

Childcare while you study

If you have young children and want to find time to study, satisfactory childcare arrangements will be important.

College childcare facilities

Most colleges and universities have childcare provision for which they charge. Places are allocated on a first-come-first-served basis.

Government provision for children of three years and older

The government funds all local authorities to ensure part-time early education is available for all pre-school children above the age of three. This means that all three- and four-year-olds are entitled to up to two years' free early education before reaching the statutory school age (that is, the first term following their fifth birthday).

The position for 2007-8 is that following a child's third birthday

- children born between 1 April and 31 August (inclusive) are eligible for a free place from 1 September.
- children born between 1 September and 31 December (inclusive) are eligible to a free place from 1 January
- children born between 1 January and 31 March (inclusive) are eligible for a free place from 1 April.

Provision could be with a registered childminder, a preschool or playgroup, a day nursery or nursery school, a nursery class within a primary school, or, for a 4-year-old, a reception class within a primary school. Additional hours for childcare over and above government provision are charged at the usual rate for that provider.

Younger children

Help with childcare costs is available from a range of different sources.

- Child Tax Credit is a means-tested allowance for parents and carers of children. Nine out of ten families with children qualify for Child Tax Credit. Go to <http://www.direct.gov.uk> and select the section *Parents* for more information.
- Working Tax Credit is for those working more than 16 hours per week and on a low income. This could cover 80 per cent of your eligible childcare costs, but there are upper limits of £175 per week for one child and £300 for two or more children. Go to <http://www.direct.gov.uk> and select the section *Money, tax and benefits*.
- Care to Learn gives childcare support for young parents. For more information, go to <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk> and select *Care to learn?* From the A-Z search menu.
- Information about childcare support for students and lone parents is available from <http://www.surestart.gov.uk>.

- You have the right to request flexible working hours from your employer 'business link' has practical advice for employers – search for *flexible working*.
<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk>

Deciding about your child's care

- Look at several local options
- Work out the exact cost before committing yourself
- Check what government help is available locally
- Check the carer is trained and experienced
- Speak with parents who have used the carer you have in mind
- Do both you and your child feel the carer relates well with you?
- Check the carer is willing to reinforce routines you have in place
- Check the environment. Is it safe, clean and well equipped, with access to an outside play area? Will your child feel happy and confident in terms of ability, race, culture, language and gender?

Where else to go for help

Contact your local education authority or go to the websites below:

- www.childcarelink.gov.uk – an interactive map which enables you to find details of childcare facilities and services in Sussex
- www.direct.gov.uk – select the section *Parents* for information on childcare
- www.hmrc.gov.uk/childcare – information about tax and national insurance contributions and childcare voucher schemes
- www.schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk – information about local provision
- www.surestart.gov.uk – a government programme which aims to support parents and increase the availability of childcare
- www.bbc.co.uk/parenting – what to look for when choosing a childminder
- www.bestbear.co.uk – search for recommended childcare providers in your local area

The Sussex Learning Network

To help you make a decision about where and what to study, the Sussex Learning Network's website provides information, advice and guidance on work-related and work-based learning at higher education level.

<http://www.sussexlearningnetwork.org.uk/learning>

The Sussex Learning Network works with employers, colleges, universities, training providers and guidance agencies across Sussex. The website brings together links to educational institutions in Sussex and a range of helpful organisations and agencies. It shows how you can progress from one course to another, or from one institution to another, and has details of special arrangements and agreements for Sussex students.

Alternative formats of our leaflets are available on request.