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[Department](#)
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Guidance

16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2026 to 2027 academic year

Updated 3 July 2026

Applies to England

Summary

This is non-statutory guidance to help providers understand their obligations and duties in relation to the provision of 16 to 19 study programmes in their institution. [Further information on 16 to 19 funding](#) is also available.

Who this advice is for

This guidance is for everyone involved in the planning or delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes.

It also covers supported internships.

16 to 19 study programmes are also relevant to 19- to 24-year-olds with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

Main points

All students funded through the 16 to 19 funding methodology must be enrolled on a study programme or T Level programme, which typically combines qualifications and other activities, and is tailored to each student's prior attainment and career goals.

All study programmes must have a core aim ^{[\[footnote 1\]](#)}. This will be tailored to the needs of the individual and typically includes a substantial qualification (academic, technical or vocational) or preparation for employment.

There is a separate core aim for students on the [T Level foundation year](#), which reflects the T Level route they are preparing for.

All study programmes should include English and maths (where required), work experience, and non-qualification activities that complement the other elements of the programme and support the student to progress to further education (FE) or higher education (HE), or into employment, depending on the purpose of the qualification.

Study programmes are flexible programmes built around the needs of individual students. T Levels are different because their components are tailored to the occupational requirements of each T Level, such that they support entry to related employment or to further related study. T Levels are therefore not covered by this guidance. More information about T Levels can be found on the [introduction of T Levels](#) page.

Section 1: Study programmes

Study programmes were introduced in September 2013 to:

- provide breadth and depth to young people's education
- provide experience that would prepare young people for the workplace and future life
- ensure a focus on English and maths for those with lower prior attainment

[English and maths requirements](#) were introduced as part of study programmes to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of students who did not attain a standard pass in these subjects during their secondary education. Since 2014, the maths and English condition of funding (CoF) requires all students who did not achieve a GCSE grade 4 or above in maths, English or both to continue studying an appropriate qualification.

T Levels were introduced from September 2020 onwards, along with the phased implementation of the [T Level foundation year](#).

A and AS levels are longstanding level 3 subject-based qualifications designed to support progression to a range of pathways, including undergraduate study.

T Levels are the right choice for students who know what broad career area they want to pursue post 16. T Levels are based on employer-designed occupational standards and include a 45-day industry placement. They are therefore the best option for learners wanting to enter a specific sector or occupation.

Following the recommendations of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, we published the [Post-16 education and skills white paper](#), which sets out our plans to introduce reformed qualification pathways at level 3 and level 2 from 2027 onwards.

Study programme principles

All 16 to 19 study programmes should be designed to provide students with a structured and challenging learning programme that supports their development and progression in line with their career plans. Study programmes should be individually tailored, but will typically combine these elements:

- substantial qualifications that stretch students and prepare them for further study or employment – this may be different for the [T Level foundation year](#), to reflect provider flexibilities
- maths and English, where students have not yet achieved a GCSE grade 4 or above
- work experience to give students the opportunity to develop their career

choices and to apply their skills in real working conditions

- other non-qualification activity to develop students' character, broader skills, attitudes and confidence, and support progression

[Section 2](#) sets out broad programme characteristics for students taking different qualification pathways. [Section 3](#) offers further guidance on the principles. [Section 7](#) links to research, case studies and other information to which providers can refer.

Core aim of a study programme

Every study programme must have a core aim so that it can be recorded in the [individualised learner record \(ILR\)](#) or school census. This is the principal activity or core purpose of a student's programme, and it will usually be the component that has the largest number of planned hours.

The core aim for most students will be either:

- one or more substantial academic, technical or vocational qualifications that have approved funding and appear on the Department for Education (DfE) [list of approved qualifications for 16 to 19](#) and will prepare the student to progress to FE or HE, or into employment, depending on the purpose of the qualification
- a substantial work placement to prepare the student for an apprenticeship or other employment

The core aim must be agreed between the student and the education provider. It will generally remain unchanged during the year, although exceptions may be made where, for example, a student finds they have made the wrong programme choice and transfers to an alternative programme.

The remainder of the study programme should complement the core aim.

Planned hours

Each study programme will consist of a number of planned hours (meaning hours that have been timetabled and are supervised by the provider). Providers must ensure that the number of hours is realistic and deliverable.

Study programmes are designed to be full-time with a minimum of 580 planned hours per academic year. All study programmes must follow the [funding rules for 16 to 19 provision](#). As per our funding guidance, we expect full-time study programmes for 16- and 17-year-olds to be, on average, 640 hours. This allows sufficient time to deliver the principles. Part-time study programmes may be agreed where, for example, a student:

- combines part-time education with full-time employment
- has a health issue that prevents them from being in education for more than a few hours a week
- needs a specific small qualification or period of work experience to progress to FE or employment

Any study programme of 150 hours or more must include:

- maths and English, if a student has not already achieved a GCSE grade 4 or above (a level 2 pass grade) in these subjects
- work experience
- other non-qualification activity

It is expected that programmes of less than 150 hours will also include these elements, although providers may make exceptions. Work experience, for example, may not be relevant to a student who is combining education with full-time employment.

As part of the additional hours introduced in 2022 to 2023, all institutions are expected to deliver on average 40 more hours on [band 5 programmes](#) than in 2020 to 2021.

This may be monitored through ILR and school census returns. We have removed the requirement for providers to complete an end-of-year report on additional hours. As in previous academic years, institutions should continue to:

- use additional hours flexibly, broadly in line with this guidance, to best meet the needs of students
- prioritise maths where there is an identified student need – under the maths and English CoF for the 2026 to 2027 academic year, we encourage institutions to offer an extra 35 hours of maths teaching
- provide support in areas such as wellbeing, mental health and study skills where these are barriers to students effectively accessing teaching and learning

[Annex A](#) sets out examples of study programmes.

Students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

The majority of young people with SEND are capable of sustained, paid employment with the right preparation and support. All professionals working with them should share that presumption. As such, the study programme principles apply equally to students with SEND.

The [SEND code of practice](#) sets out the general responsibilities of post-16

providers for young people with SEND, both with and without an EHC plan.

It is important that students with SEND are given the support they need to access their study programme. Providers should take particular care to tailor study programmes to the individual aspirations and needs of students with SEND, in discussion with the student.

