



Parent & carer guide



Shape the future



Hills Road
Sixth Form College
Cambridge

Introduction

The College aims to provide an education distinguished by opportunity, quality and achievement for all our students within a caring college community.

We value and encourage the involvement of parents and carers in helping us to support students throughout their time at the College. Whilst we expect students to accept responsibility for their own learning and academic progress, we recognise that a successful partnership with parents and carers is vital to the success of our students.

We hope the information set out in this guide will be beneficial. We kindly ask for your support with the following:

- Encourage your young person to follow the Code of Conduct
- Hold high expectations for attendance and punctuality
- Inform us if you become concerned about your young person's progress
- Inform us of changes in personal circumstances (for example, address/ telephone number or domestic circumstances)
- Avoid any absences in term-time
- Respond promptly to College communications
- Attend Progress Review consultations



Transition

Transitioning from GCSE to A level is not just a shift in academic rigor; it's a transformative period for your young person's self-discovery and identity.

This journey is a wholly individual experience, unique to each student and their family and there is no one-size-fits-all guide or universal strategy to navigate this transition.

For many young people, choosing to attend College is a deliberate and meaningful decision. It represents a secure yet significant step towards increased independence. During their time at Sixth Form, students encounter a greater sense of independence and are expected to make many more decisions for themselves, ranging from their A level subjects, progression plans, enrichment opportunities, to where and who they want to spend their time with.

This period of growth and self-discovery makes for a remarkable two years but it is inevitable that there will be challenges or frustrations along the way. It may feel in the first few weeks that the pace of sixth form is a rollercoaster, but we find that students do find their 'groove' in a short space of time. Do not hesitate though to contact your young person's Progress and Support Tutor to find out how things are going at college



Attendance

Hills Road, in line with government guidance, expects excellent attendance from its students.

Our A level subjects come to life in lively face-to-face classes, making punctual attendance at each lesson absolutely essential. These classroom sessions are dynamic spaces for student discussions, skill development, and deepening understanding. They also give teachers the chance to quickly clear up any misunderstandings.

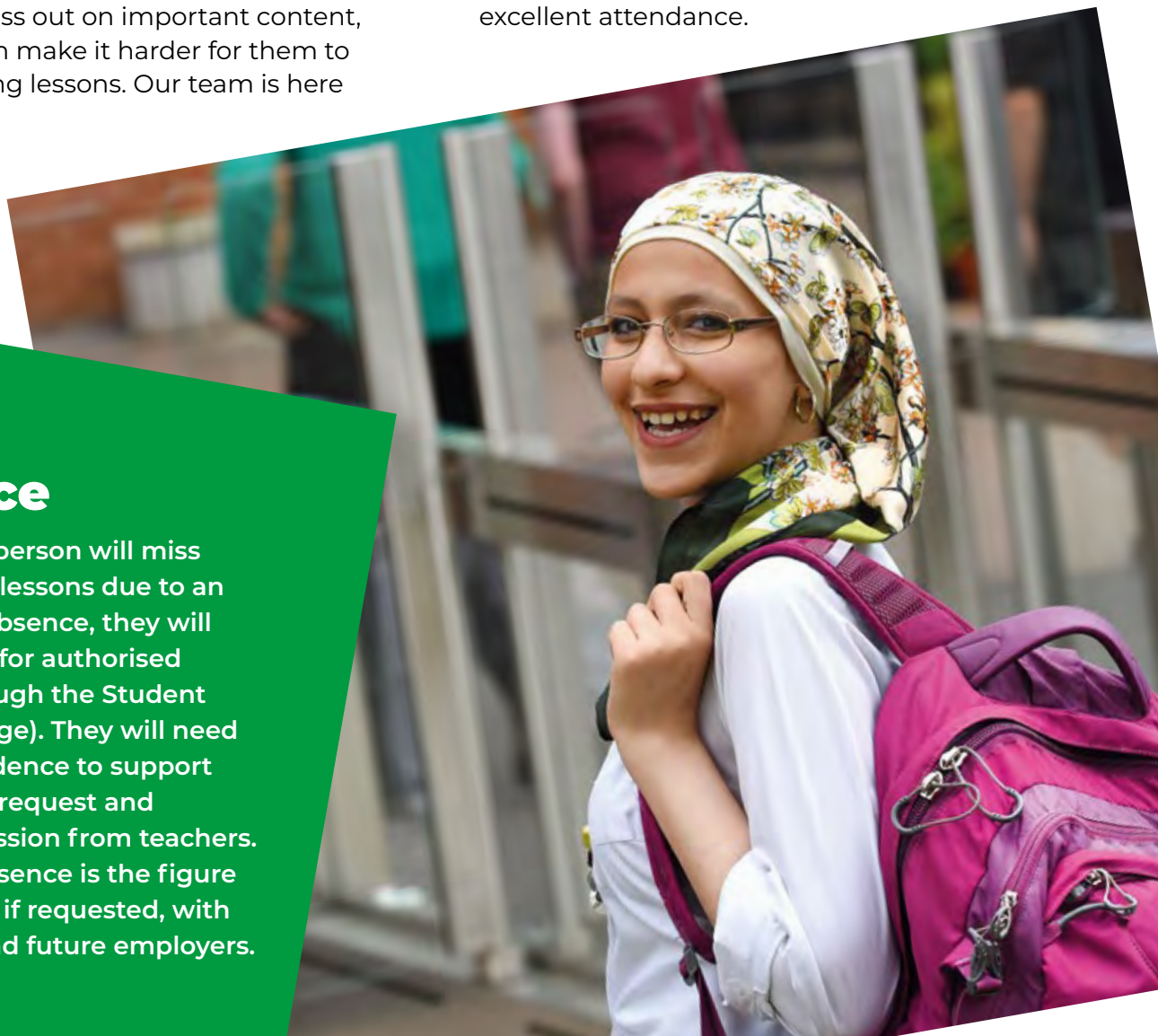
Studies consistently show that students who miss out on classroom teaching tend to achieve lower grades in their final A level exams. When a student is absent from a lesson, they miss out on important content, which can then make it harder for them to grasp upcoming lessons. Our team is here

