Aston
ACADEMY

ACET
Striving for Excellence
Empowering Achievement
Shaping Learning

Options after YEAR 11

2026/27

Careers Guide

Students • Parents • Carers



"We are passionate about empowering students through **linking education with the world of work,** ensuring students are inspired and prepared to make informed decisions on their future"

Own Your Future

DISCOVER ▶ EXPLORE ▶ EMPOWER

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Not sure what comes next?

That's OK.

Lots of students in Year 10 and Year 11 don't yet know what they want to do after their GCSEs. That is completely normal, and you are not behind.

This guide explains the different routes open to you after Year 11, what each one involves and where it could lead, so you can make an informed decision that feels right for you.

You always have a choice. There is more than one route to almost every career.

It's OK to get it wrong. If something doesn't feel right, you can change direction. Plenty of successful people have.

Take the pressure off. You don't need your whole life planned out. **Focus on your next step.**

This is your future. You are in control of it.

Dare to dream. Imagination is everything. Just because something has always been done one way doesn't mean it has to be your path.

Did you know?

In England you stay in education or training until you're 18. That doesn't have to mean a classroom. It could be sixth form, college, an apprenticeship, or working or volunteering alongside part time study.

Not sure where to start?

Book a 1 to 1 careers meeting with **James Shaw** or **Neil Raymond**.
Details on page 4.

FOUR PATHWAYS TO YOUR FUTURE

There are four main routes after Year 11. Every one of them can lead to a great future, and choosing one now doesn't close the door on the others later. Use this page to see how they compare, then turn to the pathway pages for more detail.

	ACADEMIC PATHWAY (A Levels & Alternative Academic Qualifications)	TECHNICAL PATHWAY (T Levels, TOQs & Occupational Diplomas)	VOCATIONAL PATHWAY (VTQs & BTECs – during the transition)	WORK-BASED PATHWAY (Apprenticeships & Supported Internships)
WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?	**3 x A Levels** **2 x A Levels + 1 small AAQ** **1 x large AAQ**	**T-Levels** **Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs)** **Occupational Entry Diplomas**	**VTQs still available in some areas** **BTECs and Cambridge Technicals** (until phased out) **V-Levels** (first subjects to be launched Sept 2026)	**Apprenticeships (Intermediate to Advanced)** **Supported Internships (for learners with SEND)** **Work Experience or Industry Placements as part of a Study Programme**
LEVEL	**Level 3**	**Level 2 to Level 3**	**Level 1 to Level 3**	**Entry Level to Level 3**
ENTRY REQUIREMENTS	Usually **5 x GCSEs at grade 4–9**, including **English and maths.** Some subjects need higher grades in specific areas.	Usually **4–5 GCSEs at grade 4–9**, including **English and maths.**	**Level 1–2** courses: open to learners with fewer **GCSEs grades 1-4** **Level 3** courses: usually **4–5 GCSEs at grade 4–9**	Vary by employer; typically **GCSE English and maths (grade 4+) for Level 3+.**
IDEAL IF YOU...	Enjoy academic learning, exams, and independent study.	Want to combine classroom learning with industry experience and develop specialist technical skills.	Prefer practical, hands-on projects and continuous assessment.	Ready to earn while you learn and gain real work experience.
LEADS TO...	University, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, and professional careers.	Skilled employment, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, or technical degrees.	Further study, Apprenticeships, or direct employment in skilled trades, health, business, and creative industries.	Employment, Higher or Degree Apprenticeships.
KEY MESSAGE	**The traditional route for learners aiming for higher education.**	**The new specialist route for learners focused on technical careers.**	**A practical skills-based route being streamlined as new technical qualifications replace some courses.**	**Learn on the job, develop skills, and get paid while you train.**

Speak to a Careers Adviser to help you explore the options in more detail.

Year 11 Careers Planning Guide and Timeline

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STEP 1 September – November - *Exploration*

- **Make a list or use a mind map -** list your strengths, interests and values and weigh up which is the best fit
- **Take it step by step –** Don't worry about long term – focus on next steps.