Where students have an EHC plan, providers should also involve the local authority special education needs (SEN) team where appropriate. While some students with SEND should be on study programmes focused on helping them achieve stretching qualifications, others will gain more benefit from a supported internship or other study programme that helps them prepare for employment and adult life.

Students with SEND may benefit from being exposed to a workplace setting during their preparation for adulthood and employment. Work experience may therefore be a particularly important element of their study programme to build their skills and confidence.

Providers should carefully consider how the work experience element of a student's study programme could enable them to develop and demonstrate the skills that will help them gain employment. They should also consider what additional support a student with SEND may need before, during and after the work experience, to fully benefit from it. Providers may find it helpful to read [Preparing for Adulthood's short guide to work experience](#).

[Access to Work](#) is a discretionary grant scheme delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions that can assist in paying for practical support to enable disabled people or those with health conditions to overcome workplace barriers. Providers should communicate the existence of Access to Work to students and employers when they are setting up or supporting them to enrol in a supported internship or apprenticeship.

When finding work placements for students with SEND, providers may find it helpful to refer to Disability Confident accreditation, but should not be confined by this. Disability Confident encourages employers to take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop employees with a disability. A Disability Confident business will often display a badge on its website and company literature. Further information is available on the [Disability Confident](#) website.

Exceptionally, for students with severe or complex needs, a study programme to develop independent living skills may be appropriate. This would apply only to students for whom either substantial qualifications or preparation for employment are not, at this stage in their lives, a suitable option. The student's EHC plan should confirm that independent living is their primary aim.

Section 2: Structure and content of

programme

Technical and applied qualification routes

Students for whom a technical or applied qualification is the most appropriate route to their career goal are expected to study at least one substantial qualification. This should be of sufficient size and relevance to provide a route into an occupation, profession or other form of employment, or access to education at the next level.

A levels

A level programmes typically consist of 3 A level subjects. Students can combine one or 2 A levels with an equivalent substantial qualification – for example, reformed Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) or applied general qualifications. A level study programmes should also include extension, development or non-qualification activity such as extended project qualifications, tutorials, work experience, personal or study skills, and support for students to progress to HE or employment.

Some students may benefit from taking an additional AS level, or similar-sized level 3 qualification, alongside 3 A levels. This additional qualification could be in a complementary or different subject area, depending on learner interest and aspirations.

Students who are not ready for level 3 qualifications

Students who are not yet ready to begin a qualification at level 3 should be offered a tailored study programme that supports them to progress to education at a higher level, employment or independent adult life.

Young people who are aiming at an apprenticeship or other employment, and who are capable of achieving this within 6 months, may be offered a tailored study programme to support that progression.

T Level foundation year

The T Level foundation year helps students develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours that will help them to progress to and succeed at level 3. It is targeted

at students who have the potential to progress onto a T Level when supported with the extra support and preparation that the programme can provide. It is the first step on a 3-year path to achieving a T Level for those who need it. We expect the T Level foundation year to be a full-time study programme lasting up to a standard academic year in most cases.

The programme has its own core aim, which records the T Level route that students are preparing for. This means that education providers do not need to include a substantial qualification in their programme. They can use a qualification that can be smaller in size. They can also use non-qualification delivery, or a combination of both, to deliver the national technical outcomes developed for the T Level foundation year. [How to record T Level foundation year programmes](#) has a summary of the recording details that are specific to T Level foundation year programmes.

The T Level foundation year consists of 6 interrelated components, to provide a broad foundation for T Levels:

- diagnostics, monitoring and guidance to determine students' learning and support needs, help them decide which T Level route to prepare for, provide ongoing monitoring of their progress, and ensure they are well supported to decide their next steps after the programme
- English and maths for students without GCSE grade 4 or above in these subjects and basic digital skills where a student needs to develop them
- experience of the workplace to prepare students for a T Level industry placement
- technical knowledge and skills relevant to a student's chosen T Level subject route, which can be delivered using a qualification- or non-qualification-based approach
- personal development and [enrichment](#) opportunities to support students to develop the study skills they will need for success at T Levels and the positive behaviours and key transferable skills for success in the workplace on their T Level industry placement
- pastoral support that is responsive to individual student needs

DfE has introduced a national template that providers can use to issue certificates of participation to students who complete the T Level foundation year. This will sit alongside any qualifications that students achieve on their programmes of study.

For further information and expectations for how this programme should be delivered, refer to the [T Level foundation year: framework for delivery](#), which should be read alongside this 16 to 19 study guidance.

The T Level foundation year will continue in its current form for the 2026 to 2027 academic year.

From September 2027, the T Level foundation year will be renamed 'foundation year' to better reflect its broader role in supporting progression to level 3

qualifications, including V Levels, T Levels and A levels. This change will take place during the period in which the reformed level 2 pathways Foundation Certificates are being rolled out between 2030 and 2031.

Once the Foundation Certificate has been rolled out in a particular subject, the foundation year will no longer run in that subject. We expect the foundation year to be fully replaced by the new Further Study pathway and Foundation Certificates by the 2030 to 2031 academic year.

Qualifications at level 1 and below

Progression rates from programmes below level 2 vary widely, depending on what and where young people study.

Research into effective practice identified a number of factors that combine to make an effective programme. These were used to develop a number of 'principles' set out in [Annex C](#). Providers delivering qualifications at entry and level 1 are encouraged to follow these principles, and to make use of the [effective practice and case studies](#) available.

Most young people who study at entry and level 1 attract additional funding through the disadvantage element of the 16 to 19 national funding formula. Providers are expected to use this funding to provide additional teaching and support for these students, including SEND support for those who need it.

Research has also shown the importance of taking account of local and demographic factors when choosing which programmes to offer at entry and level 1. Many providers review their provision each year to check that students are completing their qualifications and progressing to FE or employment. All providers are encouraged to do this, working with local and devolved authorities and employer organisations where appropriate. Links to this research are listed in [section 7](#).

Supported internships

Supported internships normally last for up to a year and include unpaid work placements of at least 6 months. The aim is to support the young person into paid employment at the end of the programme.

We have published guidance on [providing supported internships for young people with an EHC plan](#).