to support students in attending, staying on track and making the most of their learning.

We'll keep you informed about your young person's attendance every week through an email sent on Friday evenings. It's crucial to stress to them that attending classes, and being punctual, is vital for their academic success. With our support system in place, we aim to minimise the impact of avoidable absences. Our students are guided by an attendance officer, their teachers, and their tutor to help them maintain excellent attendance.

Absence

If your young person will miss or has missed lessons due to an unavoidable absence, they will need to apply for authorised absence (through the Student Sharepoint page). They will need to provide evidence to support their absence request and include permission from teachers. Authorised absence is the figure that is shared, if requested, with universities and future employers.



The role of the tutor

Every student at Hills Road is allocated a Progress and Support Tutor who is the first port of call for both students and their parents/carers. Tutors offer support for both the personal and academic development of their tutees.

Tutors not only provide academic advice but also act as a bridge to a wide array of support services, both within the College and externally, ensuring that students have access to the resources they need to thrive. They are instrumental in delivering programs like the Future Ready Programme, Extended Project Qualification, and Enrichment activities, enhancing students' educational experiences.

In their role, tutors monitor student progression and attendance, proactively identifying students who may be falling behind and will work closely with both you and your young person to create action plans for improvement. They maintain open lines of communication with parents, caregivers, and external agencies when necessary, to create a comprehensive support network around your young person.



ID cards

All Hills Road students are provided with an ID card which identifies them as Hills Road students.

In order to maintain a safe and secure site, students are required to enter the College site via the access gates using their ID card.

Students who have misplaced or forgotten their ID card must report to the Main Reception.

A level subjects and the Extended Curriculum

During their time at the College, we aim to support all our students to achieve the A level results they need whilst equipping them with a range of important skills for daily life.

Helping with A levels

The foundation of every student's timetable is their A level subjects. These are combined with our Future Ready programme to give a blend of activities, guidance and development opportunities individually tailored to your young person's interests and progression plans.

At Hills Road, each subject is taught in the classroom for four hours a week. This however is not enough time in which to build the knowledge and skills necessary for high achievement and students

are therefore expected to complete five hours of independent study per subject each week. Independent learning may consist of tasks designed to prepare to learn a topic, to apply knowledge or skills, to consolidate a topic or to research a topic. All independent learning which is directed by teachers will be set as a Teams assignment.

Discussing how this will work in practice is a useful way of supporting your young person. Homes vary in terms of space, family demands, and other distractions and young people have to contribute to family life like everyone else. It will help everyone, and particularly the student, to establish routines.

If your young person is struggling with their subject, there is a variety of support available. Students have access to SharePoint where each subject has support tools, guidance and resources to aid learning. Subjects also run lunchtime workshops led by teachers and some subjects have gap year students available for smaller group or one-to-one support. Please don't hesitate to contact your young person's subject teachers for further guidance on academic support.

