



Parent & carer guide



Shape the future



Hills Road
Sixth Form College
Cambridge

Introduction

Here at Hills Road, we aim to provide an excellent sixth form education experience distinguished by opportunity, quality and achievement for all our students within a caring community.

While we will be supporting our students towards increased independence and adulthood, we very much value and encourage the involvement of parents and carers in helping us to achieve that. While 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 (address/telephone number or domestic circumstances, etc. but also if any significant life difficulties befall your family with which we could offer support to your young person)
- Avoid any holidays in term-time and student commitments during college hours
- Respond in a timely manner to college communications
- Attend progress review consultations



Transition to Sixth Form

Progression from GCSE to A level is not just a shift in academic rigour; 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 are expected to make many more decisions for themselves, ranging from: their A level subjects; their progression plans; their enrichment opportunities; their Extended Project right through to where and with whom they want to spend their time.

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. Typically, students returning after Christmas feel properly settled and like they belong. Do not hesitate to contact your young person's Progress and Support Tutor to find out how things are going at college.



Attendance

Hills Road expects excellent attendance from its students.

Our A level subjects are brought to life and delivered through lively face-to-face classes, making punctual attendance absolutely essential. These classroom sessions are dynamic opportunities for higher order 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 than might have been possible for them in their final A level exams. When a student is absent from a lesson, they miss out on important content and ideas generation, which can then make it harder for them to participate fully in subsequent lessons and for confidence

to unravel due to gaps in knowledge and understanding. This can lead to a cycle of missed classes due to falling behind.

We'll keep you informed about your young person's attendance every week through an email sent every Friday evening. It's crucial to stress to the A level student in your house that attending classes and being punctual is vital for their academic success. With our support system in place, we aim to minimise avoidable absences and encourage full attendance. Our students will be supported by an attendance officer, their teachers, and their tutor to help them maintain excellent attendance.

Absence

If a student is too unwell to attend College, they should self-certify their absence daily using the 'Certify My Absences' shortcut on the Student Sharepoint. For significant illness that lasts longer than three days, you can also contact the College by sending an email to: absence@hillsroad.ac.uk or by calling the dedicated absence line: 01223 278065. Students retain responsibility for communicating with their teachers and catching up with any work they have missed.



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. They 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 core curriculum elements like the Future Ready Programme, the Extended Project Qualification and Enrichment activities, all of which are designed to enhance our students' educational experience and to build their skill set further.

In their role, tutors monitor student progress 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 to support your young person. You can contact your young person's Progress and Support Tutor by email or phone.



Lanyards

All Hills Road students are provided with an ID card and a coloured lanyard which identifies them as Hills Road students. In order to maintain a safe and secure site, both staff and students are required to wear their lanyards at all times whilst in College. The lanyard serves as our official identification as a member of the Hills Road community and helps us maintain a secure learning environment. As such, students will not be allowed access to lessons and key learning and study spaces if they do not have their lanyard. Students who may have misplaced or forgotten their lanyard can easily obtain a temporary ID sticker from our dedicated Student Services team and must do so as soon as they arrive on site. If your young person has lost their lanyard, please ensure they visit the main reception to purchase a replacement at the earliest possible opportunity.

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 while equipping them with a range of important skills for daily life.

Helping with A levels

The foundation qualifications of every student's timetable are their A level subjects and the Extended Project Qualification. These are combined with our Future Ready programme and Enrichment in Year 12 to give a blend of activities, guidance and development opportunities individually tailored to your young person's interests and progression plans.

Lessons at Hills Road are 65 minutes long. Each subject is taught in the classroom for four periods a week, including one double period. Additionally, students are expected to complete a minimum of five hours of independent study

per subject per week in order to build the knowledge and skills necessary for success at A level. 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 commitments and A level students have to contribute to family life just like everyone else. It will help everyone, and particularly the student, to establish routines that balance college work with family life.

