

Gaining New Skills and Qualifications



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Considering Courses

Learning should not stop at sixteen, and it certainly shouldn't stop before that. Many people without GCSEs find this gap on their CV a challenge when trying to get a job. There are many courses aimed at helping adults without these qualifications, developing their skills, and giving them the support they need.

There are also many people who may have missed out on a university education, even though they desired one, or feel it would really improve their prospects. I will explore some options here that will give you the information you need to decide if the time is right for you to return to study.

Basic Maths and English Skills

You've found a job advertisement that attracts you; you may even have some experience and key skills. At the bottom it reads: At least a C in GCSE English/ Maths, or equivalent. Your heart sinks. Whatever the reason you do not have these qualifications, there is help out there to give you the tools to apply for the jobs you want.

The [National Careers Service](#) offers a range of courses that will enable you to gain the skills you need for the career of your choice. They offer an online test that indicates what skills you need to develop, and they have information about funding and free courses. You can also see if you are eligible for [Discretionary Learner Support](#) while you study. If you are serious about getting the qualifications that will help you succeed, then this is a great place to start.

Vocational Training

This is essentially a form of learning that relates specifically to a job and tasks within that career. The NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) and the VRQ (Vocationally Related Qualifications) signify a certain level of competency in a specific role. One of the most well known providers of these qualifications is [City &](#)

[Guilds](#); here you can see the variety of courses that can be taken.

The National Careers Service once more provides some great information on [funding and bursaries](#).

Higher Education

It would be hard to deny the advantage of having a degree in today's job market. It also has its own intrinsic value; it's incredible to learn and discover new things.

The government report looking at [Graduates in the UK Labour Market 2013](#) provides a good case for having a degree. The graduate employment rate is the highest in the country, at 87%, with public administration, education, and the health industry being the most popular sectors. It is also the case that "Non-graduates aged 21 to 30 have had consistently higher unemployment rates than all other groups".

Many loans and bursaries are available to those going into higher education; you can apply at [Student Finance England](#). Many universities also offer their own bursaries, so it's definitely worthwhile finding out what is available to you.

Distance Learning

You don't feel like you can travel, or you want to improve your prospects while still continuing your job. For many vocational and basic skills training, you shouldn't have to travel and most of the theoretical work would be submitted online.

If you want to go into higher education, you may find this more difficult. The first thought some people have is [The Open University](#), which has been a great tool for many, but universities all over the country offer great online learning programmes.

You can often start at any time of year, apply for part time student loans, and many universities even offer online courses for postgraduate degrees.

Are You Ready to Return to Study?

Many people have the fear that they may not be able to re-enter education after such a long time away. If we're talking about basic skills courses, then there is so much help and advice out there; the National Careers Service has advisors ready to discuss your worries.

If you're looking at vocational study, you have to look at where you want to be in your career. If you need these qualifications, maybe it's time to go for it. Talk to other people you work with, or people within the trade and see how they got there.

Committing yourself to a degree can also be daunting. Most universities will have a mature student population that you can talk to and discuss life as an older student. Also, remember that the university wants you to do well; there are so many resources in most higher education providers to ensure that their student body is happy and achieving their best. You will never be thrown in the deep end without guidance.

