

Would you like help taking up learning?

A lot of the information in this section is aimed at people who have an impairment, health condition, learning difficulty or mental health difficulty. We have used the term 'disabled' to cover all of these.

I can't afford to take up learning – can I get help?

Learning does not have to be expensive. Going to the library, doing research on the Internet or joining a book group are just some of the ways you can learn that are not expensive.

However, there are some things you might need to pay for, such as:

- Course or exam fees
- Books, materials and equipment
- Travel
- Childcare (see page 64)
- General living costs.

You can sometimes get help with course or exam fees if any of the following apply to you:

- You are 16–18 years old
- You are on a low income
- You are getting income-related benefits
- You want to learn computer skills, literacy or numeracy up to Level 2. (Level 2 is the same as GCSEs graded A–C.)

Sometimes these courses are free.

There are other grants and loans that you might be able to get to help with paying for fees, books, materials, equipment, travel and general living costs. Some of the main ones are:

- **Discretionary Support Funds** – colleges have these for learners who may need help with the costs of learning
- **Adult Learning Grant** – this is a weekly grant for adults studying more than 450 guided learning hours a year (this is at least 12 hours a week), if they are studying at Level 2 or 3 for the first time. (Level 2 is the same as GCSEs graded A–C; Level 3 is the same as A-Levels.)
- **Education Maintenance Allowance** – this is paid weekly to 16–19 year olds who stay in learning
- **Professional and Career Development Loan** – this is a commercial bank loan that can be used to pay for work-related learning. It needs to be repaid when the course is over
- **Residential Support Scheme** – this can help you if you need to study away from home, if your course is not available locally
- **Fifty-Plus In-Work Training Grant** – if you are aged 50 or older and are starting a new job this could help you with work-related training costs
- **Dance and Drama Awards Scheme** – this can pay your tuition fees at a specialist performing arts school.

These grants and loans have different rules about who might be able to get them. You should find out more before you apply.

If you want to find out what help you could get you should:

- Talk to the college or learning centre you want to go to. See if you can speak to someone who works in information, advice and guidance or in student support services
- Visit www.direct.gov.uk and select 'education and learning'.

Can I get help with childcare so I can take up learning?

Looking after children does not need to be a barrier to taking up learning.

If your children are at school, daytimes are ideal for taking up learning. Lots of colleges and learning centres offer daytime courses. Or you could do distance learning. Distance learning is where your learning centre sends you course materials and you learn in your own at a time and pace that is right for you. Sometimes you can do this over the Internet. This is sometimes called 'online learning' or 'e-learning'.

However, if you need to arrange childcare so you can take up learning, you might be able to get help to pay for this. These are some of the main ways you could get help.

- **Care to Learn** – this is a fund for parents aged 19 or under. It pays for childcare while you learn.
- **Discretionary 20+ Childcare** – if you are aged 20 or older these funds can help with childcare costs.
- **Childcare Grants** – this grant can help with childcare costs if you are in higher education.

- **The Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work scheme** – this could help with childcare costs if you are aged 20 or older, are from a low income household and you are not working.
- **The Sixth Form College Childcare Scheme** – if you are a parent aged 20 or older and studying at a school sixth form or sixth form college, you could get help with your childcare costs.

All these schemes have different rules about who is entitled to them. You should find out more before you apply.

To find out more visit www.direct.gov.uk and select 'parents' or 'education and learning'

If I take up learning, will this affect my benefits?

There are different rules for different types of benefit. Some changes in your circumstances can affect what you are allowed to claim. You should talk to your personal advisor at Jobcentre Plus about your learning plans to make sure you get the right information. For example, if you are getting Jobseeker's Allowance you are expected to be actively looking and available for work. You will need to show that your learning activity leaves time to do this.

Some benefits such as Income Support are not usually available to people in full-time study. There are some exceptions to this so check with your personal advisor. Your personal advisor at Jobcentre Plus can help talk you through the different rules.

If you are getting a grant or loan towards the cost of learning, this might affect your benefits.