If your young person is struggling with their subject, there is a variety of great support available. Students have access to the College Student SharePoint Site where each subject has support tools, guidance and resources to aid learning. All subjects also offer lunchtime workshops led by teachers. In the largest subjects, these run every lunchtime of the week. Some subjects have gap year students available for smaller group or 1:1 support that is timetabled and on offer throughout the week.

Your young person will be guided in strategies to help them reach their potential in each subject, with their Progress and Support Tutor maintaining an overview of their progress. Please do encourage your young person to talk to their teacher or tutor if they have concerns or need support in any way with their subjects. If you wish for information beyond that which your young person is able to access and show you on their online learning platform, please don't hesitate to contact your young person's tutor for further guidance on academic support.

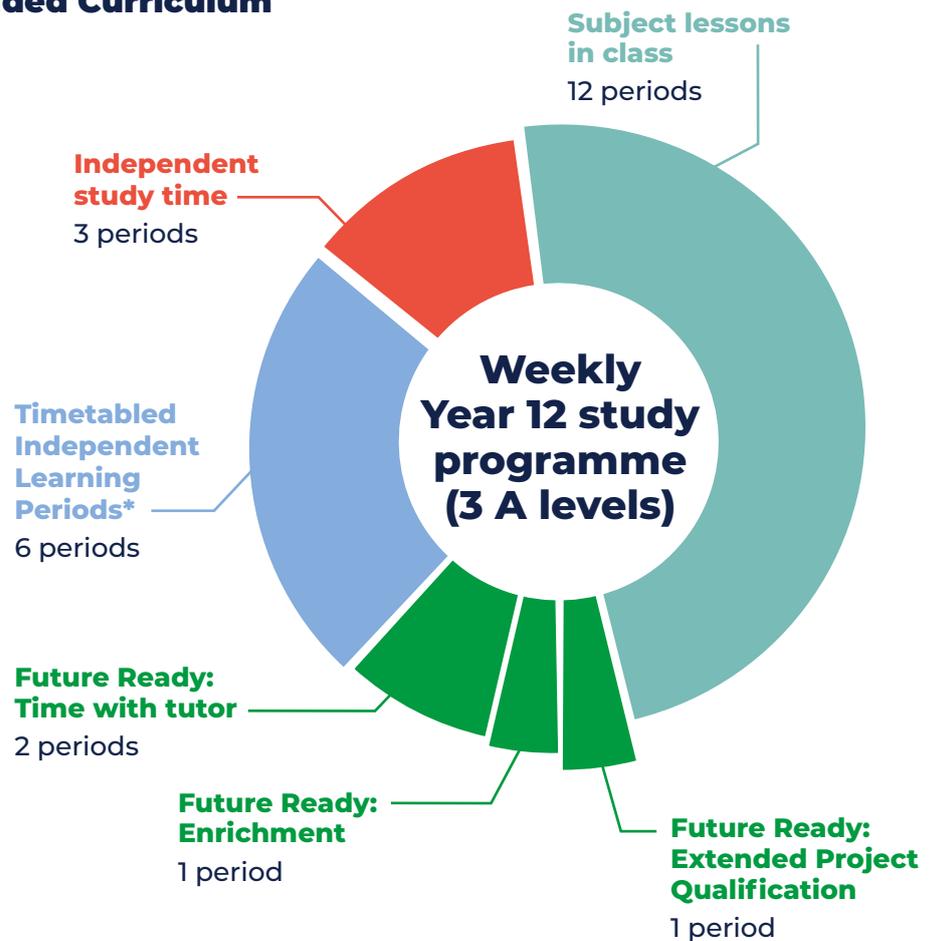


A level subjects and the Extended Curriculum

Future Ready

Underpinning your young person's educational journey at Hills is our Future Ready Programme which helps students to develop personally and socially and will equip them with valuable life skills to support them after A levels, whatever they decide to do.

The Year 12 programme consists of five modules, covering: Health and Wellbeing, Community, Study Skills, Life Skills, and Future Progression. More information on these can be found on the College website. Learning occurs through a combination of student input, tutor guidance and external experts and speakers.



