



Acknowledgements

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This publication is available on our website at www.connexions-northumberland.org.uk. It can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please contact: Isabel Taylor 01670 798 244, isabel.taylor@connexions-northumberland.org.uk

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CHOICES '10

parents and carers

...a guide for parents and carers



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WWW.CONNEXIONS-NORTHUMBERLAND.ORG.UK



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Helping your child with their learning and career choices

Your child will have a number of choices to make about education and careers during the next few years. Whatever stage they are at, you can help them with these decisions. Most young people turn to their families when they want help to make important decisions, so the encouragement, support and information you give will make a big difference.

How can you help?

Listen and offer support – even if their ideas seem unrealistic, or seem to change a lot.

Be informed. We hope that this booklet will be a good starting point. During their time at school your child will also receive **Choices Year 9, Choices Year 11** and **Getting There** (for Year 12 students) giving them more detailed information about their options. These publications are available online at www.connexions-northumberland.org.uk

You can talk to Connexions personal advisers at school parents' evenings, or you can contact Connexions Northumberland on **01670 798180**.

Encourage your child to research and discuss their plans.

Connexions Northumberland aims to support young people to make informed decisions about their future. Your child's personal adviser is available in their school and at your local Connexions Centre (see page 15 to find your local centre) to offer help and advice, at any time until they are at least 19. It's a free service!

National publications for Year 9 and Year 11 are available and your child will be given these at school. You can also look at them at www.connexions-direct.com/itsyourchoice and www.connexions-direct.com/whichwaynow.

Connexions Northumberland Online

The Connexions Northumberland website provides information on choices, careers and education as well as links to useful websites about health, money, relationships and much more. The parents and carers section of the website includes information to help you support your child. Go to www.connexions-northumberland.org.uk

Connexions Direct

Is a free national confidential helpline. Young people can phone, text or web chat with personal advisers about any issue night or day. Parents can contact it too. Tel: 080 800 13219 Text: 07766413219 Website: www.connexions-direct.com

Making the Right Choices

What help and support your child can expect

The Government expects the local council to work with schools, colleges, Connexions, training providers and other services to improve the help and support they provide to young people. These services should work together to make sure young people aged 11-19, or up to 24 if they have a disability, get the information and advice they need to be happy, confident and able to achieve their best.

They should expect:

- To be told about the different people, places, websites and helplines that can help them with education, careers and other personal, health or financial problems.
- To get information on the guarantee of an offer of further learning at the end of Year 11.

- To be told about financial help they can get to help them stay in education, such as Education Maintenance Allowance and student grants.
- To have an adult they can trust to help them contact any services they need if they have any problems at home, school or college.
- To be given opportunities to get involved in planning and improving information and advice services.
- To be told where to go for help after they reach 19 years, or 24 years if they have a disability.

If they don't get the information and advice they need they should try to speak to someone in their school or college or to a Connexions personal adviser or youth worker and ask them to help them sort out any problems.

September Guarantee

Every young person aged 16 or 17 who will be coming to the end of a school or college course this year is guaranteed the offer of a place on an appropriate course at school, college or with a training provider by the end of September. This is called the September Guarantee. The agreed start date may be after September but should be by the beginning of January.

The offer could be full or part-time education, an apprenticeship or e2e.

Speak to a personal adviser at your local Connexions Centre for more information and advice.

