

# Further Education after School



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Further education in the UK refers to education typically taken on after you have finished your compulsory education (i.e. Secondary school education). This includes studying at sixth form and college, among other options. This article discusses school leaving age, further education fees and financial support available to you during further education. A second article will discuss options open to you.

## When can I leave school?

In general, compulsory education in the UK ends at the end of the school year in which you turn 16. There are some exceptions and variations based on the country you live in and your date of birth, which you can find more about on the government's website ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) However, in England at the time of writing, if you were born on or after the 1st September 1997 you must stay in some form of education until your 18th birthday. This can be full time education at school or college, part time education alongside working or volunteering for 20 hours or more a week, or an apprenticeship or traineeship. These will be covered in more detail below.

## Do I have to pay for further education?

If you are under 24 and studying for your first qualification equivalent to a GCSE or an A-Level (for example, if you are studying for a BTEC) your course is likely to be free. Similarly, most courses in skills such as literacy and basic maths are free. However, you may be able to get funding support for any course costs you may have, as well as for living costs or childcare depending on your circumstances. These include:

- 16-19 Bursary Fund – a bursary of up to £1200 given to students who are in one of the most "in need" groups, such as those in care or who have previously been in care for a significant amount of time, disabled students receiving benefits, and those claiming income support. This is also available for some who are not in these

groups. To apply to this, speak to your learning provider.

- Discretionary Learning Fund – for students over 19 who are facing financial difficulty. This may be a bursary or a loan, or even paid straight to someone else, such as a landlord. You should speak to your learning provider to claim this fund.
- Care to Learn fund – given to parents who are under 20 years old at the start of their course to help with childcare costs. To apply for this you must contact Learner Support.
- Support for those over 24, individuals claiming benefits and those who need to live in accommodation during term time.

To find out more about financial help during further education, speak to your learning provider. In most cases, they are responsible for allocating these payments – if not, they can point you in the right direction.

## What's the right choice for me?

This is a question that only you can answer for yourself. It is important to think about what you want to do in the future. If you know, you should look in to your ideal career to find out the right path for you, as some of them have quite specific entry requirements while others can be accessed through a variety of routes. There are career sites online which can provide you with job profiles, highlighting entry requirements and ideal qualifications for your career path, or you could speak to your school's careers service.

If you are not sure what you want to do, there is no need to panic! Many people feel like it is too early to make a decision on their future career at this stage, so you are not alone. It may be a good idea to keep your options as open as possible by choosing a wide range of subjects. However, make sure you are studying things that you enjoy! Also, take this opportunity to arrange work experience in any areas you think you might like to work in – this can give you a taste of what working in this sector may be like, and may help you to get a job in the future.