

espa
EDUCATION & SERVICES
FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

COLLEGE PROSPECTUS



*Realising potential
through autism-specific
education*



CONTENTS

- 3 Welcome to ESPA College
- 5 The ESPA College Curriculum
- 7 Social Communication
- 9 Emotional Literacy
- 11 Behaviour Self Management
- 11 Multi-Disciplinary Input
- 13 The Curriculum Also Includes
 - Skills For Life
 - Creative and Expressive Arts
 - Performing Arts
 - Media Studies
 - Independence
 - Leisure Skills
 - Employability Skills
- 15 Additional Information
 - Induction
 - Tutorials
 - General Further Education College
- 17 Extended Learning
- 19 Day College Sites
- 21 Residential College Sites
- 23 Student Involvement
- 25 Monitoring Progress
- 27 Living Life
- 29 Graduation
- 29 What's Next
- 31 Sustainability
- 33 Getting a Place at ESPA College
- 35 Contact Us



WELCOME TO ESPA COLLEGE



ESPA provides education for young people between the ages of 16 and 25 with an autism spectrum disorder. The College has been open since 1995 and currently provides programmes of study for over 100 students.

ESPA College is committed to providing a high quality autism-specific educational experience to enable learners to maximise their potential for future life, well-being and work.

We use a range of imaginative and varied teaching strategies to meet the unique needs of students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Each student has an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) to meet their own learning goals.

The programme starts in September and follows a 38 week academic year. Day and residential places are available and students may study for up to 3 years.

Individual support and guidance is provided for each student, including 1:1 support when required. Our qualified and experienced staff team is given extensive ongoing autism-specific training from both our own Learning and Development Department and external training providers. ESPA has held the "Investors in People" Award since March 2000.

We adhere to the principles of Every Child/Youth Matters. Student health and safety is paramount and the College has a comprehensive Safeguarding Policy and Procedure and we have close links with local child and adult safeguarding teams. This works hand in hand with a thorough Risk Assessment Policy and Health and Safety Policy to provide a safe and secure environment for all students.

Although there are exceptions, current funding for each student is generally through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).



***"I learnt to live independently,
understand people more, make
friends and control my moods"***

ESPA Graduate

THE ESPA COLLEGE CURRICULUM

Programmes of study are individually tailored and based on students' specific needs and interests. All students follow the ESPA College Curriculum. Teaching is autism-specific, imaginative and varied to maximise students learning.

Some of our students have had negative experiences in their previous learning due to their social and behavioural difficulties, non-specialist teaching or late diagnosis.

The curriculum we offer is based on realistic individual goals and prepares each student for life beyond College. Each student will have an ILP.

Students, whether day or residential, are expected to take an active part in the planning and reviewing of their learning. Learning will take place in the College, the community and other educational settings.

Students' personal progress is monitored by a named Key Worker and/or Personal Tutor.





***"I enjoy being here
because it's a friendly
environment"***

ESPA Student

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The curriculum focuses on teaching social communication skills within formal classroom based sessions such as conversational skills and social rules and relationships. A range of more informal settings such as social, leisure and community environments are regularly used.

Consistent and specialist support in all these areas is essential to the progression of every student. This autism-specific focus underpins the College approach to enable students to achieve increased independence in all aspects of their lives. Achievement in these areas is recorded through the setting of individualised goals and regular feedback on the progress of each student in relation to these goals.

ESPA College recognises the importance of developing appropriate and functional communication for all students. We acknowledge that many individuals' challenging behaviour can be a means of communication. We have a well established approach to supporting students to manage their behaviour by identifying the communicative intent behind specific behaviours, and developing more appropriate and effective methods of communicating this information.



***"I feel accepted,
welcomed and I
really like it"***

ESPA Student



EMOTIONAL LITERACY


Emotional Literacy includes the development and understanding of emotions and their impact on ourselves and others. The curriculum our students follow enables them to live a more rewarding and independent life. It includes peer support, social skills groups and individual counselling. This is a core theme within all ILP's.

We recognise that many students have had difficult or negative experiences in the course of their education and life. Therefore we have a strong focus within the curriculum on developing self-esteem and confidence.