Changes in education and training

Education and training options at ages 14-19 years are changing. The Government has introduced these changes to improve the skills and employability of young people, to ensure that they are prepared for the world of work or further study. Young people now have a wider range of learning options, providing a suitable route for everyone.

my steps

My Steps is Northumberland's online guide to local learning choices. It contains information about all courses from Years 10-13 (ages 14-18) available to your child in Northumberland and describes the providers who offer them. Some students seek learning opportunities outside Northumberland, so My Steps has links to similar online learning guides for Tyne and Wear, County Durham and Cumbria. My Steps is updated regularly, but if in any doubt about whether a provider is offering a certain course it is always advisable to check with the provider by using the contact details given. Specific course information for young people who have finished Year 11 and want to continue in learning is also available in the Connexions publication 'Choices '10'. www.my-steps.co.uk



Levels 4-8	Higher Education		
Level 3	A levels	Advanced Diploma	Advanced Apprenticeships
Level 2	GCSEs (A*-C)	Higher Diploma	Apprenticeship
Level 1	GCSEs (D-G)	Foundation Diploma	
Entry level	Foundation Learning		

Your child is not limited to one route to gaining qualifications. They can change direction, e.g. after taking GCSEs they can go onto a diploma or apprenticeships.

The increasing choice available to young people means that getting information, advice and guidance about the options available will be essential at each stage of their learning.

gcseS and a levels

These qualifications have been changed and revised recently to ensure that they are relevant and up-to-date. See page 11.

Foundation Learning

Foundation learning is the name for the range of entry level and level 1 qualifications that give young people who aren't ready for level 2 courses (e.g. GCSEs, higher diplomas) a starting point to further learning. Young people will have individual learning programmes tailored to their needs to help them progress to other courses, to live independently or to find employment, whatever is appropriate to them. See www.qcda.gov.uk/8153.aspx

diplomas

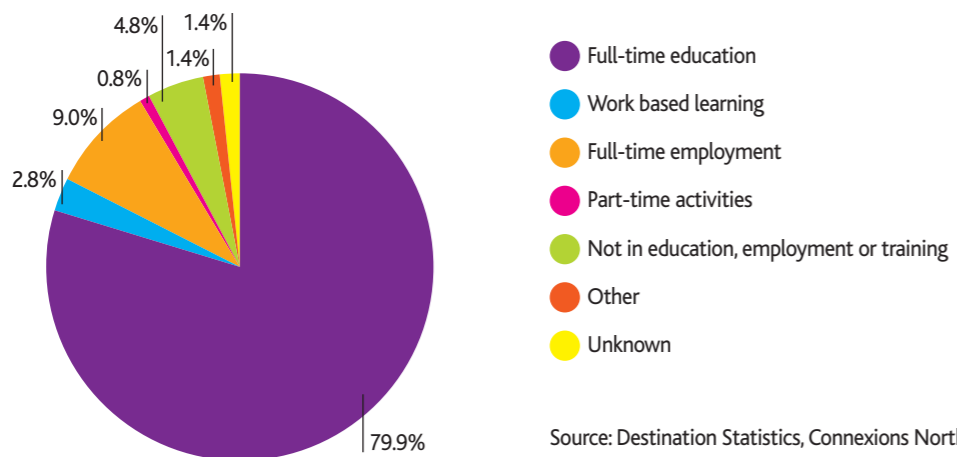
Diplomas are new qualifications that give young people the opportunity to learn in different ways – in the classroom and by gaining practical experience. Although a Diploma course will give them an insight into an area of work, it won't commit them to following a career in that area. So, for example, if they complete a Higher Diploma in Construction and the Built Environment they don't have to continue on to an Advanced Diploma in the same subject or a job in the construction industry. They could still change subject, take A levels or start an Apprenticeship.

Diplomas are taught by groups of schools, colleges and learning providers. This means that if your child decides to take a Diploma course offered by their school they could spend some time every week away from school, perhaps at college or in a workplace. See <http://yp.direct.gov.uk/diplomas>

apprenticeships

Apprentices gain work experience while working towards nationally recognised qualifications and earning a wage. As part of the changes, the number and type of apprenticeships available nationally should expand. The choice available to young people will depend on the area of work and the options available locally. See page 9.

Where did Year 11 leavers go last year?



Source: Destination Statistics, Connexions Northumberland

Knowing about employment and opportunities in Northumberland can help you when supporting your child to make decisions about their choices at the end of Year 11.