STEP 2 October – January

- **Get up close –** Visit multiple open days and talk to tutor, gain a feel of different environments

Listen to your intuition – What feels right – what doesn't

STEP 3 November – December - *Application Stage*

- **Apply for multiple provisions –** Ensure you have applications in your backups – Example

The Sheffield College · TRC Thomas Rotherham College · Rotherham College

STEP 4 December – January

- **College Interviews *(information sessions)* –** opportunity to speak to the area tutor and look at the sector environment to support decision making

STEP 5 January

- **Conditional offers –** Subject to grades meeting entry requirements

STEP 6 April - June

- **Apprenticeship Vacancy window:** When Employers advertise for Summer Opportunities. Apprenticeship vacancies are advertised throughout the year, so it's worth registering early.

STEP 7 August Results Day

- **Confirm your place with your chosen provider and let your backups know.**

Options after Year 11

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A Levels

A levels or Advanced Levels are two-year subject-based qualifications for students aged 16 or older who plan to go to university or want much deeper knowledge of a study area.

Who it suits

You enjoy academic study, you're comfortablewith exams and you like getting into a subject in real depth.

Entry requirements

5 GCSEs at Grade 4 or above including Maths & English (please check each course)

Where to study it locally

School 6th Forms including Wickersley, Brinsworth and Wales, Thomas Rotherham College and Sheffield College 6th Form also Tapton, Silverdale, King Edward and Mercia.

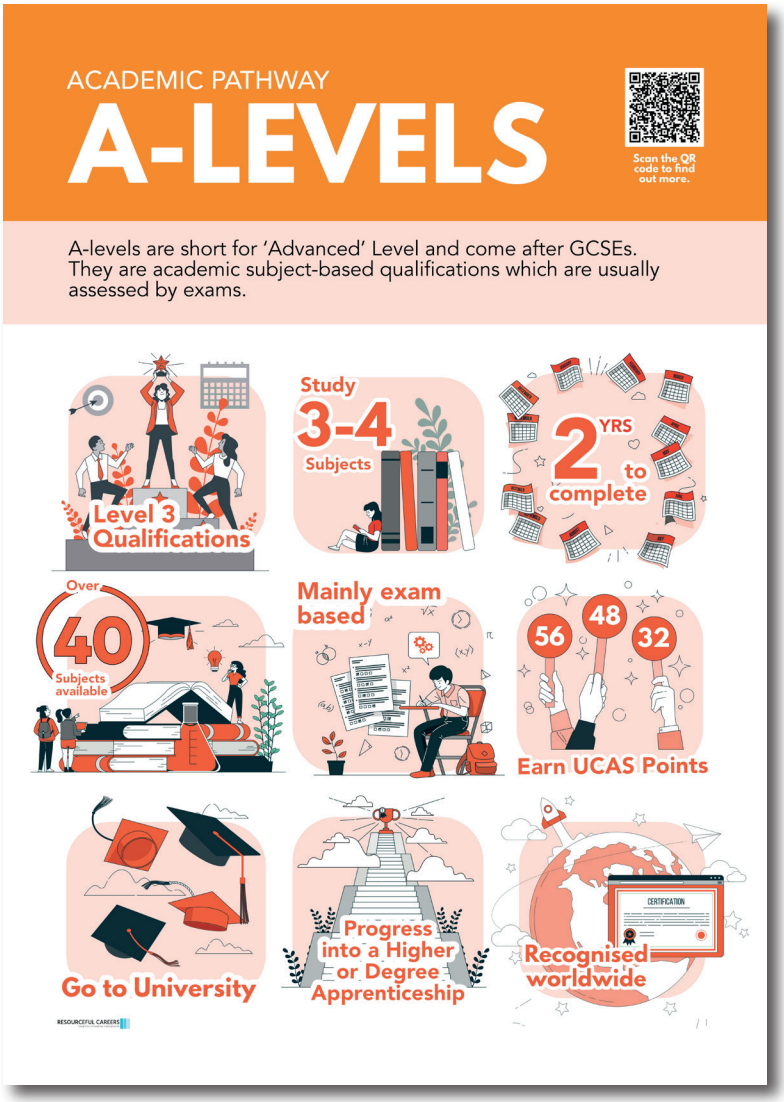
What to expect

An increase in difficulty compared to GCSEs, differences in the way you're taught and what's expected from you

More independent study time – you'll only have between three and five subjects to study as opposed to ten or more at GCSE, meaning less time in the classroom.

