help get prepared you should make sure you have an up to date CV and covering letter for applications, and practice your interview skills.

It's a big decision, and it is important you choose the right course and provision for you. Gather as much information as you can, attend open days and have a look round, get a feel for the place you are considering. Speak with friends, family, carers for their advice and speak with your careers advisor. When you go for interviews or to look around, ask lots of questions about what they can offer you. Walsall Virtual School have a Careers Advisor that you can speak to too.

www.prospects.ac.uk/planner



Expectations

Whatever you decide is right for you, the expectations will be different from school. You will be treated like an adult and there is much more freedom and the expectation that you will be able to study independently, be responsible and work to a good standard. There are expectations around attendance and behaviour, and if you don't meet these you will be at risk of being withdrawn from your course. If you go to college and don't meet the required expectations during the first 6 weeks of the course, they may remove you before or during the first half term. You are being prepared for the world of work, and will be expected to behave as if you were in the work place, so in a professional manner.

You will be expected to:

- Be on time.
- Attend regularly.
- Be ready to work with all the equipment you need.
- Follow the code of conduct.
- Contact the education provider if you are going to be absent.
- Take responsibility for communicating with the education provider yourself if you are worried or struggling, rather than a parent or carer.
- Find your own work experience if that is part of your course.



Timetables

Maths & English

If you don't get a grade four at GCSE in Maths & English it is a legal requirement that you carry on studying these post 16. If you get a Grade 3, you will be expected to re-sit your GCSE's, but if you get a lower grade you may be studying Functional Skills levels. You will be expected to study 3 hours of maths, and 3 hours of English per week if you don't pass at GCSE grade 4 whilst at school.

Timetables

If you are attending college, your timetable will not be like it was at school, and you won't be doing as many hours. Normally a full-time timetable is around 16/18 hours, and can run into the evening. There may be gaps in your timetable, between lessons, which you will be expected to use for independent study. You may find that you have one or two days a week where you don't have to attend at all, or maybe only attend for a few hours.

If you are doing an apprenticeship, training, or internships you will find that your time is split between college and the work place. Your learning might take place one day a week in a college or it might be one full week in a block every half term.



Finance

You should be able to apply for a bursary whilst at college, sixth form or training provider. This will normally be something you can do at main enrolment, so make sure you get the forms you need and complete them as soon as possible. You will need a letter from your social worker to confirm your Looked After status for your bursary application. Sometimes a bursary is “means tested” and they will look at the money coming into your household to make a decision.

The bursary can cover transport, food and equipment, but each college/school has their own way of organising it, so you will need to understand how it works. You might be issued with a free bus pass each term, and have a card to get your lunch for free in the canteen; or you might be given money each week to pay for these things independently. You will need to have a bank account for them to pay you, so if you haven't got one, you will need to organise this before you start.

If you need equipment for your course or uniform, this may be covered by the bursary. However, you might need to buy the items yourself and then provide the receipts before the bursary money will be paid back to you. You need to prepare for this, and make sure you can buy what you need. If you are worried about this, speak with your social worker ahead of time.

Bursary will always be linked to attendance, and if you don't attend you won't get paid the bursary. Each college/training provider is different but it is usually in the 85%/90% mark that you need to attend or your bursary may not be paid or reduced.

If you need support with this contact the Post 16 Education Support Officer in Walsall Virtual School and/or your Social Worker.



Special Educational Needs and Education and Health Care Plans

If you have an EHCP you will need to let the college know about it when you make your application. Normally your application will then be looked at by someone who is experienced with EHCP's. The local authority who hold your EHCP have to send this to be looked at, by the new college, so that they can make sure they can meet your needs. This is called "Consultation" and needs to be sent by the end of March, before you start in September. If they feel that they can't give you what you need to learn, then they may say they can't offer you a place on the course you want and you may have to apply elsewhere.

You also need to let them know if you have SEN and had extra support in school so that they can make sure they can give you all the support you need and understand your needs. You will be invited to have a meeting, sometimes called a Needs Assessment, so that they can understand how to support you. You will need to take someone with you that knows you well, and can help you explain all the support you had in school and how best to help you learn. This might be a family member, parent, carer, social worker or anyone you feel comfortable with, but it needs to be someone who can help you explain all your needs, so that the right support is put in place. If you have any doctors letters, or diagnosis letters about your needs it is a good idea to take these with you too, along with any information from school.

If you were used to having the same teaching assistant or mentor all the time at school, this probably won't be the case at college. You will normally have different support staff in different lessons and at different times of day. If this is something you may find difficult it is important to talk about it at the needs assessment so college can work with you to help you adapt to this change.

There is normally a team that works with all young people that have SEN and it may be called student support, inclusive support or the SENCO. Make sure you know where this is and who you can talk to if you need help.

Support Available

All of this information may seem complicated but there is a wealth of support available to you in the form of:

- Pastoral Support
- Learning Mentors
- Counsellors
- Tutors
- SENCO/Inclusion Department
- Walsall Virtual School Post 16 Education Support Officer
- Walsall Virtual School Careers Advisor
- Walsall Virtual School SEN Caseworker
- Social Worker

As a care experienced young person, there will normally be one allocated member of staff at the college for you to talk to, and it is important you know who that is.