- In 2008 almost 4,000 young people in Northumberland completed Year 11. Most decided to continue in full-time education either in a school sixth form or at college. Advanced level courses (A/AS levels) were the most common choice, however specialised courses such as BTECs, OCR courses and CACHE diplomas were also taken by students. See page 11 for more information on these options.
- 470 Year 11 leavers went into work or training. The 9% in full-time employment includes those young people on Apprenticeships. Those in the work based learning category were on 'placement' rather than employed by an employer. More information on Apprenticeships is on page 9. Young people entered a range of employment sectors; the largest number entered the construction industry followed by hairdressing and related areas and vehicle trades.

employment in northumberland

The most recent figures available (2007)* show that employment in Northumberland is dominated by service industries. More than a third of people work in public services. This includes jobs in the NHS, local government and education. The distribution, hotel and restaurant sector is the second largest employer, followed by manufacturing.

Employment opportunities vary across Northumberland. While retail, health & social care and manufacturing are large employment sectors in most of the County, the North has the highest percentage of people working in Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry. The South East has the highest number of people commuting to Tyne and Wear. In the West, real estate, renting and business activities employ many people and this part of the County also has the largest number employed in education. Tourism is important in the North and West.

The table below shows examples of industries that are declining or expanding in Northumberland.

declining

- **Manufacturing** – traditional areas have declined but new developments in pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and renewable energy should lead to growth in these areas.
- **Food and drink** – food production and manufacturing has declined but the number of hospitality businesses such as restaurants and bars has increased.
- **Agriculture** – the industry has been in decline for many years although it still employs 5% of the County's workforce.

expanding

- **Creative industries** – but many of these are small employers and self employment is high.
- **Knowledge Intensive Business Services** e.g. finance, consultancy, training and IT, are expected to grow in the long term despite the effects of the recession.
- **Public sector** – employment has increased in recent years but cuts are expected as public spending is reduced.

However, even in declining areas there is still a need for staff to replace those who are retiring, now or in the future.

The job market is constantly evolving. Twenty years ago web designers didn't exist and there will be jobs advertised in 10 or 20 years' time that haven't been heard of today.

If you would like to know more about the job market in the North East go to

www.realhelpnortheast.co.uk/page/infactsheets.cfm

Connexions Northumberland's Your Chances leaflets are available to download at

www.connexions-northumberland.org.uk/worklearn/learning

Progress to Success leaflets on Construction, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Information Technology and Business Administration can be downloaded from

www.connexions-northumberland.org.uk/aboutus/downloads.

*Annual Business Inquiry, Office for National Statistics, Crown Copyright. Reproduced with permission of the Controller of the Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI).

Learning for the future

Expected Qualifications	Desired Job Level	Learning Needed
GCSE E/F/G or other achievements.	A job with some skills needed & some training – often called "semi skilled".	NVQ 1 or BTEC Introductory Certificate/Diploma. Foundation Diploma.
GCSE C/D/E.	A job which requires qualifications - often called skilled or craft level.	NVQ 2 or BTEC First Diploma. Apprenticeship. Higher Diploma.
GCSE grades C & above in most subjects.	A technician or supervisor level job. Qualifications and training necessary. Junior management. Qualifications & training required. Professional/management. Usually needs a degree level qualification	NVQ 3, 2 A levels or BTEC National Diploma. Advanced Apprenticeship. Advanced Diploma. NVQ 4, BTEC Higher National Diploma or Degree. NVQ 5 or Degree + further 'postgraduate' qualification.

Learning and Personal Development

Qualifications are important, however employers are also interested in potential workers' personal and employability skills. Employers look for good communicators, people who can work in a team, are reliable and keen to learn. Young people can gain these skills during their spare time activities. If they're involved in sport or voluntary work, have part-time jobs, or organise charity events, chances are they are gaining valuable skills and experience already. There are opportunities in school, college and work based learning. The links on this page give information on a couple of volunteering opportunities. If your child is interested their Connexions personal adviser can also put them in touch with volunteering and personal development opportunities.