Where it leads

University, skilled employment, higher or degree apprenticeships.



Useful links

UCAS Guide to choosing A-Levels
https://www.ucas.com/further-education/post-16-qualifications/qualifications-you-can-take/levels

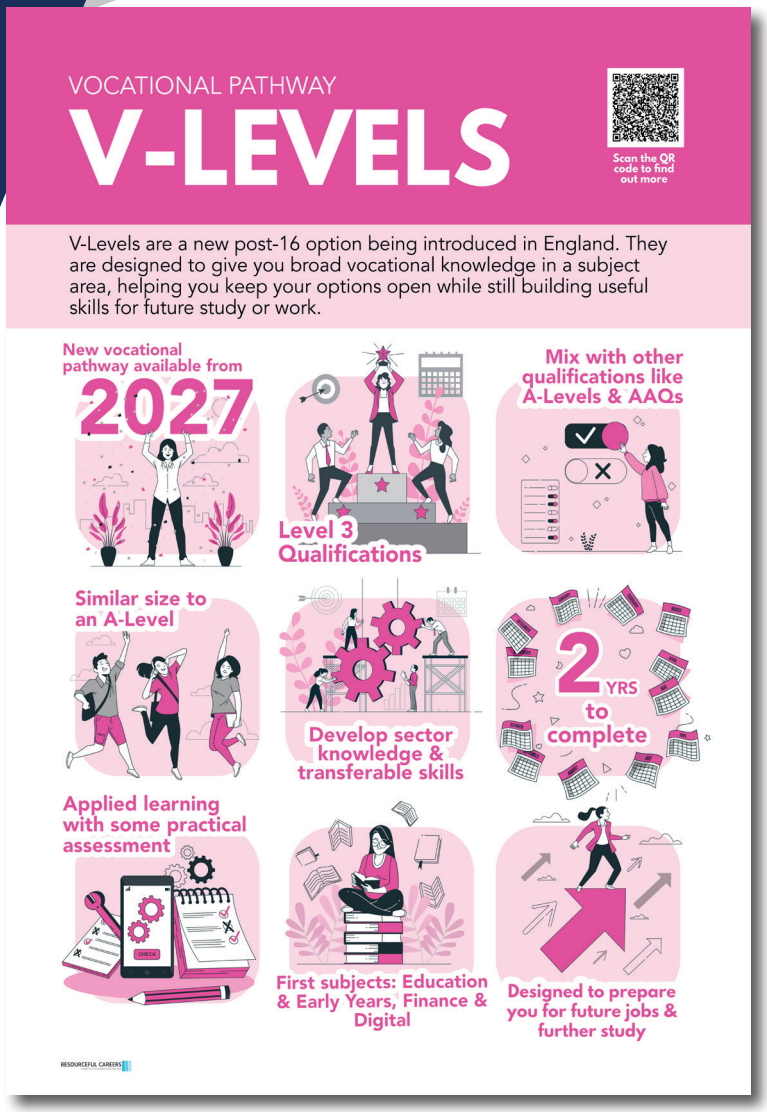
UCAS Subject Guide https://www.ucas.com/explore/search/subject-guides?query

University Rankings https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings

NEW FOR 2027

V Levels

Vocational Levels are a new type of Level 3 qualification in England designed to streamline and simplify post-16 education. Officially launching for teaching in September 2027, V Levels are structured to bridge the gap between purely academic paths and highly specialised technical paths, replacing many existing Level 3 BTECs and alternative qualifications



Who it suits
You want to keep your options open, you prefer practical projects and coursework to exams, or you'd like to combine a vocational subject with A levels.

Entry requirements
Level 1–2 courses: open to learners with fewer GCSEs grades 1-4 Level 3 courses: usually4–5 GCSEs at grade 4–9

Where to study it locally
[Local providers to be confirmed.] V Levels are brand new from September 2027, so ask at open days whether a college or sixth form will be offering them.

What to expect
Each V Level takes two years to complete and is equivalent in size to one A Level (360 Guided Learning Hours).

V Levels have **"Mix and Match"** flexibility. They match A Level sizing, students can combine V Levels with A Levels or take multiple V Levels together. For example, a student can study two traditional A Levels alongside one V Level to keep their career options flexible.