Students on supported internships are not automatically exempt from the 16 to 19 maths and English CoF.

Institutions can use their discretion on the mode of delivery requirements for students with EHC plans on supported internships. This allows students to remain under CoF and continue to benefit from it.

Students on supported internships maybe exempt if they have an EHC plan and are assessed as being unable to study towards a stepping-stone qualification, Functional Skills qualification or GCSE for the minimum number of required hours. Students on supported internships with an exemption should still study maths and English at an appropriate level and mode of delivery.

Level 3 maths qualifications

Mathematical and quantitative skills are important for students' future study and career prospects. Higher levels of achievement in maths are associated with higher earnings for individuals, and many employers are looking for applicants with advanced mathematical and quantitative skills.

Providers should consider integrating maths into 16 to 19 study programmes that have not previously included it. In particular, providers might wish to consider the benefits of additional maths for students studying quantitative subjects such as psychology, biology or geography.

We would like to see providers offering a range of level 3 maths qualifications, and the [advanced maths premium](#) will help education providers to increase participation. As well as reformed AS and A levels in maths, statistics and further maths, we also have 'core maths' qualifications at level 3. The focus of core maths qualifications is on problem solving, reasoning and the practical application of maths and statistics. These qualifications have been designed with the help of employers and universities to suit students at a grade 4 or above in GCSE maths, and to provide them with the quantitative skills needed in a wide range of jobs. The continuation of the [core maths premium](#) will encourage the provision of core maths qualifications for students who could benefit from them.

Work experience

Work experience is a key component of 16 to 19 study programmes. It helps students:

- explore their career choices
- develop critical employability skills needed for the workplace
- prepare for transition into skilled employment

The term 'work experience' refers to all forms of work-related activity, including:

- work tasters
- running a student enterprise
- participation in a social action project
- volunteering or a placement with an external employer

All students are expected to undertake work experience or work-related training as part of their study programme, and for some students, it can be the core aim of the study programme.

Planned activities should reflect students' previous experience, work readiness and future plans.

The purpose of work experience may differ depending on a student's next step. For example, it may be different for students who plan to apply for HE and those preparing for employment.

This approach is consistent with the Gatsby Benchmarks of Good Career Guidance, which are set out in the statutory guidance on [careers and access for education and training providers](#). The Gatsby Charitable Foundation provides a [summary for leaders](#), which includes an updated definition of a meaningful workplace experience.

Work experience is funded at the same level as qualifications taught in the classroom, allowing providers to assign staff to engage employers and secure high-quality work experience opportunities.

Planned hours should normally be delivered within the provider's normal working pattern. Work placements can take place during the evening, weekend or outside term time where this gives students a more realistic experience of the workplace. Hours must be agreed in advance, appropriate to the student's age, and consider factors such as late-night transport. Students should know whom to contact if a problem arises when their school or college is closed.

Work placements that are an integral part of students' qualification hours should be undertaken in a workplace relevant to their course, to build their sector-specific skills in a practical setting. Work placements can also form a part of students' non-qualification hours, to help them gain experience to progress along their chosen career path.

While social action projects or work experience in a simulated environment can help students develop 'softer' skills, providers should prioritise arranging work placements with an external employer wherever possible. This allows students to experience the real demands of the working environment and apply the transferable and sector-specific skills they have learnt, independent of their peers and tutors.

Common principles of a high-quality work placement are that it:

- is purposeful, offers challenge and is relevant to the young person's study

programme and career aspirations

- allows the student to apply the technical and practical skills learnt in the classroom or workshop
- is managed under the direction of a supervisor to ensure the young person obtains a genuine learning experience suited to their needs
- has a structured plan for the duration of the placement that provides tangible outcomes for the student and employer
- has clear roles, responsibilities and expectations for the student and employer
- is followed by some form of reference or feedback from the employer based on the young person's performance

Detailed information on how to include and record work experience in study programmes is available in [Annex B](#).

Section 3: Delivering study programmes

Mode of delivery

The following guidelines aim to support providers in their use of digital technology to design and deliver their curriculum.

Ofsted's criteria for judging quality and sufficiency of provision are set out in the [Further education and skills inspection: toolkit, operating guides and information](#), which came into effect in November 2025.

As per the toolkit, 16 to 19 provision is assessed under the 'educational programmes for young people' provision type. Inspectors evaluate:

- curriculum, teaching and training
- achievement
- participation and development

In all circumstances, quality should be the main consideration when deciding whether to use remote or online learning. Remote or online delivery should not replace face-to-face provision where the main reasons for using it are primarily non-educational in nature, such as reducing costs or improving administrative efficiency.

To ensure students are fully engaged and supported with their learning, it is expected that a significant majority of the planned hours for all 16 to 19 study programmes (and the constituent elements that make up a study programme – for example, substantive qualifications) are delivered face to face, with students

attending on-site every week during term time.

Providers should not assume that all students can successfully study remotely and online. It is the responsibility of providers that decide to use online learning as part of their delivery of 16 to 19 study programmes to ensure every student has access to a learning environment, device and connectivity suitable for learning online or remotely.

Where providers opt to use remote and online delivery, they must ensure that practitioners have access to relevant training, support and guidance to effectively teach remotely and online.

In making decisions concerning the use of remote and online delivery, providers should also be considerate of the wider socio-economic and wellbeing implications of remote and online learning – for example, parents and students may have legitimate reservations regarding the appropriateness of spending significant amounts of time studying from home (unless this is required through national or local restrictions [in response to an emergency or public health incident, such as COVID-19](#)).

To meet the 16 to 19 maths and English CoF, institutions must deliver the minimum teaching hours as standalone, whole-class, face-to-face teaching. If institutions feel that students would benefit from any further support, such as small-group tuition, or embedded or online learning, this can be delivered in addition to the minimum teaching hours.

Section 4: 16 to 19 maths and English

Policy intention

Progress towards and attainment of level 2 maths and English is essential for helping students seize opportunities in life, learning and work. The [16 to 19 maths and English condition of funding guidance](#) ensures students have this opportunity. Institutions are required to provide teaching and learning support to those on 16 to 19 study programmes and T Levels to improve their maths and English skills, where they did not achieve a grade 4 or above in GCSE maths and/or English at 16.