Vinspired
(youth volunteering programme)
www.vinspired.com/vadvice

The Prince's Trust
(charity supporting 14-30 year olds who have had fewer opportunities than others)
www.princes-trust.org.uk
0800 842 842

Do-it.org
(volunteering opportunities)
www.do-it.org

Free to Choose

Although equality legislation has been around for more than 30 years, men and women still tend to work in traditional roles. In 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission (now the Equality and Human Rights Commission) published a report, 'Free to Choose: Tackling Gender Barriers to Better Jobs', that investigated why this is still happening and ways to bring about change. Don't let your son or daughter be put off by traditional ideas of what jobs men and women should do.

Why is it important to encourage equality?

- There are major skills shortages in some industries in which a significantly low number of women are employed, e.g. construction and engineering. Attracting women into these areas could help address these shortages.
- Occupations traditionally viewed as 'women's work' are usually lower paid than those seen as male jobs. There's a financial incentive for women to choose work where men usually dominate as pay tends to be higher.

Further information

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com www.knowyourplace.org.uk

Work based Learning

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are available to people living in England and not in full-time education. Depending on the occupational area, there may be no set entry requirements (although for most Apprenticeship vacancies, GCSEs (or equivalents) are required).

Which Apprenticeship is suitable for your child will depend on their experience and the work based opportunities in the area. However, all apprentices complete a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at either Level 2 (equal to 5 GCSEs at grades A-C) or Level 3 (equivalent to 2 A levels). They also gain key skills, technical certificates and other qualifications required by the particular occupation. Apprenticeships resulting in NVQ Level 3 can lead to university.

Apprenticeships are usually completed in 1-2 years but there is no set time as they vary in content and size. The length of time taken will depend on the apprentice's ability and the employer's requirements.

Most apprentices are employed from day one. The employer pays the apprentice's wages (minimum £95 a week) and provides on-the-job training. An apprentice also spends time with a learning provider. There are often more applicants than employed Apprenticeship places so a growing number of young people start on a Programme Led Apprenticeship that may lead to an employed Apprenticeship. A Programme Led Apprentice will spend most of their time with a work based learning provider, rather than an employer. These apprentices are not paid but may be entitled to EMA (see page 13).

Further information

Choices '10 - lists learning providers and Apprenticeships available.

National Apprenticeship Service, tel: 08000 150 600

www.apprenticeships.org.uk

www.my-steps.co.uk

- Online course guide to local learning choices

Applying for an Apprenticeship

If your child is interested in an Apprenticeship they should speak to their Personal Adviser (PA) in school, who can give them information and application forms to fill in before the end of Year 11. They can also provide online application details. Vacancies start to open up from February/March onwards. Once they have left school, they can see a PA in their local Connexions Centre. PAs will tell them about vacancies and help with applications and interview preparation.

Apprenticeships usually require the young person to have an employer. Some learning providers will look for an employer but your child can help their chances by finding their own. They could try to contact potential employers by phone or letter. Their PA can help.



CHOOSING THE RIGHT COURSE

A/AS courses

Students can take a combination of Advanced Level courses. They can take A levels (AS or A2) in traditional subjects or in specialist skills. These specialist A levels may be called 'Applied', e.g. Applied Art and Design, Applied Business, Applied ICT or Applied Science.

In Year 12 students usually take a broad range of AS (Advanced Subsidiary) subjects – perhaps 3 or 4, occasionally 5. An AS level can either form the first part of a full A level or stand as a qualification on its own. In Year 13 students usually specialise in 2, 3 or 4 of the subjects they did at AS level, taking A2 examinations in them. Some AS and A levels are double awards. These would be equal to two AS levels or two A levels. Some career areas and university courses require specific A levels. Check prospectuses for more information.

