



Information for parents and carers, February 2011

Natspec is a membership association for independent specialist colleges that provide further education or training for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Specialist colleges can give young people their first real taste of independent living and help them to achieve their hopes and aspirations for the future. Specialist colleges enable young people to find a college that can meet their learning and support needs.

Over the last few years there have been a number of changes in the application process for specialist colleges. Local authorities are more involved in decision making; the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) has been created as a funding body and the Connexions and careers services have been reorganised. Through all these changes, **specialist college places and the funding to support them remain available**. Young people and their parents/carers should not be put off by misleading statements that there are no places or no money; this is not the case.

How to apply to a specialist college

Transition planning should begin in Year 9 or 10 at the latest – when your son or daughter is about 14, and you can begin to think about options after school. Your son or daughter should have a Connexions Adviser or Careers Officer, who can give advice and guidance about the choices available.

The procedure for applying to a Specialist College will vary slightly depending on where you live; in particular, the timings might differ, so ask your Connexions adviser or careers officer what should happen where you live. Make sure you know the completion dates for all the steps that are needed, and chase up your adviser if you think it is taking too long. The full process is in the YPLA document linked below:

- [YPLA ISC placement information](#)

If your son or daughter has a statement of special educational needs, your Connexions adviser or careers officer must produce a Learning Difficulties Assessment (LDA) for them - it might also be called an S139a assessment. This will identify their hopes for the future, their learning and support needs, and the best place to meet these needs. If your son or daughter does not have a statement, but

has a new disability, or their disability has become more severe, you can ask for a Learning Difficulty Assessment. The LDA should include your views about what is best and right for your son or daughter.

Choosing a college

If you are thinking about further education, it is a good idea to visit the local further education college to see if it can meet your son or daughter's needs. If not, and you think a specialist college is the best choice, you should arrange to visit one or more specialist colleges. This may take some time, so the sooner you start the better. If your Connexions adviser or careers officer agrees that a specialist college is the best place to meet your son or daughter's learning and support needs, this must be clearly stated on the LDA. Your son or daughter can then visit the chosen specialist college for a more detailed assessment. The college admissions team can provide help with your application.

The Connexions (or careers) service will then make an application to your Local Authority. If they approve it, they will apply for funding to the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA) in England, or the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) in Wales. The YPLA has a budget to pay for specialist college places; this budget remains at the same level for 2011/12. It is important to be clear that the government has allocated funding for this purpose - **there is definitely money available to pay for a place at a specialist college.**

If you are not happy about any part of the process, you can go to your local authority to ask them to reconsider any decision they have made. All local authorities should have an appeals process in place. Unfortunately there is no second stage appeal at present, as this is still under discussion.

Note: this guidance is issued in good faith, in the light of information currently available - Natspec cannot be held responsible for the management of the process or the success of the outcome