Assessment & Grading is unlike exam-heavy A Levels, V Levels focus on applied learning, utilising practical projects, real-world scenarios, and coursework.

Tranche 1 Subjects (Starting September 2027)
- Accounting and Finance
- Digital Systems and Data
- Education

Upcoming Subjects (Phased Rollout 2028–2030)
- Business, Management & Supply Chains
- Sport & Exercise Science
- Construction Design
- Engineering & Manufacturing
- Health & Healthcare Science
- Legal Services

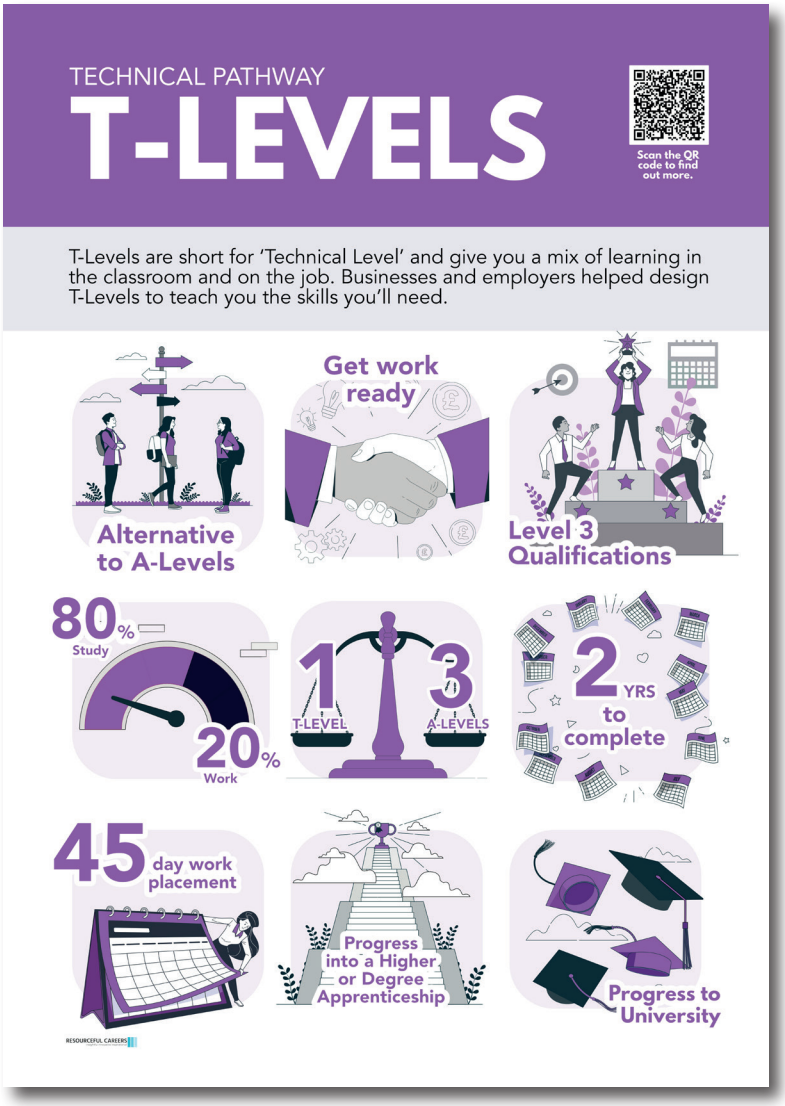
Where it leads
University, apprenticeships, further study or employment.

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T Levels

T Levels are a new type of technical qualification, designed for after your GCSEs. They've been developed alongside employers to make sure that what you learn meets the needs of industry and prepares you for work.



Who it suits

You already know the industry you'd like to work in and want real experience in a workplace alongside your studies.

Entry requirements

Minimum of 5 GCSEs including English and Maths at grades 9-4.

Where to study it locally

Available at most Colleges including Rotherham and Sheffield

What to expect

T Levels are two-year courses, equivalent to three A Levels. Students' time is split into 80% classroom learning and 20% industry placement. Placements are at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days).

Where it leads

Skilled employment, higher or degree apprenticeships, or university.