BTEC qualifications include Introductory, First, National, and Higher National Diplomas and Certificates and are available in subjects such as Performing Arts, Graphic Design, Music Technology, Sport, Business, Horse Management and Beauty Therapy. See www.edexcel.org.uk for more information.

OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA qualifications) provide National First Awards, National Certificates and Diplomas and Progressions Awards in vocational areas such as Administration, IT, Languages and Education. See www.ocr.org.uk.

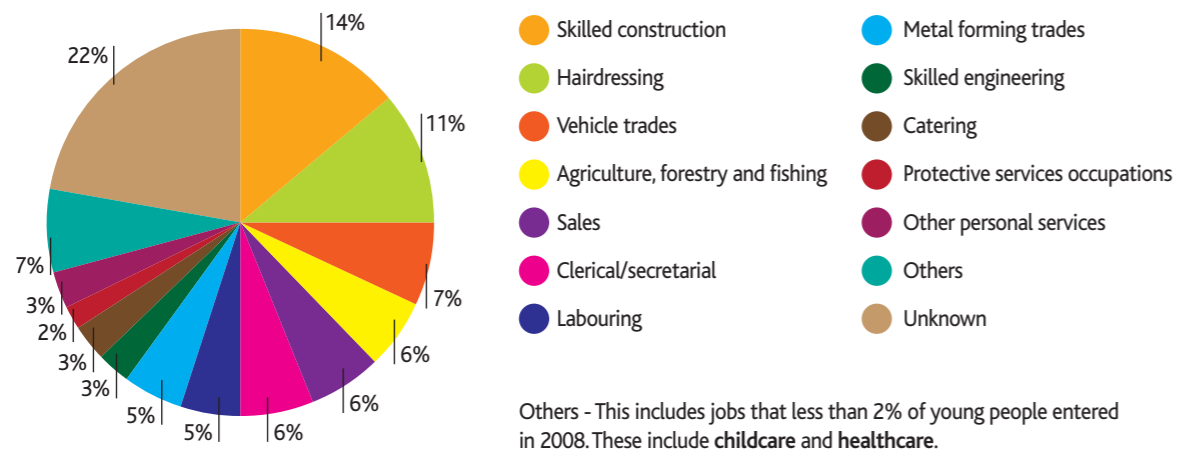
City & Guilds qualifications are also available at different levels in a variety of work areas. See www.city-and-guilds.co.uk.

A CACHE (Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education) Diploma is a two year qualification in Childcare. www.cache.org.uk

Diplomas are new qualifications which are now available in Northumberland. Eventually (2013) there will be 17 different diplomas to choose from. Currently diplomas in Construction and Built Environment, Engineering, Hair and Beauty Studies and Environmental and Land Based Studies are available. Diplomas are also offered by schools and colleges across the region. Diplomas are two year courses available at 3 levels: Foundation (equal to 5 GCSEs at grades D-G), Higher (7 GCSEs at grades A*-C) and Advanced (3½ A levels). Diplomas offer a mix of classroom based and practical learning in a work based environment. They offer a chance to learn about an area of work that young people might be interested in without committing them to a career.

Re-sitting and taking more GCSEs
Some schools and colleges will give students the opportunity to resit English Language and Maths GCSEs if they haven't yet achieved grade C or above. These two subjects are fundamental for entry into a lot of career areas and necessary for entry into some universities. Some school sixth forms and colleges will offer other GCSE courses.

Types of work and training entered by young people in Northumberland after year 11 in 2008



e2e (entry to employment)

e2e is for young people who need some direction and extra support.

Young people are encouraged to work towards a qualification. This might be part of an NVQ, Key Skill awards, a first aid or food hygiene certificate, or the European Computer Driving Licence.

Young people on e2e can apply for EMA (see page 13). EMA is paid in addition to other benefits your family receives such as Child Benefit, Income Support and Tax Credits. Special bonus payments may be available. They will receive the maximum EMA payment of £30.