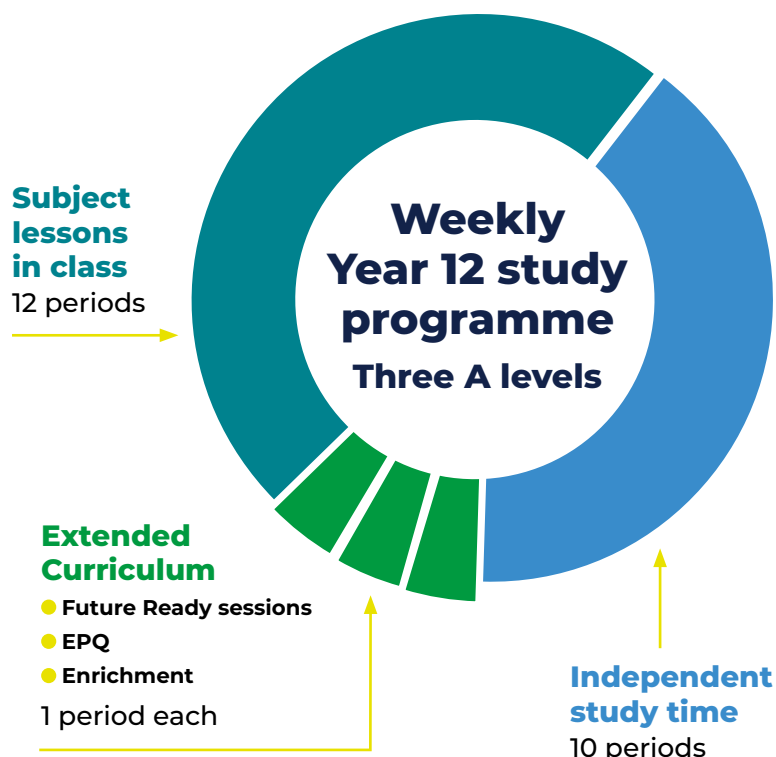


A Level subjects and the Extended Curriculum

Future Ready

Underpinning your young person's educational journey at Hills is the Future Ready Programme which helps students to develop personally and socially and equips them with valuable life skills to support them after A levels, whatever they decide to do. The Year 12 programme covers areas such as Health and Wellbeing, Community, Study Skills, Life Skills, and Future Progression.

Learning occurs through a combination of student input, tutor guidance and external experts and speakers. More information can be found [here](#).



Extended Project Qualification

Delivered in Year 12, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is a compulsory aspect of our study programme. The EPQ offers the chance to develop real independence, resilience and maturity as an advanced level learner, while pursuing a topic of the student's choosing. The EPQ offers an opportunity to try something new, learn new skills and gain extra UCAS points as well as impress employers. The project provides evidence that the transition from college to university will be a smooth one for students who have successfully demonstrated their aptitude for independent learning. You can support your young person by talking to them about their project ideas, helping them keep track of their progress, and up to date via emails from the Head of EPQ.

Enrichment

All students in Year 12 undertake Enrichment as part of their study programme and there are lots of activities to choose from. You can support your young person by looking through the list of enrichment opportunities available and helping them decide which to sign up for. The choice of activities will be shared with Year 12 students in the first few weeks of term. Skills and talents develop in different ways, and they're not always related to A level subjects. It could be that your young person finds a new talent or skill through Enrichment that they decide to turn into their EPQ. Enrichment aims to be fun and relaxing, to give your young person the chance to try a new experience or expand an existing interest, to explore new skills such as independence, creativity and resilience, and to help make new friends.

* Independent study time are timetabled sessions in which students can continue their learning in College (using the College's resources) or at home.

Course changes

At Hills Road, we encourage all students to begin the term by attending all of their enrolled subjects for the first two weeks. This gives them a chance to experience each course fully before making any decisions. After this initial period, we open a short 'course change window' to allow students to request a subject change, provided they meet the entry requirements and space is available.

If your young person is considering a change, it's important to explore the reasons carefully. A level subjects are all challenging in their own way, and sometimes a subject may feel difficult simply because it's unfamiliar or requires a different approach. That said, we understand that finding the right fit is key to a successful and enjoyable learning experience.

Students will receive clear instructions on how to request a course change, and we encourage you to talk with them about how they're finding their subjects during those early weeks. If a change is needed, it's best to act promptly, as switching later means catching up on missed content independently. For this reason, no course changes are approved after the October half term.