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 keeping up to date via email updates 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 to decide which to sign up for. The Enrichment booklet was sent to Year 12 students in the early days of this first 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 Learning Periods are timetabled sessions in which students can continue their learning in College (using the College's resources) or at home.

Course changes

Each student attends their assigned subjects for the first two weeks. However, if they're not happy with any of their subject choices, they have an opportunity to request a subject change.

Before considering a course change it is essential to have valid reasons to believe that the new course will genuinely benefit the student, rather than simply using it as an escape from a challenging or perceived as uninteresting one. All A levels are hard, it just depends on who you are and what you want to learn.

Students will be sent instructions on how to go about this process. Please do discuss how your young person is finding their subjects in those early weeks: the course change window is only open for a short period of time and will close before the October half term, so any changes need to be made in a timely manner. The longer a student leaves the course change, the more work in their new subject they will need to catch up on independently. No course changes will be approved after the October half term due to the quantity of content already covered in the first half term.



Routines, planning use of time and organisation

Due to the nature of sixth form study providing less structured time and greater independence than they have been used to in school, some students can really struggle with procrastination and motivation.

We encourage students to refer to their 'free periods' as 'independent learning time' to help them navigate their time effectively. By getting into good study habits and routines, whether at home or at college, students will find they have enough time to study as well as to enjoy all the other activities and opportunities that joining a thriving community presents.

Students are able to view their timetable on their ProPortal page and you may wish to look at this together or support your young person in creating a routine that works for them.

We have a range of silent and social study spaces available from 9am to 4pm every day: some are open from 8.30am to 5pm including our new study centre which has been purpose-built to support students develop good study habits. Our Supported Independent Learning Service (SILS) provides staffed structure and support for students who are struggling to manage their workload by offering timetabled slots in the Study Centre alongside regular target setting and review. If students struggle to manage their time effectively, they can also seek support from their Progress and Support Tutor, or the study skills department.

► 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.

► See the website for more details.



Exam access arrangements (EAA)

We use access arrangements in exams to make reasonable adjustments for students who need them. We will ask all students to confirm their pre-existing access arrangements and sign a data protection form when they start with us.

We must adhere to external regulations which are regularly updated, therefore access arrangements which were offered in your previous school may no longer be applicable. If Hills Road has an established relationship with your young person's previous school, we can usually 'roll forward' EAAs such as extra time, and word-processor use (if your young person's subject choices mean they still require it). For out-of-area and home-schooled students, or where previous school documentation is incorrect or missing, EAAs can't be rolled forward. We will reassess your young person as soon as possible. Your young person will continue to be allowed to use their former EAAs in tests while waiting to be reassessed.

If you believe there are any discrepancies with your young person's EAA, please contact study skills as soon as possible: **Studyskills@hillsroad.ac.uk**

We screen all students in the early weeks using software called Exact Screening. Sometimes this reveals underlying processing or reading difficulties which might mean students would



benefit from EAAs. We will contact relevant students following the screening to offer further assessment.

If you are considering a private Specific Learning Difficulty assessment for your young person, please contact Study Skills first. We can't retrospectively use private assessments as evidence for EAAs.

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

Supporting your young person

A levels can be an extremely stressful period for some young people. It is therefore extremely important to understand the academic and pastoral support that is available to your young person here at Hills Road.

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. Try to discuss the feedback they have received about their work and not just the grade achieved. Focus on what they have learned from a difficult piece of work and what they could do differently in the future. Some of the best learning moments come from not doing well initially at something.

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 an impending 'crisis'. Staff are used to helping students through their studies and we have a large team of 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 1-1 sessions to help give academic advice and discuss further support if appropriate.

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. Increasingly robust longitudinal studies demonstrate a correlation between the amount of time per day spent on social media and feelings of anxiety and depression, with the most extreme users of social media content also experiencing the most acute effects. 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 here for you to speak to regarding further support and advice.