Attendance is for at least 16 hours per week, building up to full-time learning. Within 22 weeks they could progress into employment, employment with training, an Apprenticeship or Further Education.

e2e is carried out in learning centres all around Northumberland; young people will usually attend the closest one to where they live. Any excessive travel costs will be refunded.



Where to study

In Northumberland young people can study full-time in either a school sixth form – this can be at the school they attend now or a different one – or a college of further education (FE). In some parts of Northumberland young people can attend school and college to take a combination of courses. The main colleges attended by young people in Northumberland are Northumberland College (including Kirkley Hall), Newcastle College, Tyne Metropolitan College, Borders College and Carlisle College, depending upon whereabouts in Northumberland they live.

Reasons for going to college	Reasons for staying at school
A less formal learning environment.	A familiar environment.
An opportunity to meet new people.	A more formal structure to learning.
A different range of courses on offer – generally the range of work related courses is larger because colleges are bigger institutions.	Already know staff and have built up relationships with them.

Specialist colleges, for example Dilston College, cover a specific subject area or offer specialist support for students with a particular disability or learning difficulty.

For the most up to date information contact schools and colleges directly.

Self employment

Self employment is an option for young people after school. Advice and information is available from a variety of places. The contacts below are a starting point.

Northumberland Business Link

0845 600 9006
www.businesslink.gov.uk

(includes a section about starting a business when you are young).

Prince's Trust

0800 842 842
www.princes-trust.org.uk

Shell Livewire

0845 757 3252
www.shell-livewire.org

Young Enterprise

01865 77 6845
www.young-enterprise.org.uk

Right to time for study

The law says that 16 or 17 year olds who haven't got a qualification at level 2 (5 GCSEs at grade C and above or equivalent) and get a job without training when they leave school, have the right to time off work to study or train towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) level 2. Connexions can advise young people and their employer.

National minimum wage

Employers should pay at least the National Minimum Rate to 16 and 17 year olds they employ (not apprentices). Workers aged 18-21 should be paid at least the National Minimum Wage Development Rate. These rates change annually on 1st October. See <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Employees/TheNationalMinimumWage/index.htm>

Money matters

Whether your child is staying at school, going to college, or starting a job or Apprenticeship, they will need to get to grips with money and learn how to manage it.

Education maintenance allowance

EMA is designed to support young people to continue to learn and develop new skills. If your child is aged 16-18 and has left or is about to leave compulsory education they could be entitled to it.

The main features of the scheme are:

- Payment bands of £30, £20, £10 per week.
- Bonus payments if certain targets agreed with tutors, teachers or learning providers are met.

If your son or daughter is thinking of staying at school or going to college, joining an e2e programme or becoming a programme led apprentice and your household's annual income is £30,810 or less they should apply for EMA. If they start an LSC-funded e2e course they'll get the maximum weekly payment of £30 regardless of household income. Payment is made directly into their bank account.

EMA can be received for 2 years. If they need additional time in learning to achieve their full potential it will be available for 3 years.

A completed application form and details of household income should be sent to the Assessment and Payment Body. Entitlement is based on assessment of household income in the previous financial year. Their weekly payment will be the same for the period they receive EMA, although if household income goes down during the year they can be reassessed at the start of the next academic year. Teachers, learning providers and Connexions PAs can help with filling in application forms.

EMA is available to young people undertaking 12 hours of guided learning per week at school, college or with a learning provider. Schools, colleges and learning providers can provide further information.

EMA is paid in addition to other benefits such as Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Child Benefit and is not affected by any money your child earns from a part-time job.