Routines, planning use of time and organisation

Sixth form brings greater independence and flexibility, which can be exciting but also a little overwhelming at times. Some students may find it challenging to manage their time effectively, especially when faced with more free periods and fewer structured lessons. That's completely normal, and we're here to help.

We encourage students to think of their free periods as valuable independent learning time, which can be used to stay on top of studies, explore interests, or simply get organised. Establishing good routines, whether at home or in College, can make a big difference in helping students balance their academic work with everything else that sixth form life offers.

You might find it helpful to sit down together and look at your young person's timetable on ProPortal to plan the week ahead. Hills Road offers a variety of study spaces, including our dedicated Study Centre and College Library, both designed to support different learning styles.

For students who need a bit more structure, our Supported Independent Learning Service (SILS) provides timetabled sessions, regular goal-setting, and personalised support. If your young person is finding it hard to stay organised or motivated, their Progress and Support Tutor is always available to help.

► Contact: Studyskills@hillsroad.ac.uk

Bring Your Own Device (BYOD)

Students are expected to bring their own digital device to College (laptop or tablet), to use in lessons and during independent study periods. Students need to ensure:

- The device is fully charged every day
- It has the capacity to use digital ink to write, such as a stylus or digital pen.

Students who qualify for a bursary payment can request to borrow a suitable device from the College for the duration of their two years with us.

► More information can be found [here](#).



Exam access arrangements (EAA)

At Hills Road, we're committed to ensuring that all students have the support they need to succeed in their exams. Exam Access Arrangements (EAAs) are in place to make reasonable adjustments for students who may require additional help due to specific learning needs, medical conditions, or other circumstances.

At the start of the academic year, we'll ask students to confirm any pre-existing EAAs and complete a data protection form. If your young person previously received support such as extra time or the use of a word processor, and we have an established relationship with their previous school, we can usually carry these arrangements forward provided they're still appropriate for their current subjects.

For students who were home-schooled, attended schools outside our usual network, or where documentation is incomplete, we'll reassess their needs as soon as possible. In the meantime, they'll be able to continue using their previous arrangements during internal tests.

We understand that navigating EAAs can feel complex, but our Study Skills team is here to help. If you notice any discrepancies or have concerns about your young person's support, please don't hesitate to get in touch: **studyskills@hillsroad.ac.uk**

To promote independence, we offer assistive technologies such as Read&Write and voice-



to-text software, and we encourage students to explore these tools where appropriate. We also screen all students early in the term using Exact Screening software, which may highlight additional support needs. If further assessment is needed, we'll contact families directly.

If you're considering a private assessment for a specific learning difficulty, please speak to our Study Skills team first. Unfortunately, we're unable to accept private assessments retrospectively as formal evidence for EAAs.

Our goal is to create a fair and supportive environment where every student can perform to the best of their ability.

► Contact: **Studyskills@hillsroad.ac.uk**

Looking after your young person

A levels can be an extremely stressful period for some young people. It is, therefore, important to understand the academic and pastoral support that is available.

Pressure

We understand that it can be exceptionally difficult for parents to find the right line between encouraging resilience when your young person is finding things tough and exerting too much pressure which can potentially become counterproductive.

Initially, it is always useful to have an open dialogue with your young person, which is especially important towards the summer of Year 12 during the mock exam period and the end of Year 13 during their actual A level exams. Helping your young person to develop a list of strategies to use if they get stuck will help them to overcome some of the more challenging aspects of their studies. Another thing is to discuss feedback they have received about their work, not just grades, but in terms of what they have learnt from a difficult piece of work and what they could do differently in the future.

If you do have any concerns about your young person, it is better that they are raised at an early stage rather than wait until there is a pending 'crisis'. Staff are used to helping

students through their studies and we have a large team of pastoral staff dedicated to academic support and signposting to other services within the college for mental health support. Progress and Support Tutors are able to meet their students for one-to-one sessions to help give academic advice and discuss further support if appropriate.



Looking after your young person

Social Media

As well as providing many benefits, you will be aware that the internet and social media platforms are associated with growing levels of anxiety among young people. There are a multitude of reasons for this, and the relationship is highly complex. However, young people can become anxious or depressed and these feelings can be amplified by feeling excluded, isolated, or that their lives don't compare favourably to those of the content creators they see online. Some more extreme examples are online bullying, abuse or grooming and in such cases the College's Safeguarding Team and Online Safety Lead are available to speak to regarding further support.