Useful links

Rotherham College Courses
https://www.rotherham.ac.uk/courses/

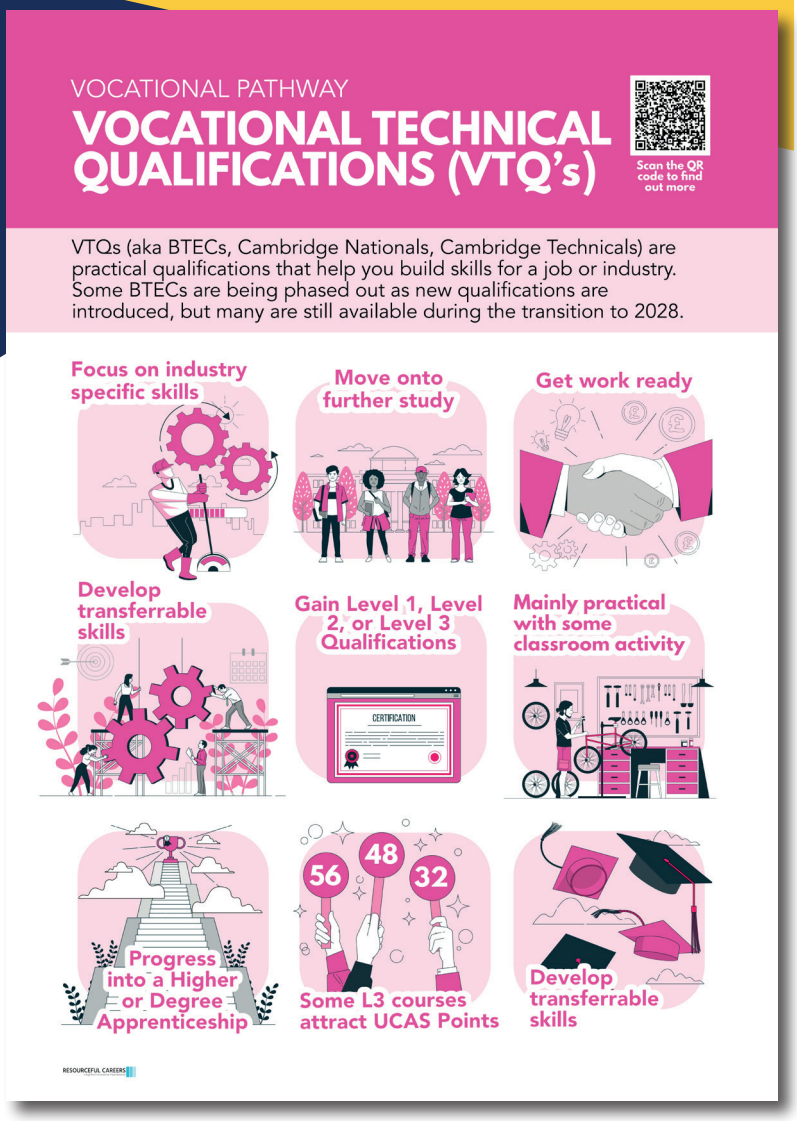
Sheffield College Courses
https://www.sheffcol.ac.uk/courses

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Vocational Courses

A vocational course is a training programme which focuses more on practical work, rather than traditional academic exams.



Who it suits

You learn best by doing, you have a strong interest in a particular area, or you'd like to build up your qualifications one level at a time.

Entry requirements

(please check provisions as entries may differ)

Level	Entry Qualifications
Entry Level - 1 year course	No qualifications needed
Level 1 – 1 year course	4 GCSE grade 2s (inc English Language)
Level 2 – 1 year course	4 x GCSE grade 3s (inc English Language)
Level 3 and T Levels – 2-year course Equivalent to 3 x A levels	5 x GCSE grade 4s or above (inc maths and English)

Where to study it locally

Available at Rotherham and Sheffield College and other FE settings

What to expect

Vocational courses focus on a specific job or a broad employment area, such as childcare, engineering or IT.

Students that don't gain level 4 in Maths and English in their Y11 examinations will retake these alongside their vocational studies. Full time College is classed as 2 or 3 days a week at college with an extra half a day if needed for English and Maths retakes.

Where it leads

The next level of study, an apprenticeship or employment.

