

College and university – to go or not to go?

If you're not sure whether to go to college or university, take a look at the following points to help you make a decision.

What are the benefits of staying on in education?

- **Better career or pay prospects** - some diplomas and degrees can lead to jobs in higher paid professions, for example, engineering, health and medicine and law.
- **Greater independence** - you can learn to stand on your own two feet and make your own decisions, especially if you live away from home.
- **Getting new and important life skills** – communication, technical, social and analytical skills that enhance both your personal and working life.
- **Self-discovery** - you might even learn new things about yourself on the way, such as a passion for student politics or natural leadership ability.
- **Good social life** - you can meet some interesting people, form some new and lasting friendships, try new activities and visit new places.
- **Hedging your bets** – it's a good opportunity to keep your options open while building on your strengths and interests; you can explore other areas of study and get more experience of life and work before choosing a career path.
- **Daily variety** - with different classes and lectures to attend, and learning about different subjects at different levels, you can enjoy a varied experience before settling into a specific career.

So what are the negative aspects of staying on?

- **Getting into debt** - unless you get financial help through a scholarship or from your parents, or you are really good with money, you will need to take out a student loan for your living expenses. Depending on how long you study and if you live away from home, a bank overdraft on top of that could result in a sizable debt to pay off during your working years. Many students take a part time job.
- **Long-term commitment** - can you buckle down to years of further study? Juggling full time study and a part time job creates a lot of pressure for many students, particularly for vocational, or practical, courses that involve a lot of time on campus. Roughly one in ten university students drop out every year. One in four college students drop out each year.
- **Being responsible for your own time** - meeting deadlines and managing your spare time between lectures requires lots of discipline and self-motivation. Spending a 'free' afternoon reviewing your notes after a lecture is advisable, wandering around the shops or sitting in the pub with your new pals is not. Will you have the self-discipline to resist the temptations?

Is full time study right for you?

- **Why do you want to go to college or university?**
Reasons such as the social life, it's what your parents want, all your friends are going, or even the adventure of escaping from home, are not the best indicators that you are making the right decision. On the other hand, exploring a subject that you have a real passion for, a certain career being your lifelong ambition or even wanting to find out more about yourself, are great reasons for becoming a full time

student.

- **Are you mature enough for higher education?**

Will you be able to adapt to a new culture at university or college? Dealing with different kinds and ages of people, an open style of learning where you are not told what to do and when, and dealing with subjects at a deeper level, all require a certain degree of maturity.

- **Have you considered the alternatives?**

Find out about any other routes into your chosen career before you make your final decision about full time study. You can enter many careers, including professions such as accountancy and engineering, by going straight into a job and studying part time towards a professional qualification. Some employers offer school and college leaver programmes that allow you to do just that. There is now also a wider range than ever of Modern Apprenticeships. In addition to traditional trades such as plumbing and joinery, you can get into areas like accounting, business, computing and healthcare. Which route will suit you best?