Sleep

It is recommended that young people need 8-10 hours sleep a night. Most people have experienced how a lack of sleep can affect their mood, causing irritability and exaggerated emotional reactions. Over time, the consequences can be even greater for young people who are adapting to more independence, responsibility, and new social relationships.

Students are often drawn into a nocturnal social life online which prevents them from getting sufficient sleep. This means they learn less when in college and may have difficulty coping. Being 'over-stimulated' through gaming, communicating with friends until late into the night or simply the use of bright screens inhibiting melatonin production (a hormone which helps us sleep) can all contribute to insufficient rest. Young people can also find it hard to swap the dopamine 'hits' designed into their phones for the relatively 'dull' act of sleeping. If your

young person is not sleeping properly that will need discussing as an unsustainable situation. Consider, at least in the short term, asking them to leave their phones somewhere else or with you overnight. Some families switch wi-fi off after a certain point in the evening to help change habits. If your young person continues to struggle with sleep, do seek further guidance from your GP.

Top tips to encourage good sleeping habits

1. Emphasise the importance of sleep and that it improves memory and performance.

2. Encourage regular exercise 20 minutes three times a week will help.

3. Suggest they drink less caffeine Too much caffeine stops them falling asleep and prevents deep sleep.

4. Point out that eating too much or too little close to bedtime An over full or empty stomach may prevent sleep or cause discomfort throughout the night.

5. Try and help your young person into a good bed routine Suggest that doing the same things in the same order before going to sleep can help.

6. Limit electronic devices from the bedroom If this is not possible, try to zone areas of the room for work, leisure and sleep.

7. Ensure a good sleep environment A room that is dark, cool, quiet, safe, and comfortable.

Looking after your young person

Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

Sixth form college is a time of change which can sometimes feel challenging. Sometimes these new challenges alongside personal matters can become overwhelming and this might be the time for seeking help.

At Hills Road we are committed to supporting our students' mental health and wellbeing and we would encourage you to contact your young person's Tutor or the College Safeguarding and Welfare Officers if you have any concerns and to initiate a discussion about how best to support the young person in your care.

The College Safeguarding and Welfare Officers are:

- **Year 12:** Edward Smith
- **Year 13:** Donna Dishaw

Hills Road has a dedicated and experienced Wellbeing team and an in-house Counselling service staffed by trained and professionally regulated counsellors. Each service offers a safe, calm place to think about and reflect on anything a student wishes to explore.

As parents/carers if you notice that a young person in your care is presenting with changes in mood and/or behaviours which are out of the ordinary and continue over an extended period then it is recommended that you also contact a GP.

What is the Wellbeing Service?

The Wellbeing Service offers universal support for all students at Hills Road. It is a listening and triage service. Our experienced members of staff aim to provide a safe, non-judgemental



and confidential space for students to talk about anything that may be troubling them. There doesn't need to be a specific reason for young people to come and visit the service; they can come for a one-off chat, book regular appointments, or see the Wellbeing team as and when they feel they need to. Students should look out for the drop-in sign outside the dedicated Wellbeing rooms on the tutor corridor.

How can students contact the Wellbeing Service?

- They can self-refer to the Wellbeing team via the Wellbeing service on SharePoint.
- Drop in on the Wellbeing team every day at lunchtime.
- Speak to their Tutor, Safeguarding & Welfare Officers, or Student Services Team to signpost them to the Wellbeing Service.

Looking after your young person

What is the College Counselling service?

The College Counselling Service is a specialist free service for students at the college staffed by a team of trained and professionally regulated professionals. Counselling is often best suited to those struggling with a mental health difficulty that needs an in-depth exploration. Counselling appointments are regularly scheduled to provide a safe, predictable space for exploring and thinking in-depth about troubling issues.

Following an introductory session to work out if counselling is suitable, a round of counselling usually consists of eight sessions. Each session lasts 50 minutes and students would meet with the same counsellor throughout. We also offer single-session therapy. These services are available from Monday to Friday and appointments are booked to suit students' timetables and commitments.

How can students access Counselling support?

Students can self-refer to the Counselling Service.

- An initial appointment can be booked via the Counselling service on Sharepoint
- Tutors, Safeguarding and Welfare Officers and the Student Services team can signpost students to the Counselling Service.

Enjoyment!