This policy applies to all students on a 16 to 19 study programme or T Level who are:

- aged 16 to 18 (students up to the age of 25 with an EHC plan) and do not hold a GCSE grade 9 to 4 (a level 2 pass grade) or equivalent qualification in these maths and/or English, by the end of year 11, doing a programme of 150 hours

or more, which started on or after 1 August 2014

- aged 19+ who are continuing their 16 to 19 study programme or T Level

To meet CoF, a student must study an [approved qualification](#) for the minimum teaching hours. These are:

- GCSEs
- Functional Skills level 2
- other approved qualifications at level 1 and entry level

A student's eligibility to study each of these qualifications depends on the GCSE grade they achieved at 16.

Full-time students who have a GCSE grade 3 must study towards a maths and/or English GCSE, as these students are those closest to achieving level 2 at GCSE. Part-time students can study towards any qualification approved to meet the CoF, on their way towards achieving a GCSE grade 9 to 4.

Students who have a GCSE grade 2 or below can study towards a pass in Functional Skills level 2 or they can study towards a GCSE grade 9 to 4. For these students, an institution and student may feel an approved qualification at level 1 or below is more suitable at the beginning of their study programme, on their journey to studying a level 2 qualification.

Minimum planned teaching hours for maths and English

For full-time students, the minimum planned teaching hours requirement is 100 hours for maths and/or 100 hours for English, to be delivered at any point in the academic year. These minimum hours apply regardless of the guided learning hours attached to the specific qualification a student is undertaking.

We pro rata this requirement for part-time students. For example, for those on programmes of up to 485 hours, this is a minimum of 84 hours per year for both maths and English.

To meet the 16 to 19 maths and English CoF, institutions must deliver the minimum teaching hours as stand-alone, whole-class, face to face teaching. If institutions feel that students would benefit from any further support, such as small group tuition or embedded or online learning, this can be delivered in addition to the minimum teaching hours.

We measure compliance with these requirements by data returns in the school census or individualised learner record (ILR). Institutions' returns will cover the number of hours planned for each student, not students' attendance of them.

Tolerance

We apply a tolerance that allows institutions to exclude a proportion of their students from CoF requirements. Institutions must regularly review these exclusions. We calculate the 2.5% tolerance by determining the value of the non-compliant students and expressing this as a percentage of the total value of all students. The value for a student is the national rate for their funding band.

Setting the tolerance at 2.5% ensures as many students as possible get support for maths and English whilst acknowledging that, despite institutions' efforts, it may not be appropriate to deliver this support for every student.

Institutions should use their professional judgement to ensure those students who have been excluded under the tolerance still have literacy and numeracy included in their programme at an appropriate level and mode of delivery. This is to ensure these students will still have the opportunity to improve their skills. Where a decision is made to enter a student into an exam, this should be based on their institution's assessment that they are ready to improve their grade.

Exam entry

Where a decision is made to enter a student into an exam, this should be based on their institution's assessment that they are ready to improve their grade.

Students with prior attainment of a low grade 3 or below will typically need more teaching time to consolidate their learning and make progress. Institutions must carefully consider whether to enter these students into the November resit series, by considering if they have demonstrated suitable readiness, including attendance, engagement and progress.

Where information on a student's prior attainment is not available, institutions should use their diagnostic assessment to establish the approximate level of a student's knowledge and skills.

English and maths progression

Students should be supported to progress towards and achieve level 2. We understand that students come from different starting points. Institutions must be able to demonstrate progression for students enrolled on maths and/or English qualifications. In most cases, we expect that it will be appropriate for students to study for a qualification at a higher level than they have already attained.

The [16 to 18 English and maths progress measure qualifications](#) show, for

students that did not achieve a grade 4 or above in maths or English GCSE at key stage 4 (KS4), how much grade improvement students made from their GCSE result at KS4 (or from their result at a previous 16 to 18 institution, if higher).

The provider level [16 to 18 accountability headline measures](#) show the outcomes of students completing 16 to 18 study in academic year 2024 to 2025.

Qualifications

To meet CoF, a student must study an approved qualification for the minimum teaching hours. These are GCSEs, Functional Skills level 2 and other level 1 and entry level qualifications approved by DfE.

International GCSEs do not meet the CoF. However, they do continue to count as equivalent to GCSEs for the purposes of recognising prior attainment. Holding the International Certificate in Christian Education (ICCE) exempts a student from further study in maths and English. When students have achieved an ICCE, institutions can record an exemption for holding an overseas equivalent qualification.

Students should be supported to make progress towards level 2, and we know they will come from different starting points. We expect institutions to use the flexibilities available in this guidance to support each student in the most appropriate way.

Full-time students who have a GCSE grade 3 must study towards a maths and/or English GCSE, as these students are those closest to achieving a grade 4 and above at GCSE.

Part-time students with a GCSE grade 3 can study towards any qualification approved to meet the CoF, on their way towards achieving a GCSE grade 9 to 4.

Students who have a GCSE grade 2 or below can either study towards a:

- pass in Functional Skills level 2
- GCSE grade 9 to 4

For these students and part-time students, an institution and student may feel an approved qualification at level 1 or below is more suitable at the beginning of their study programme, on their journey to studying a level 2 qualification.

A student does not need to continue studying these qualifications with their current institution if they have already achieved an eligible level 2 qualification (based on their highest prior attainment at either the end of year 11 or during their 16 to 19 study) during the funding year. For example, by taking and passing an exam to the required standard at their previous institution.

Approved qualifications at level 1 and below include:

- Functional Skills at level 1 and below
- English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) qualifications
- other qualifications that have been nominated by institutions and approved by DfE

Supporting students with SEND

All students should be supported and given the opportunity to study maths and English wherever possible, given the benefits this brings. We expect institutions to use the options available for SEND students to tailor programmes to enable each student to improve in maths and/or English to the best of their ability. Institutions should recognise and record students' progress and achievement.

When a student with SEND does not hold a GCSE grade 9 to 4 or equivalent qualification in maths and/or English, it is important they have every opportunity that others do to study and progress towards a level 2 maths and/or English qualification. There are a wide range of approved qualifications under the CoF that should enable this in most cases, from entry level upwards. Institutions should make every effort to enable students with SEND to study towards these valuable qualifications.