Supporting your young person

Sleep

It is recommended that young people need 8-10 hours of 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 can sometimes be 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 other than where they sleep or with you overnight. Some families switch wi-fi off after a certain point in the evening to help change or manage poor online habits.

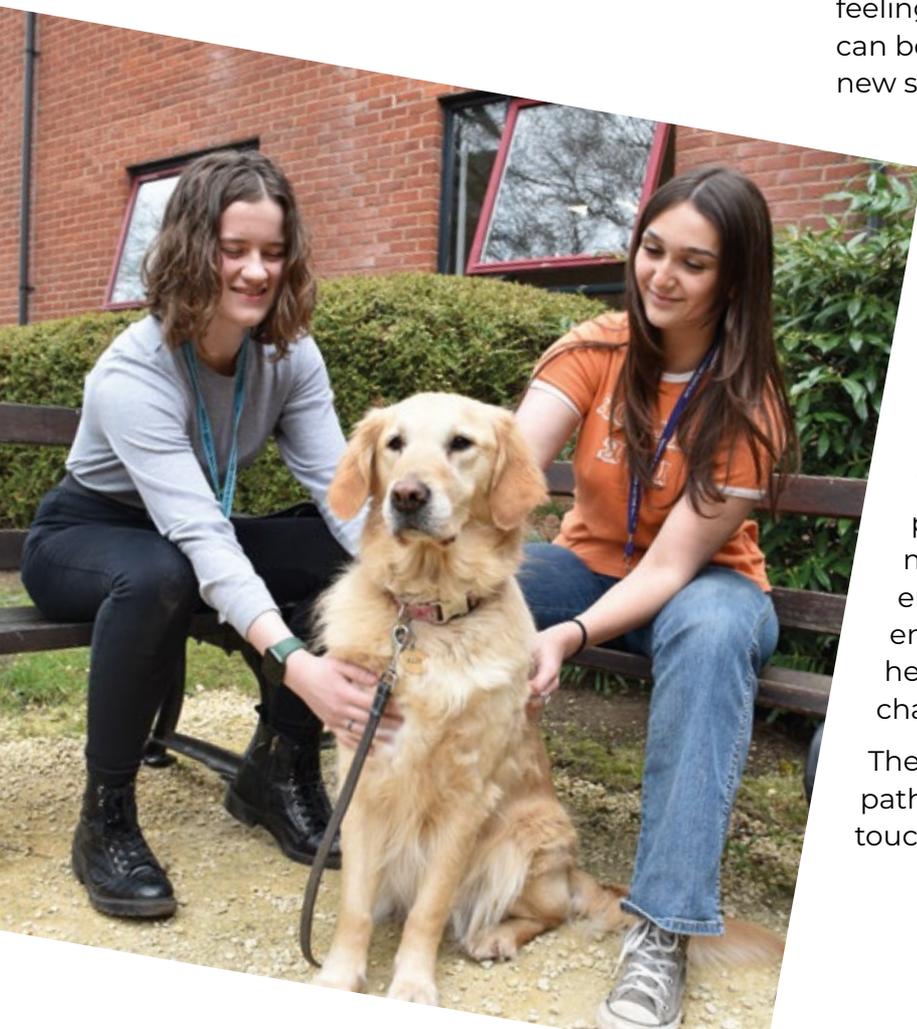
Emotional health and wellbeing

Most people – young people as well as adults – feel low, sad or 'blue' occasionally. This is a normal reaction to experiences that are stressful or upsetting. Young people experience all sorts of changes which can add feelings of insecurity into the mix and these can be amplified when trying to learn things in new social contexts.

For most young people, parents and carers are their main source of support – you may notice changes early and have a sense of what might help. If you sense that your young person is unable to cope, or is experiencing low mood for more than a few weeks, we would recommend that you contact the GP.