For more information

Helpline: 0800 121 8989
 Website: www.ema.direct.gov.uk

If your son/daughter wants to find a job or Apprenticeship it's important for him/her to contact their local Connexions Centre as soon as possible after they leave school. We can advise them on local opportunities, help with job search and interview techniques. Child Benefit continues to be paid until Christmas to the parents/carers of school leavers who are actively looking for work and in regular contact with Connexions.

higher education

Over 72% of young people in Northumberland continue in education after Year 13. Most of these will be studying Higher Education (HE) courses at college or university. HE courses are those that can be studied after level 3 qualifications, e.g. AS/A2s. They could be HNCs (Higher National Certificates), HNDs (Higher National Diplomas), foundation degrees or degrees and vocational courses such as NVQs. The choice of universities and courses is huge so young people can decide to study at home or at the other end of the country; full-time or part-time.

HE gives young people a wider choice of jobs and helps to improve career prospects. Those with a higher education qualification earn, on average, around 50% more than those without. They are more likely to get promoted in their job and half as likely to be unemployed.

People from all types of backgrounds and ages who have the right qualifications go to university. There is help with money to pay for things like fees (see <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/UniversityAndHigherEducation/StudentFinance/index.htm>).

To find out more log onto www.aimhigher.gov.uk.

www.prospects.ac.uk – provides useful information on occupations available to those with HE qualifications.

www.ucas.com/parents/ – contains information for parents about higher education. You can sign up for a free parents' guide and parents' email bulletins.

taking a break – the gap year

Taking a gap year between A levels and going to university, college or work is becoming increasingly popular – in 2007, 29,000 students deferred university places.

The advantages of a gap year are varied – a break from studying, the chance to travel, an opportunity for work experience and earning money, developing survival skills and becoming independent – useful qualities for surviving university or the world of work afterwards.

If your child is considering a gap year it is important to plan and research it well in advance and in detail to avoid problems such as difficulties with finances, accommodation, travel or work permits. They'll need to check that their chosen university is happy to defer their place. There are many websites devoted to the subject; those listed below are a starting point.

www.lattitude.org.uk (Lattitude formerly Gap Activity Projects)

www.yini.org.uk Year in Industry

CONNEXIONS CENTRES

main centres

Ashington Connexions Centre

88-90 Station Road
Ashington
NE63 8RN
Tel: **01670 811 040**

Blyth Connexions Centre

7 Sextant House
Freehold Street
Blyth
NE24 2BA
Tel: **01670 798 180**

Hexham Connexions Centre

14c Gilesgate
Hexham
NE46 3NJ
Tel: **01434 607 097**

Ashington, Blyth and Hexham

Connexions Centres are open
Mon-Thurs: 9.00-12.30 & 1.30-4.30
and Fri: 9.00-12.30 & 1.30-4.00

part-time centres

Alnwick Connexions Centre

24 Fenkle Street
Alnwick
NE66 1HR
Tel: **01665 605 982**
Mon, Wed, Fri: 9.00-12.30

Bedlington Connexions Centre

Trinity Youth Information Shop
76 Front Street West
Bedlington
NE22 5UA
Tel: **01670 823 267**
Tues & Thurs: 1.30-4.00

Berwick Connexions Centre

5 The Chandlery
Quayside
Berwick upon Tweed
TD15 1HE
Tel: **01289 331 823**
Mon 9.00-12.30
Tues & Thurs: 9.00-12.30 & 1.30-4.30

Cramlington Connexions Centre

Paradise Row
Cramlington
NE23 6QF
Tel: **01670 735 653**
Mon & Thurs: 9.00-12.30
Tues: 1.30-4.30

Morpeth Connexions Centre

c/o Morpeth Business Advice Centre
35 Newgate Street
Morpeth
NE61 1AT
Tel: **01670 511 666**
Mon: 1.30-4.30
Wed: 9.00-12.30 & 1.30-4.30

Connexions Centre Headquarters

7 Sextant House
Freehold Street
Blyth
NE24 2BA
Tel: **01670 798 180**
Fax: **01670 798 181**

The opening hours listed above provide a guide only. Centres may be open outside of these hours. It is advisable to check these times in advance of your first visit.

General enquiries about Connexions services should be made to our Head Office, telephone **01670 798 180**.

