



Are you pushing your teenager in the wrong direction? You could be holding them back from what they want to do.

Stop and think...

Do you feel under pressure to get them to take a 'respectable' academic route like university – because that is what all your friends say they are doing?

We at Edge – an educational foundation – believe that teenagers have many paths to success, including practical and vocational learning.

That means doing things for real, integrating theory and practice, getting qualifications that could lead your child to career success.

There is a whole range of options out there – the most important thing is knowing how to decide what's best for your child.

Finding your way through the maze of prospectuses can be difficult.

We can't give you advice on what's best for your child because everyone is different. Looking at all the options can be off-putting. So try starting with an overview of what's available for young people:

- www.direct.gov.uk - Official government site covering education and learning.
- www.connexions-direct.com Connexions is a public service for 13-19 year olds providing advice on getting to where you want to be in life.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority develops the curriculum in England and regulates the examination system through several awarding bodies. Some are specific to regions of the UK. Details for Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland can be found at the following websites:

- www.wjec.co.uk Welsh Joint Education Committee
- www.sqa.org.uk Scottish Qualifications Authority
- www.ccea.org.uk Northern Irish Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

The links above will give you a quick overview of the main qualifications that are currently available in the UK.

To help you narrow down the choices to the course that suits your son or daughter best, we've put together these questions.

The answers should guide you towards the right options.

Ask the course provider:

- Is it full or part-time?
- Can you start it at any time of year?
- Can students get a grant?
- What qualification do students get at the end?
- Can we talk to a student who is doing the course now?
- What percentage of people finish?
- What do people do after they have finished the course?

Ask your child:

- How much do you know about the course?
- Does it match up with your interests and abilities?
- Do you know any one who has worked there/been on that course?
- What would you like to do at the end of the course?
- If you don't get your first choice of course have you got another option?

Ask about apprenticeships:

- How much of the week will be at college and how much at work?
- Does my child have to find a work placement or will the college / training provider do that?
- How much will they get paid?
- Has the employer had apprentices before?
- What happened to them when they finished the apprenticeship?
- What qualifications will my daughter or son end up with?
- Can the apprenticeship lead to higher qualifications?
- You are the biggest influence on the choices your child makes - even if they don't admit it.
- So be careful how you say something - because they might think your suggestion is an instruction.
- Don't say: "I think you ought to be a website designer".
- Say: "Have you thought about training to be a website designer?"
- Take time to discuss choices with your teenager when they want to - even if it's inconvenient.
- Don't say: "Sorry, I'm very busy can we discuss this at the weekend?" ...because they'll think you are not really interested.
- So take an interest - without taking over. Go to careers evenings or option evenings at school or college - even look things up on the internet, but...
- Don't say things like - "I've just filled your application form in for you".
- Don't load your own ambitions on to your teenager. Just because you went to university - or wished you had done - doesn't mean your child should.

Ask about prospects:

- Does the course lead to a nationally recognised qualification?
- Will it help him or her get a job?
- Will my son or daughter need to go on to do a further qualification?
- After the course, what did most people do next?

Questions and Answers

Q Help! Every time I try to talk to my teenager about what they are going to do next we fall out - What can I do?

A Perhaps they think that you are nagging. Back off for a while and then watch for another opportunity to start talking about their future. We've got some ideas about how you can help support your child.

Q Where can I get independent and professional help about careers?

A The free careers service, Connexions. There's a local office near you and every secondary school has a Connexions advisor. Learn Direct can also help.

Q What's wrong with universities, don't they do vocational courses?

A There's nothing wrong with them and many run excellent vocational courses, but we believe that university is only one of the routes. Many young people are more suited to a work-based vocational route - and it's not a second best option.

Q Aren't vocational courses just an easy option for people who are not clever enough to do academic qualifications?

A No. They can be just as demanding, in some cases more so. What one person finds difficult another person finds easy. It is about matching a person's abilities to a route which suits them and valuing every course equally.

Q My child's school seems interested only in students doing academic courses. What should I do?

A The first step is to talk to the head teacher about your concerns. Also, contact your local Connexions service and Learn Direct who will be able to help.

Q My child is 24, has a university degree, but can only get a job working behind a bar. Is it too late to change tack?

A It certainly is not too late - part of the problem may be that they don't know what to do. First try talking to them about what they would like to do and help them create their own route. Also suggest that they talk to the local Connexions service, Learn Direct or use one of the many private careers advice services which can be found easily on the internet. They will charge, but they may be able to offer more detailed advice.

Look around at the different choices open to your child. There are over a million courses available in this country and it can be difficult to know where to start.

- www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu
- Having a happier outlook on life is a key measure to success. Complete a questionnaire to find out how happy you are!

- www.cityandguilds.com/myperfectjob
- Explore over 500 qualifications across 28 industry areas.

- www.aimhigher.ac.uk
- Explore a vast range of courses and many different ways of studying. Aim Higher can help you explore all the options and choose a direction that's right for you.

- www.learn-direct-advice.co.uk
- Explore hundreds of job profiles and the qualifications needed.

- www.direct.gov.uk
- Information on which qualifications are needed for different career paths.

- www10.learn-direct-advice-search.co.uk
- Find the right course here.

- www.inourhands.lsc.gov.uk/
- Information on all the different learning options available.

- www.parentlineplus.org.uk
- Parentline Plus works to offer help and support through an innovative range of free, flexible, responsive services - shaped by parents for parents.

- www.edexcel.org.uk/studying
- Studying for an Edexcel qualification? Or looking for a course to suit you? Make use of our hints and tips or check out your options.

- www.apprenticeships.org.uk
- There are over 180 apprenticeships available across more than 80 industry sectors. Take a look at the full list of Apprenticeships.