Useful links

Rotherham College Courses
https://www.rotherham.ac.uk/courses/

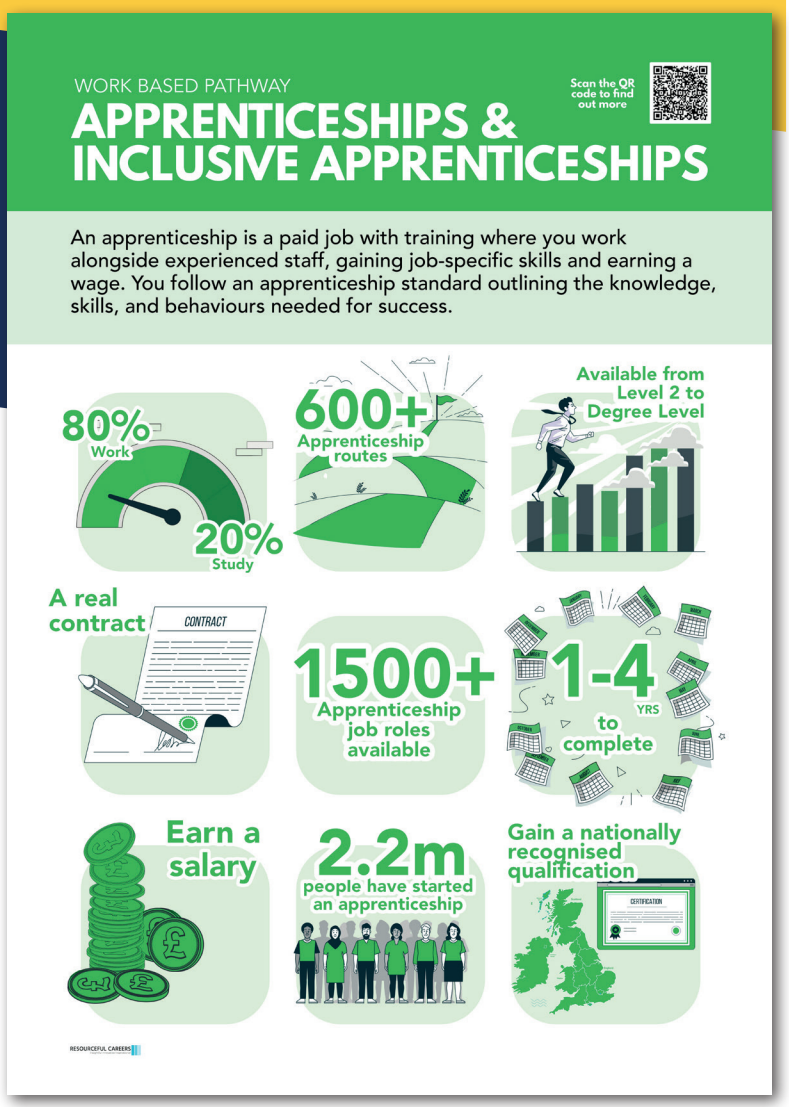
Sheffield College Courses
https://www.sheffcol.ac.uk/courses

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Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is a paid job where the employee learns and gains valuable experiences. Alongside on-the-job training, apprentices spend at least 20% of their working hours completing classroom-based learning with a college, university or training provider which leads to a nationally recognised qualification.



Who it suits

You're ready to start work, you want to earn while you learn and you'd like hands on experience in a real job.

Entry requirements

(please check provisions as entries may differ)

Apprenticeship	Equivalent education level
Foundation (level 2)	GCSE
Intermediate (level 2)	GCSE
Advanced (level 3)	A Level or T Levels
Higher (level 4,5,6,7)	Foundation degree and above
Degree (level 6 & 7)	Bachelor's or master's degree

Help finding an apprenticeship

You don't have to do this alone. Our careers team can help you search for vacancies, write your CV and prepare for interviews.

What to expect

An apprenticeship is paid employment with holiday leave.

It includes hands-on-experience in a sector/role of interest with at least 20% off-the-job training.