To allow more students with EHC plans to continue to receive support for maths and English under the CoF, there is a flexibility for institutions to deliver the minimum hours of teaching to them in an alternative format whilst remaining compliant with the CoF. For example, small group or embedded learning. This includes students with EHC plans on supported internships, who may struggle with the mode of delivery due to the unique format of this study programme. In line with the study programme guidance, institutions are encouraged to provide face to face support for students wherever possible.

Flexibilities for students with EHC plans

Institutions can use flexible delivery methods to provide the required minimum teaching hours in maths and English for students with EHC plans, while staying compliant with CoF. For example, teaching may be in the format of small group or embedded learning. This includes students with EHC plans on supported internships who may struggle with the mode of delivery due to the unique format for this study programme.

In line with the study programme guidance, institutions are encouraged to provide face to face support for students wherever possible.

Section 5: Student support, enrichment and employment

Integrating work placements into study programmes

There is no single 'correct' way of planning work experience and work placements – this will depend on the employer's capacity and could vary considerably by sector. Employers are more likely to respond favourably to providers that are willing to be flexible and work with them to organise placements to suit their requirements. For example, placements could follow a pattern of once a week for the duration of the term, longer block placements, or a rotation of shorter placements at different employers, so students can experience different aspects of a sector.

Students who have a work placement as the core aim of their study programme must spend a large proportion of their time with an external employer to ensure they develop the employability skills, attitudes and behaviours that are expected in the workplace and progress successfully into paid employment.

The length of placements for other study programmes will vary according to course type and employer preferences. Providers' assessment of students' abilities, prior attainment, career goals and work readiness should also determine the level and nature of work experience needed to prepare for progression to employment.

In all instances, education providers should agree the following with both the student and employer:

- the education and training goals of the placement
- reasonable expectations about student conduct
- the role of the employer in providing supervision and training

This agreement can take the form of a short note or email from the education institution to the student and the employer. This is in line with good practice in the provision of work experience as part of a 16 to 19 study programme and to meet DfE audit requirements for the provision of work experience.

When setting up placements, providers must discuss with the student and employer whether a young person with SEND needs more support in the workplace to benefit fully from the experience.

Providers should prioritise students for whom work experience is their core aim and for those who would benefit most from spending time developing their employability skills in a physical workplace.

Careers information and support

Schools and colleges should have regard to DfE's updated statutory guidance on [careers education and access for education and training providers](#). They must continue to provide independent and impartial careers guidance and ensure learners understand the full range of education, training and employment opportunities available to them.

Schools, colleges and independent training providers are expected to deliver a structured careers programme aligned with the Gatsby Benchmarks. This should include opportunities for learners to:

- engage with employers
- experience workplaces
- develop the skills and confidence they need for future progression

For learners on 16 to 19 study programmes, careers guidance should support progression into:

- higher education
- apprenticeships
- technical routes
- employment

Schools must also meet the requirements of provider access legislation, ensuring pupils can hear directly from providers of technical education or apprenticeships.

Evidence shows that high-quality careers provision and meaningful employer engagement support successful transitions into FE, training and employment, helping young people develop career readiness and make informed choices about their future.

Youth social action

Providers are encouraged to incorporate youth social action into study programmes alongside other work experience. Youth social action involves young people taking practical action in the service of others to create positive change.

In a work experience context, social action can take the form of young people improving their work-related skills and behaviours to have a positive community impact. Evidence shows^{[\[footnote 2\]](#)} that young people who participate in social action show robust improvements in the skills and behaviours that employers are looking for, including resilience, problem-solving and a sense of community.

Young people participating in social action projects have:

- stronger personal networks
- higher life satisfaction
- reduced anxiety

The common principles of a high-quality youth social action project are that it is:

- youth-led: led, owned and shaped by young people's needs, ideas and decision-making
- socially impactful: has clear and intended benefits to a community, cause or social problem
- challenging: stretching and ambitious as well as enjoyable and enabling
- embedded: accessible to all, and well-integrated into existing pathways to become a habit for life
- progressive: sustained and providing links to other activities and opportunities
- reflective: recognising contributions as well as valuing critical reflection and learning

Activities can include volunteering, campaigning, fundraising and mentoring, where the activity has a 'double benefit' to both the young people participating and the community they are serving.

National Minimum Wage

Young people undertaking work experience or a work placement are not in employment and are therefore not entitled to the National Minimum Wage. We encourage but do not require employers to meet students' expenses such as travel or meal costs.

Providers can also use the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund to help students with the costs of work experience if these costs would otherwise prevent them from taking part.

Health and safety

The employer has the primary responsibility for the health and safety of students while they are on work experience or a placement. While education or training providers must satisfy themselves that an employer has assessed the associated risks to workers aged under 18 on their premises, and has suitable and sufficient risk management arrangements in place, checks must be kept in proportion with the risk environment. For low-risk environments, assurance can be gained through a conversation with the employer. A physical inspection by an education provider,

or requiring the employer to complete lengthy forms, is not necessary.

The Health and Safety Executive has published [guidance for work experience placements](#) and providers should refer to this when making arrangements.

Employer's liability compulsory insurance

The insurance industry has agreed that students on work experience placements should be treated as employees for the purposes of insurance.

An employer or voluntary sector organisation that already has employer's liability compulsory insurance cover does not need to buy additional cover.

If a voluntary organisation has only public liability insurance, it will need to obtain temporary employer's liability compulsory insurance for the duration of the placement.

The Association of British Insurers has published [guidance for employers](#) planning to take on work experience students.

Safeguarding

Employers may request a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (also referred to as a disclosure check). As such, young people aged 16 or over who are planning to undertake work experience should be prepared to undergo a relevant DBS check if it is required for the role. The level of check required, if any, will depend on the type of work the young person will be doing.

The levels of DBS check are as follows:

- a basic check, which shows unspent convictions and conditional cautions
- a standard check, which shows spent and unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings
- an enhanced check, which shows the same as a standard check plus any information held by local police that's considered relevant to the role
- an enhanced check with a check of the barred lists, which shows the same as an enhanced check and also whether the applicant is on the adults' barred list, children's barred list or both

The employer will need to explain the process of how to obtain the DBS check and the costs associated with it to the young person.