We are also keen to support your young person if they are struggling with their mental health or wellbeing and would encourage you to contact their tutor to enable us to discuss how best we can help your young person through this challenging time.

The tutor may suggest the following support pathways, or your young person can get in touch independently.



Supporting your young person

Wellbeing

The Wellbeing team offers a non-judgemental listening ear to students for anything that may be troubling them. This could be anxiety, low mood, friendship/relationship worries, loss, loneliness or indeed if it has been a bad day. There is no obligation and no commitment – it could be a one-off chat or regular ongoing support, whatever works best for the student.

How can students access wellbeing support?

- Drop ins – anytime Wednesday 12 to 4, any lunchtime Monday to Thursday.
- Make an appointment – **studentwellbeing@hillsroad.ac.uk**
- Speak to any of their teachers, tutor, Safeguarding and Welfare Officers, or Student Services team.

Counselling

Our Counselling services offer focused, in-depth support for students experiencing persistent mental health problems and are accessible to all students.

How can students request a counselling appointment?

- Book an appointment by emailing the Counselling team at **counselling@hillsroad.ac.uk**
- Speak to their tutor.

Keeping active

There is a lot more to College life than just A levels and we want to encourage our students to socialise; to participate in our many clubs and societies and to take part in any physical activities that they might enjoy. College life presents many opportunities to students and we hope they will make the most of all that's on offer here. Some student activities available 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.

College Safeguarding and Welfare Officers

Our Safeguarding and Welfare Officers provide one-to-one support for students who require regular support following mental health and/or safeguarding concerns. Each year group has both a Head of Year and a Safeguarding and Welfare Officer and these colleagues work with the Progress and Support tutors to ensure a safe and supportive environment for our students. Referrals and self-referral routes are explained to students as part of their induction.

Bursary Funding

We offer bursary funding to support families who may require assistance. Here's what you need to know.

We understand the importance of ensuring that all students have equal access to opportunities, regardless of their financial circumstances. Any young person can apply to the Bursary Fund providing they satisfy the eligibility criteria detailed on our website, 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 including transport, meals, essential educational activities linked to chosen A level courses, student learning resources (including books), tests required for university entrance 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 their tutor. Additionally, if there is a need for an IT kit or technology support, please reach out to us, and we will do our best to help.

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. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any concerns or if you believe your young person could benefit from bursary funding. We're here to help and support your family in every way we can.

► Contact: BursaryFund@hillsroad.ac.uk

Part-time work

For some students part-time work is a financial necessity while others take it on to build their skills or earn a bit of independence. This is often valuable and, within limits, it can help a young person to value their time and become more organised. The College advises that students should not undertake more than 8 hours of paid employment per week. Beyond this point, the demands of part-time work and studying tend to clash, making it challenging for students to effectively balance both responsibilities. We have seen the adverse consequences over the years to know that 8 hours per week tend to be the maximum amount of paid work that most students can manage alongside effective A level study and progress. If finances are the issue, please let us help via the bursary fund.

Post-Hills – what next?

Our Careers team have designed a comprehensive programme which is delivered to Year 12s through the Future Ready Programme; through our whole cohort presentations, our careers fairs and through regular email updates and newsletters.

The programme covers higher education, gap year, apprenticeship and employment options and our students have access to a variety of our own digital resources and wider 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 Careers Advisors, tutors and subject staff. Students are advised to research career opportunities as soon as

appropriate. Students are welcome to make an appointment with one of our Careers Advisers from January of Year 12. In the autumn term, much of the early focus is on Year 13, but our lovely Careers Advisers are very happy to discuss the progression implications with Year 12 of a potential course change if that is something being considered.

Our main 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 so students can have up to two approved days out from College teaching to visit prospective universities in the summer term. We ask that any further visits to open events take place during weekend open event opportunities.

► 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 that this takes 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 one or two key points throughout the year when students' timetabled lessons are suspended to allow extended curriculum activities to take place. This 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, encouraging students to approach employers and arrange their own placement: support which is available if needed.



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