Formal assessment leads to a nationally recognised qualification

Where it leads

Higher level apprenticeships and career progression. Degree apprenticeships let you gain a degree without paying tuition fees

Useful links

National Apprenticeship Service:
https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship

South Yorkshire Apprenticeship Hub:
https://vacancies.southyorkshireapprenticeships.org/vacancies/all/allhttps://www.sheffcol.ac.uk/courses

SEND and Supported Pathways

Support for students with SEND
If your child has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), there are specialist programmes designed to build independence, confidence and skills for work and adult life. Our careers team and SENCO can help you explore which option is the right fit.

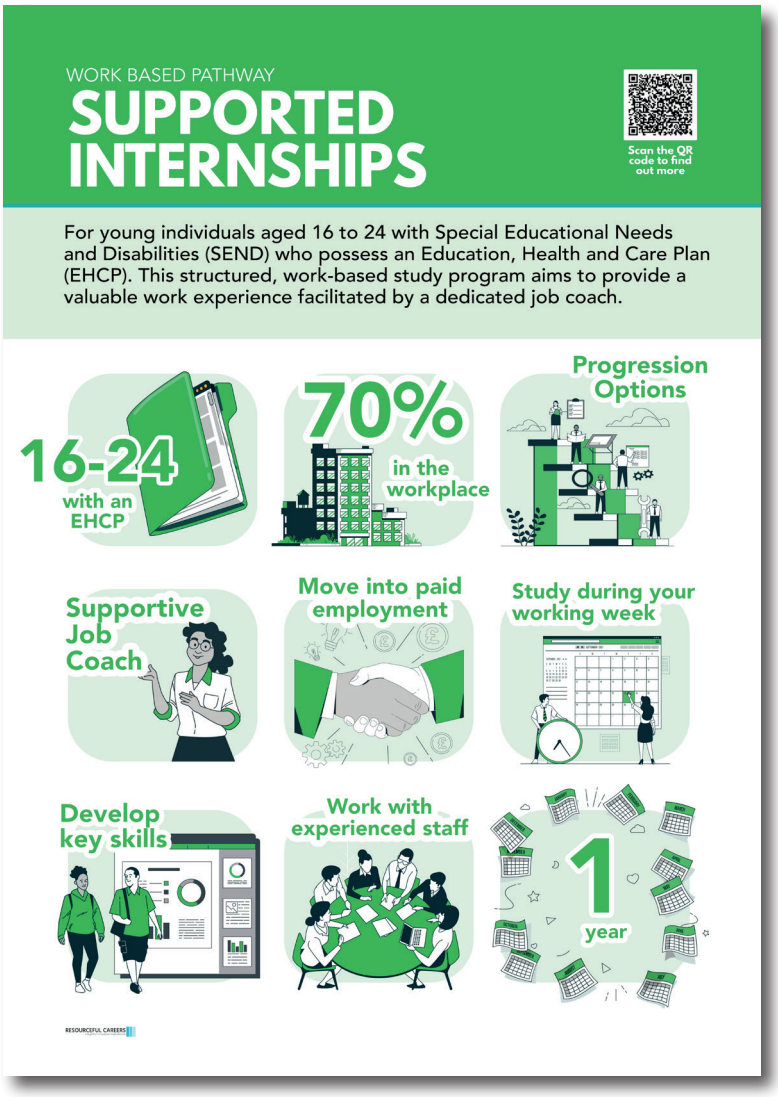
Rotherham College FLEX:
Horizons, Pre-internships and Supported Internships
For students with an EHCP. Students choose from three project based pathways depending on their goals, working towards either independence and adulthood or employment. They try taster sessions in a range of vocational areas, build employability and personal skills, and continue with English, maths and IT. Students attend college at least three days a week. There are no formal entry requirements.

What students study
Employability skills, personal and social development, independence skills, communication, study skills, vocational units, and English, maths and ICT.
https://www.rotherham.ac.uk/course/horizons-9/

Sheffield College Bloom:
Preparing for Adulthood
(Peaks and Hillsborough campuses)
For students with an EHCP. Bloom is made up of several programmes: Pathway to Personal Progress, Pathway to Independent Living, Pathway to Supported Work Skills and the Supported Internship.