Special Exam Arrangements

If you had SEA's in school, such as extra time, a reader, a writer, being in a separate room, or a scribe you need to know that these will not carry over automatically once you go into post 16 education. You will have to have another assessment and will need to let your college/training provider know at the start of your course that you need to be reassessed. This will usually be done after the first October half term and it is very important you attend your appointment for this assessment.

You only qualify for SEA's in exams of Level 1 or above, so if you are taking Functional Skills Levels, or Entry Levels you won't qualify for SEA's.

Transport

It is very important to think about how you are going to get to college, school, apprenticeship etc.

Are you an independent traveller?

Do you know how to use public transport and are you happy to use it?

Have you thought about how long it will take you to get there? For example, if your first lesson is at half eight, what time will you need to get up and what time is your bus?

Have you had a practice run to get there?

If you currently use funded transport due to having an Special Educational Needs or Education Health and Care Plan you will need to check whether this is still going to be available to you post 16. Have a conversation with your social worker around this to make sure.



Conditional Offers

You may get a letter saying that you have been offered a place on your course, which is great but you must understand this is a conditional offer. This offer is on the condition that you get the grades needed in your GCSE's/exams. If you don't, you may not get on the course or you may be offered a lower level of course. Your place is not secured until you are enrolled and this will not happen until late August, prior to the course starting in September. You will need to take proof of your GCSE results with you, to main enrolment.

Don't worry if you don't get the grades you needed as there are usually other options available, but it may mean you don't get onto the course you initially hoped for. **Always have a back-up plan in case you don't get the course you want.**



Convictions

If you have unspent criminal convictions you will be asked to declare these on any application you make for post 16 education. This does not automatically mean you won't get on the course you want. The college will look at your case on an individual basis and you may be asked to attend a meeting to talk about the convictions, and to discuss if they are able to offer you a place or not. There are some convictions that may mean you cannot access some types of courses that involve working with vulnerable people or children, as you would not be able to hold a clear DBS for employment purposes.



What if I change my mind, or it's not what I hoped?

Transitioning to post 16 education can be challenging! It is very different from school and many young people can find adjusting hard. Please remember, you are not alone and it is OK to feel this way.

If you find that the course is not what you hoped or expected, then it is important to let people know as soon as possible. If it is during the first few weeks of the year, then it is possible that you can be moved onto another course. If you leave it too long though, you may have missed too much work to catch up and may not be able to move courses as easily.

It might be that you like the course, but are struggling with other things like building friendships, travelling, or getting used to the environment. It is important you talk about these worries and get support from those around you at home, from your tutor or pastoral support in the college, and through your Education Support Officer at the Virtual School.

If you are finding things challenging later on in your course, it is important that you don't just leave. This can impact on you being able to get a place on a course in the future, so always talk to your tutor, support staff, Education Support Officer, Social Worker, friends or carers if you are struggling, so that everyone can work together to support you.



Wellbeing

How do I make friends?

It might be that you have friends that are going to the same college you are and you feel pretty confident about it all, and are looking forward to it. You may also be worried and anxious about the new start, not knowing anyone, fitting in and making friends. Remember you are not alone and there will be many other young people that feel the same as you do.

There are usually lots of opportunities to make friends and during the first weeks there will be induction and activities where you get to know people on course better. There will also be a student union that will offer events, and opportunities to take part in volunteering, work experience, trips, Duke of Edinburgh etc. and you could even become a student rep!



Check List

Things To Think About

- I have an idea about what I would like to do.
- I have thought about how I might cope if I don't get the required grades, and how I may feel if I have to go onto a lower level/different course.
- I am sure the course(s)/pathway I have chosen are what I really want to do
- I understand that any offer is conditional, and that I haven't got a place until I am enrolled.
- I have thought about transport - how I am going to get there, how long it is going to take me each day. Is this manageable for me and realistic?

Things To Do

- I have had some careers advice.
- I have got an up to date CV and covering letter.
- I feel confident about my interview skills and I know where to get further support with this.
- I have made applications for college/sixth form/apprenticeships/traineeships and have given myself plenty of time to look at my options.
- I have applied to more than one thing so I have back-up plans and other options if my first choice doesn't work out.
- I understand that if I don't get grade 4 GCSE in Maths and English I will continue to study them post 16.
- I have attended open days and got a feel for the place I am looking to go to.
- I have shared that I have an Education Health and Care Plan or Special Educational Needs so that I can make sure I am going to get the right support.
- I have disclosed any unspent criminal convictions.
- If I want to go to University in the future I have checked that the course I am doing meets their entry criteria.
- I know how to apply for the bursary and how this will be paid to me. I have a bank account for this.
- If I have equipment and uniform I need to buy, I have got the money for this so that I can purchase it and be reimbursed by bursary afterwards.

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