A levels can be demanding, often requiring a lot of time and energy from students, which can make it easy for them to lose sight of the importance of maintaining a balanced lifestyle. It's important to encourage your young person to continue engaging in activities they enjoy

Keeping active

There is a lot more to life than just A levels and we want to encourage our students to socialise, participate in our many clubs and societies, and take part in any physical activities that they might enjoy. College life presents many opportunities to students, and we hope your young person will seize those which really interest them. Some are simply about having fun while others are valuable life experiences which might help them in the future. Some, such as the Duke of Edinburgh award, combine a variety of important skills. We do find that some young people, however, lack the confidence or don't always see the potential benefits of putting themselves forward for activities that the College provides and so your encouragement to get involved would be greatly appreciated.

as a way to relieve stress and maintain their wellbeing. Whether it's an existing hobby they're passionate about or trying something completely new, these activities can offer a much-needed break from academic pressures.

Opportunities also take place in College through the societies and extracurricular groups that students can join. These societies provide a great opportunity for students to connect with others who share similar interests, whether in areas like sports, arts, culture, or even more niche activities. Joining such groups not only helps them pursue their interests but also offers a chance to explore new ones, develop social connections, and enrich their overall college experience. Supporting your young person in finding a healthy balance between academic work and enjoyable pursuits can contribute to their personal growth and help them manage the challenges of A level studies more effectively.

Bursary Funding

We understand the importance of ensuring that all students have equal access to opportunities, regardless of their financial circumstances. That's why we offer bursary funding to support families who may require assistance. Here's what you need to know:

Any young person can apply to the Bursary Fund providing they satisfy the eligibility criteria detailed at hillsroad.ac.uk/parents-and-carers/bursary-fund, which relates to household income. The amount of money available to each eligible applicant will depend on individual circumstances and financial need.

The Bursary Fund is made up of two parts:

1. Bursaries for students in defined vulnerable groups. Students who meet the criteria, and who have a financial need, can apply for a bursary for vulnerable groups.
2. Discretionary bursary. The College makes a discretionary bursary award to students to help them overcome individual barriers to participation.

Support will normally be provided for students who cannot stay in education without financial help, and can cover a range of needs and resources such as transport, essential educational activities linked to chosen A level courses, learning resources and the loan of a digital device.

We understand that financial matters can be sensitive. Rest assured that all bursary applications and discussions are entirely confidential.

If you believe your young person requires financial assistance or if you have any questions regarding bursary funding, please don't

hesitate to reach out. You can contact the Bursary directly or get in touch with your young person's tutor.

We are committed to ensuring that every student at Hills Road has the opportunity to thrive academically and make the most of their educational journey.

► Contact: BursaryFund@hillsroad.ac.uk

Part-time work

Part-time work can be a valuable experience, whether it's needed for financial reasons or chosen to build skills and independence. It often helps students develop time management and confidence. However, research suggests that working more than around eight hours a week can begin to affect academic progress and wellbeing.

We encourage students to think carefully about how part-time work fits into their weekly routine. It's important that any job does not impact attendance or engagement with College life. If your young person is considering part-time work, their Progress and Support Tutor can offer advice and help them find a healthy balance.

Post-Hills – what next?

We have a comprehensive programme designed by our careers department which is delivered to your young person through the Future Ready Programme, Whole Cohort Presentations, Apprenticeship Mondays, careers fairs and regular email updates.

The programme covers higher education, gap year and employment options, and our students have access to a variety of resources and internet sites to research their options. There are also opportunities throughout the academic year to join parent/carers webinars to find out more information about post-Hills options.

An important part of our student guidance system involves helping students to make career choices. Help with this is available from College careers staff, tutors and

subject staff. Students are advised to research career opportunities as soon as appropriate. Our careers programme starts in the spring term of Year 12; by the end of Year 12, most students should have definite ideas of the options available and be researching particular higher education courses or employment routes in more detail. We recognise the importance of visiting universities to help make informed choices and students can have up to two approved days out from college teaching to visit prospective universities. We ask that further visits take place during weekend open events.

► Contact: careers@hillsroad.ac.uk

Work experience

During Year 12, your young person will be encouraged to arrange at least three days of work experience. We advise this to take place before the start of Year 13 so students can discuss what they have learnt as part of their applications for their post-Hills options. There are various points throughout the year when students are off timetable which is an ideal time to carry out work experience and avoid disruption to learning. Students can also undertake work experience during the college holidays. Our careers team provides information, advice and guidance on securing a work experience placement; however, we do encourage students to approach employers themselves and arrange their own placement.





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