Providers will also need to factor the cost of any DBS checks into the total cost of the programme. They should also plan for the time it takes to complete the

application process, which could be between 2 to 8 weeks, depending on the level of check required.

Providers should be aware that DBS requirements for staff supervising 16- and 17-year-olds can be complex. They should discuss with the employer how 16- and 17-year-olds will be supervised and the level of DBS check required for staff involved in that supervision.

More [detailed guidance on DBS checks](#) is available.

Education and training providers should also refer to the statutory framework and guidance for safeguarding that is relevant to the setting in which the student will be working or on a placement:

- [Keeping children safe in education](#)
- [Early years foundation stage \(EYFS\) statutory framework](#)
- [Working together to safeguard children](#)

In addition to the statutory guidance, there is also non-statutory guidance for out-of-school settings providers on the [Using after-school clubs, tuition and community activities](#) page.

Other non-qualification activity

All students are expected to take part in meaningful non-qualification activities alongside work experience that support their:

- individual needs
- career plans
- preparation for adult life

The [enrichment framework for schools and colleges](#) provides non-statutory guidance to help post-16 providers and FE colleges plan, review and improve their enrichment offer. Colleges should make enrichment a planned part of study programmes.

High-quality enrichment can support learners’:

- personal development
- wellbeing
- confidence
- employability
- progression

Enrichment opportunities should be accessible to and inclusive of all learners,

particularly those who are disadvantaged or have SEND, and should reflect learners' interests and aspirations as well as local needs.

Colleges may wish to work with employers, community organisations and other local partners to provide a range of enrichment activities. They are expected to use the benchmarks, tools and resources in the enrichment framework to review and develop their enrichment offer.

Examples of enrichment activities include:

- activities to develop confidence, character and resilience
- group work to develop teamwork, communication, leadership and problem-solving skills
- volunteering, social action and civic engagement activities
- arts, culture, sport, outdoor learning and nature-based activities
- tutorials and seminars, including careers education
- life skills, such as travelling independently, cooking and eating healthily, staying safe, making sustainable choices, managing personal finances, and preparing for adult or university life

These activities should help students gain experience they can include in their CVs and personal statements.

Providers may also offer external programmes alongside study programmes to give students additional opportunities to develop their character, skills, attitudes and confidence, and to support progression.

The DfE's [Climate Leaders Award](#) will complement classroom learning and allow students to develop their connection with nature and make a contribution to establishing a sustainable future. It will provide a structured route through existing awards in this area, such as the John Muir Award, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Junior Forester Award. Participation will enable children and young people to acquire credits towards the prestigious Climate Leaders Award, which is designed to be recognised and valued in supporting progression to employment and further study.

Sexual and reproductive health

Evidence (WHO, 2026) shows that effective sex and relationships education prior to becoming sexually active is linked to:

- first sexual experiences at an older age
- higher condom and contraceptive use
- decreased likelihood of having an unplanned pregnancy

An [Ofsted review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#) found that 79% of girls and 38% of boys reported experiencing sexual assault. Therefore, providers may wish to prioritise helping students understand what healthy, respectful relationships look like and build knowledge and confidence in relationships and sex.

The Association of Colleges provides a free, quality-assured [relationships and sex education toolkit](#) for all post-16 providers.

Providers should enable students to access relevant information and support to have positive relationships and sexual experiences, and prevent outcomes such as sexually transmitted infections (STI) diagnoses or unplanned pregnancies. By working with local public health teams and voluntary organisations, providers can help maintain an up-to-date list of local sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, where students can seek advice and support on SRH issues.

Providers are also encouraged to proactively signpost students to accurate and youth-friendly online SRH resources. Resources include:

- [information provided by Brook's resources](#), where young people can find advice about sexual health and wellbeing
- the College of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare's [contraception choices tool](#), which supports people to find the method of contraception that is right for them
- the [NHS Sexual Health Service Finder](#) tool, which young people can use to find services in their area
- the [HIV Prevention England](#) website, which provides information on HIV testing, treatment and prevention

Young people can also call the national Sexual Health Helpline free on 0300 123 7123. Their call will be treated with sensitivity and in confidence.

The government is committed to making sex and relationships education mandatory for all FE students under the age of 18, in line with the requirements for students in school sixth-forms. DfE is considering how best to implement this.

Financial literacy

The government believes it is essential that young people are well prepared to manage their money and make sound financial decisions, giving them the skills needed to succeed in the modern world.

In response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review, published in November 2025, the government committed to reforming the curriculum and assessment system to ensure every young person leaves school with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life and work. This includes strengthening essential

applied knowledge such as financial literacy. The new curriculum will be taught from September 2028.

Providers should consider whether young people have appropriate financial awareness and include financial literacy activities in their planned employability, enrichment and pastoral hours (EEP) where appropriate.

Providers can also signpost young people to reliable sources of information, such as MoneyHelper, which provides government-backed guidance on [supporting yourself financially](#).

Participation age

Young people are required to continue in education or training until at least their 18th birthday. They can do this through:

- full-time education
- a job or volunteering combined with part-time study
- an apprenticeship
- a supported internship

Local authorities have a duty to identify young people who are not participating in education or training so that they can help them to find a suitable place. In addition, schools, colleges and education and training providers are required to inform local authority support services if a young person aged 16 or 17 has dropped out of learning, so they can be helped to re-engage. Further information is available in [Participation of young people: education, employment and training](#).

September guarantee

The September guarantee is crucial to ensuring that every young person has a suitable offer of a place in education or training by the end of September. It entitles all year 11 students, and year 12 students on one-year courses, to an offer of a place in education or training for the following September. It aims to ensure that all young people, regardless of what they achieved in school, understand the opportunities that will help them progress, and ensures they receive the advice and support they need to find a suitable place.

This can include:

- full-time education
- an apprenticeship
- T Level

- supported internship
- full-time employment
- volunteering combined with part-time study.

While local authorities are responsible for delivering the guarantee, they rely on support from providers to identify which students are expected to continue with a 2-year programme, and which are likely to leave or complete their current programme and need to find an alternative place for the following year.

[Statutory guidance on young people's participation in education and training](#) gives further information about the duties, including the role of education providers.