Students say which programme interests them when they apply, and the college agrees the best fit at interview based on their support, needs and goals. The Supported Internship requires an active EHCP.
https://www.sheffcol.ac.uk/course/search?main_framework=Inclusion

Other SEND providers
Landmarks
Rotherham Opportunity College
Morthyng Training Provider (Rotherham):
https://www.morthyng.co.uk/contact-mvc-rotherham/
Freeman College
Project Choice Sheffield (NHS, EHCP needed):
https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/choices-college-supported-internships



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FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Supporting your child

You are one of the biggest influences on your child's choices, and you don't need to be a careers expert to help.

Talk openly.

Ask what they enjoy, what they're good at and what they'd like to try. Listen without steering them towards one route.

Explore together.

Go to open days and information evenings with them. Seeing places in person makes a real difference.

Keep an eye on deadlines.

Use the timeline on page 4. Most applications are made in November and December.

Encourage backups.

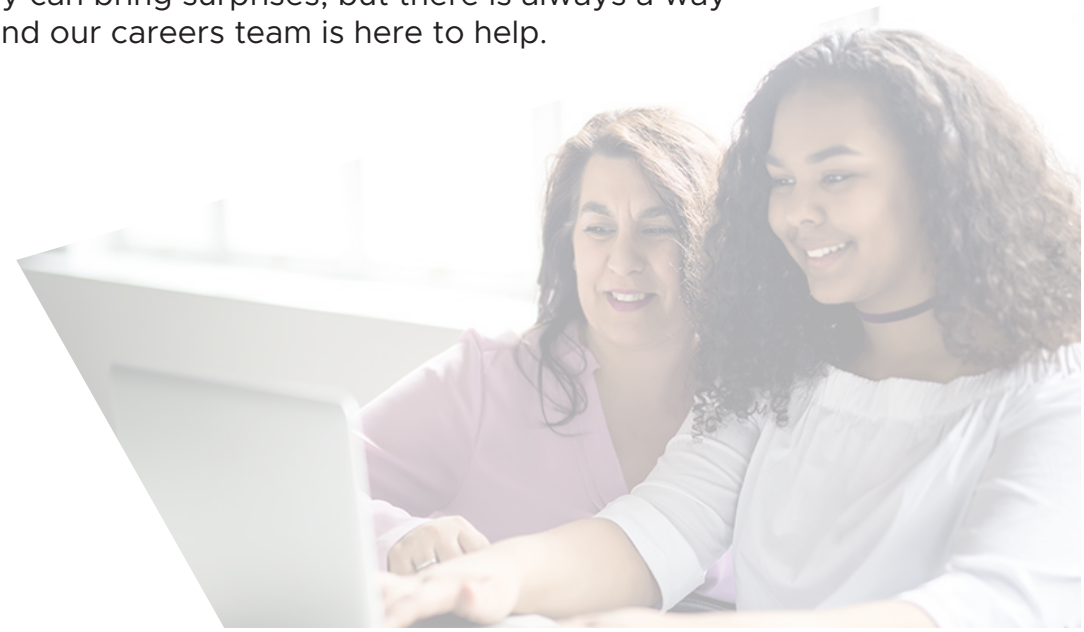
Applying to more than one provider takes the pressure off.

Come to a careers meeting.

You are very welcome to join your child's 1 to 1 meeting, usually held between 3.10pm and 4pm.

Reassure them.

Results day can bring surprises, but there is always a way forward, and our careers team is here to help.



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Need help? Talk to us.

Drop into the careers rooms (E7 and Main Corridor)
at break or lunchtime, or email to book a 1 to 1 careers meeting:

James Shaw: **james.shaw@astonacademy.org** (Monday to Friday)
Neil Raymond: **neil.raymond@astonacademy.org** (Monday and Friday)
Mrs Adams, Careers Lead: **deborah.adams@astonacademy.org**

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Useful links

National Careers Service:
https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

Find an apprenticeship:
https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship

South Yorkshire Apprenticeship Hub:
https://vacancies.southyorkshireapprenticeships.org/vacancies/all/all

Rotherham College:
https://www.rotherham.ac.uk/courses/

Sheffield College:
https://www.sheffcol.ac.uk/courses

Thomas Rotherham College:
https://www.trc.ac.uk/

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Alumni Invite

Could you inspire the next generation of students?

Aston Academy warmly invite you to step back in time and reconnect. Whether it has been five years or 10 years since you left, come and showcase your journey from classroom to career- If you would be interested,

please contact Debbie Adams or James Shaw