Diploma in Sporting Excellence

The Diploma in Sporting Excellence is a [Department for Culture, Media and Sport](#) funded programme. More information is available in [DiSE – The path to your sporting future](#).

Section 6: Funding and accountability

Funding of study programmes

Funding is allocated on a per-student basis rather than a per-qualification basis. This means providers receive funding for all planned hours, including non-qualification activities such as work experience.

For more information on 16 to 19 funding, refer to the [funding rates and formula](#) and [funding rules](#).

16 to 19 performance measures

We publish a [range of 16 to 19 performance measures](#) to reflect students' outcomes in their study programmes. More information is available in the [16 to 19 accountability measures technical guidance](#).

DfE has consulted on how to improve 16 to 19 performance measures, aiming to deliver better outcomes and provide clearer, more reliable information for students, parents and carers, and other users.

Section 7: Further information and useful links

Useful resources and external organisations

- [Work experience guidance for employers from the Health and Safety Executive](#)
- [Ofsted](#)
- [Further education and skills inspection: toolkit, operating guides and information](#)
- [Preparing for Adulthood's short guide to work experience](#)
- [Access to Work: get support if you have a disability or health condition](#)

Research and practice

- [Effective practice in supporting entry and level 1 students in post-16 institutions](#)
- [Effective curriculum practice at below level 2 for 16 and 17 year olds – report and case studies](#)
- [Work experience and related activities in schools and colleges](#) includes good practice in providing effective placements
- [Young people in low-level vocational education: characteristics, trajectories and labour market outcomes](#)
- [Ofsted level 2 study programmes report](#)
- [Rapid evidence assessment on SEN and post-16 work experience](#)
- [Guide for employers and providers on work experience and SEND](#)

Other relevant DfE advice and statutory guidance

- [The enrichment framework for schools and colleges](#)
- [16 to 18 accountability headline measures: technical guide](#) – guide for schools, colleges and local authorities on measures in performance tables
- [16 to 19 education: funding guidance](#) – rules and guidance for using post-16 funding allocated by DfE
- [16 to 19 funding: maths and English condition of funding](#) information on English and maths CoF

- [Careers guidance and access for education and training providers](#) – statutory guidance for schools and colleges on providing careers guidance
- [DfE post 16: intervention and accountability](#) – information about the intervention framework for post-16 education and skills providers
- Post-16 technical education reforms:
 - [Post-16 pathways: implementation plan](#)
 - [Government response: Post-16 pathways at level 3 and below consultation](#)
 - [Post-16 level 3 and below pathways](#)
 - [Post-16 education and skills white paper](#)
 - [The outcomes of the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)
 - [The outcomes of the Review of Qualifications Reform](#)
 - [Post-16 skills plan and independent report on technical education](#)
 - [Introduction of T levels: information for education providers](#)
 - [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 in England: policy statement](#)
 - [Review of level 3 qualifications reform: final outcomes](#)
 - [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below](#)
- [DfE list of qualifications approved for funding 14 to 19](#)
- [SEND code of practice](#) – chapter 7 provides guidance relating to post-16 education and SEND support, and chapter 8 provides guidance relating to preparing for adulthood
- [Supported internships for young people with an EHC plan](#) – DfE advice on study programmes for supported internship providers
- [Technical and applied qualifications](#) approved for reporting in 16 to 18 performance tables
- [T Level foundation year: framework for delivery](#) for providers delivering the T Level foundation year

Annex A: Examples of study programmes

Academic study programme (per academic year)

A level study programmes typically include 3 A levels, which make up most of the planned hours, alongside non-qualification activities. The content of each study programme will vary depending on individual student needs.

	Planned hours: qualification hours	Planned hours: non-qualification hours	Core aim?
3 A levels	Substantial proportion of time should be spent on qualification study (the majority of planned hours of the programme)	-	Core aim
Non- qualification activity (such as tutorials, preparation for HE, work experience, and social action project)	-	Should be included within the study programme, in addition to time spent on A level qualifications	-

Technical study programme

	Planned hours: qualification hours	Planned hours: non- qualification hours	Core aim?
Tech level	280	-	Core aim
English GCSE	120	-	-
Tutorials	-	40	-
Employability skills	-	40	-
Work experience	-	160	-
Total	400	240	-

Annex B: Study programme work experience additional guidance

The principles of the 16 to 19 study programme apply to work experience. These

are available in [section 3](#) of this guidance.

All 16- to 19-year-old students are funded for either a T Level or individual study programme. Most study programmes have a core aim which is either a substantial qualification (academic or vocational) or work experience.

Study programmes must be tailored to the prior attainment of each individual student, have clear study or employment goals reflecting the student's prior attainment and should include:

- substantial qualifications or work experience
- maths and English for students who have not achieved GCSE grade 4 or above or an [equivalent qualification](#) in these subjects by age 16
- planned EEP, including work experience

Common principles of a high-quality work experience placement are that it:

- is external, with a different employer organisation (not within the training provider's organisation)
- is purposeful, offers challenge and is relevant to the young person's study programme and career aspirations
- allows the student to apply the technical and practical skills learned in the classroom or workshop
- is managed under the direction of a supervisor to ensure the young person obtains a genuine learning experience suited to their needs
- has a key point of contact within the provider for the student and employer during the placement
- includes documented monitoring visits by the educational institution appropriate to the length of the placement
- has clear objectives, roles, responsibilities and expectations for the student and employer
- has a structured plan for the duration of the placement that provides the student's learning goals and tangible outcomes for the student and employer, with a record of the student's weekly hours, start and finish times, and placement duration
- has a plan, containing key tasks and activities, progress indicators and the expected professional workplace behaviours and attitudes (this is so the student, institution and employer are clear on their responsibilities) – the plan should be a working document, used to self-assess performance, progress towards these principles and help all parties understand the consequences if they are unable to meet expectations
- is followed by some form of reference or feedback from the employer, based on the young person's performance, to check the objectives that have been achieved

Work experience as the core aim of a study programme

Where a student has work experience as the core aim of their study programme, it must be with an external employer and on a site that is external to the learning environment.

This applies even where the institution has extensive facilities mirroring the workplace. Activity in a simulated work environment may well form a helpful part of work preparation training but will not count as 'external' work placements for the purpose of study programmes.

Work experience where it is within a vocational qualification that has work experience as an essential element

Some vocational qualifications have work experience as an essential element of the qualification. Here, the purpose of the work experience element is to provide the student with the opportunity to practice skills in a supervised environment. This applied learning and practical training could take place in an institution's workshop such as a college hairdressing salon or on a college farm. It could also take place on employer's premises. The qualification, not the work experience, is the core aim of the study programme.

Work experience as an enrichment activity

External work experience as an enrichment activity can add value to the study programme by preparing students for work. It enables them to explore the careers linked to the academic or vocational subjects they are studying and helps with their choice of FE or HE.

Supported internships and work experience

Supported internships are available to students with an EHC plan. A supported internship is a structured study programme where the student is based primarily with an external employer for extended work placement. Supported internships are intended to help students obtain sustainable paid employment by equipping them with the skills for work through learning in the workplace. The internship normally lasts for a year and includes an unpaid work placement of at least 6

months.

A work placement within a supported internship study programme has to be planned, organised and supervised by the institution as with any other work experience.

Internal work experience

Activities that reproduce aspects of the work environment, including working environments such as college restaurants, hairdressing salons or car repair centres, can take place within the educational institution and will be funded. This could be an option for students who need support in going from a safe school or college environment to the workplace. It can be a valuable part of work preparation training.

This can apply in hazardous occupations, such as agriculture or forestry, where skills and experience need to be developed under supervision on college farms or estates, so that students can operate safely on external work experience. It can also meet awarding body requirements for accreditation.

More information about recording work experience hours in the ILR and school census is available within this guidance.

Students who work part-time, and work experience

Part-time paid work, such as evening or weekend work, does not qualify for work experience funding. In no circumstances can the hours of the student's employment be included in any data returns.

Students often think their part-time work counts as funded work experience, but this is not the case. The main purpose of part-time employment is to earn money, rather than to support learning. It is also not arranged by the institution with the employer, so is not designed around what the student will learn by being in a work environment.

There may be exceptions, such as students in studio schools who undertake paid employment. In these cases, the main purpose of the activity must be work experience rather than earning money, learning objectives should be agreed, and the full criteria for funding planned hours must be met.

Work experience organised by the student

Any work experience organised by the student without the involvement of their

institution should not be included as either a learning aim or within the student's planned hours. This is because it does not meet the requirements for funding planned hours.

Work experience within local authorities

A number of local authorities have a training arm, but direct provision of training is not the local authority's core business. In these circumstances, work experience within local authority departments, which are separate to the training arm, is fundable and counted as external work experience.

Local authorities offering work experience within their organisation must be able to evidence whether or not the work experience opportunities they offer are sufficient to meet the purpose of external work experience. They should ensure that the evidence is sufficient to satisfy any challenge and Ofsted.

How work experience is funded within study programmes

Work experience is funded as part of the total planned hours for each student's study programme. 16 to 19 national funding rate information is published at [16 to 19 funding: rates and formula](#).

Qualifying for funding

To qualify for funding, work experience hours included in planned hours must:

- be directly relevant to the student's study programme
- be evidenced by documentation that it is planned, realistic and deliverable, and clearly set out in the student's timetable or learning plan
- be within the normal pattern of attendance at the institution
- be supervised or organised by a member of staff

Funding and recording work experience

Work experience is funded and recorded differently depending on the type of study programme being undertaken.

You can find more information about [recording the work experience placement in](#)

Withdrawing from part of a study programme

If a student withdraws from part of their study programme after the first 6 weeks but continues with the rest of their programme, they should take part in other meaningful activity during those hours that support the purpose of the study programme.

The institution should arrange this activity. It can include qualification or non-qualification hours. For example, if a summer external work placement is no longer available for a student starting a 2-year course in September and the work experience cannot be rearranged within the planned hours for either year 1 or year 2, the student should be offered alternative supported education. This helps ensure that the planned delivery remains realistic and deliverable.

In these circumstances, the learning agreement should also be updated to reflect the change.

Annex C: Study programmes below level 2 – principles

1. Diagnostic assessment – identify the student's needs, plan their provision, and ensure that appropriate support is in place to meet these needs. While most students are currently assessed on entry, evidence shows that it is vital that these assessments are used expertly in the planning of the student's learning programme.
2. Support to make informed choices – lower prior-achieving students can often arrive at college with unclear career plans or limited understanding of the opportunities available to them. If programmes are to be designed to maximise progression, students need viable and engaging education and career plans. This should, in turn, reduce the number who 'drop out' because they find they have an inappropriate choice.
3. Practical, hands-on teaching in a workshop environment can enthuse a student who struggled in school - basic skills can be embedded into vocational programmes, to reinforce any separate classes on basic skills and make the relevance and benefits of those skills clear. An introduction to their chosen occupational area will also help students progress to further learning, an apprenticeship, or employment at an elementary level.
4. English and maths provision delivered in line with DfE policy, and which supports, wherever appropriate, the level the student needs to have achieved to progress to their chosen level 2 programme, apprenticeship or occupation.

5. Engagement with employers and work-related activity to introduce students to the opportunities available and the behaviours that employers expect. A structured work placement may be right for some, but others working at entry level or level 1 may benefit more from experiencing a variety of different employment-related activities.
 6. The programme must be flexible if it is to meet the needs of this diverse group, and to respond to some inevitable changes in the student's longer-term plans. As such, the balance between the elements above must be individually tailored to student needs.
 7. Pastoral and specialist support to help students to remain engaged and progress. A high proportion of students will have special educational needs or personal and social issues and will have received additional support when they were in school. Failure to provide sufficient support post-16 risks students 'dropping out' of education, so it is important that providers address any special educational or other needs so these students can benefit fully from the study programme.
 8. All programmes must focus on progression to the next stage of education or employment. Students should be encouraged to move on in less than one year if they are ready and have been offered other training or employment.
-
1. The core aim is the principal or 'core' activity in a student's programme. It must be a learning aim so it can be recorded in the ILR or school census. Institutions returning the ILR identify the core aim for each programme. For the school census, institutions must only return the core aim for students studying vocational programmes, or mixed programmes with a vocational core. [↩](#)
 2. DfE (2016): [Evaluating youth social action](#) [↩](#)

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