The Emotional Literacy curriculum includes:

- Self-awareness
- Positive thinking
- Self-esteem
- Decision making
- Goal setting
- Making relationships
- Taking personal responsibility
- Team building
- Supporting others
- Men's/Women's issues
- Empathy
- Exploring aspects of adulthood
- Self presentation
- Planning for the future
- Increasing motivation





*"I've had my ups
and downs but I'm
getting there all
the time"*

ESPA Student

BEHAVIOUR SELF-MANAGEMENT


The development of behaviour self-management is an essential element in each student's programme. Students are consulted on the formulation of their behaviour support plans, which enables them to become more independent. Interventions are always positive, sensitive and individualised. There is clear evidence of exceptional student achievement in this area. All staff are trained in non-aversive approaches to working with students with challenging behaviour.



MULTI-DISCIPLINARY INPUT

In addition to qualified tutors, learning support assistants and key-workers, our multi-disciplinary team includes counsellors, speech & language therapists, consultant psychologist and consultant psychiatrists. All students have access to our multi-disciplinary team as required. Individual behaviour programmes and risk assessments are used to help students self manage their behaviour.





"Initially tutors at my local GFE college and the potential employers I met were nervous about how I would fit in. Not knowing about autism/Asperger Syndrome is a real problem for many employers and something which should be addressed. For me ESPA College staff took time to meet tutors to explain my difficulties and how best to manage them, this was a huge help and stepping-stone to getting my career choice of working with children underway"

ESPA Student

THE CURRICULUM ALSO INCLUDES:

Skills for Life - Literacy and numeracy courses are tailored to the individual student's needs after diagnostic assessment. Students are able to advance their skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing and in literacy in everyday life. Some qualifications in literacy and numeracy are offered. ICT is taught in College and in the community and is often embedded throughout the curriculum.

Creative & Expressive Arts - The practical knowledge gained through the Creative and Expressive Arts curriculum offers the student challenges, builds self-esteem and develops problem solving skills.

Working at different levels according to individual needs, students undertake different programmes of study. Projects (group and individual) are specifically designed to provide every opportunity for success.

Performing Arts - Performing Arts is for students of all abilities who have an interest in the world of performance. The project focuses on enhancing self-esteem, confidence, creative thinking and communication through the medium of drama, theatre and performance. We have recently introduced Media Production which allows students to produce short films. Students are involved from the conception stage, through to the editing process and on to the finished product.

Media Studies - This course encourages students to explore current affairs and world issues through written media (newspapers and magazines), television and film. Students are encouraged to develop their flexible thinking, discussion and communication skills whilst exploring a range of topics, for example; truth and bias in the written media, representation of gender in popular television (we look closely at soap operas and comedy shows) and advertising, the history of cinema (silent movies, early talkies, Technicolor), the use of film as a vehicle for propaganda, and how the social and political climate at the time of a film's release can affect censorship.

Independence - Including daily living skills, cooking, shopping, travel, budgeting, social skills and community skills.

Leisure Skills - including sport, fitness and Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Employability Skills - Students have the opportunity to add to their range of skills with such courses as Preparation for Work in which they receive teaching in interview techniques including role play, personal presentation and completing forms. Students are expected to put these skills into practise during work placements. Examples of previous placements range from conservation and shop work through to stage hand, hospital radio and aeroplane renovation.

***"The College has done
wonders for me"***

ESPA Student



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Induction

During their first week in College, all students undergo a formal induction. Along with a tour of the college and meeting their peers and staff, students learn what we expect from them, and what they can expect from us. This includes requirements for attendance, punctuality and behaviour and it stresses the importance of mutual respect for staff and fellow students.

Tutorials

We also have a tutorial programme which enables students to discuss and receive feedback on their learning and contribute to the development of their learning programme. As part of this process our students record non-accredited achievements e.g. social, interpersonal and communication skills. In addition the student is supported and encouraged to set personal goals in 5 key areas: social skills, being flexible, independence, college work, actions & behaviour.

Tutorial sessions also cover current topics and events pertinent to our students and the wider community such as: Our Planet, Chinese New Year Celebrations, Equality and Diversity, My Rights, Bullying, Adult Learners Week and Basic Food Hygiene.

General Further Education College

Students are encouraged to study additional courses in other educational establishments.





***"College was
really good fun"***

ESPA Student

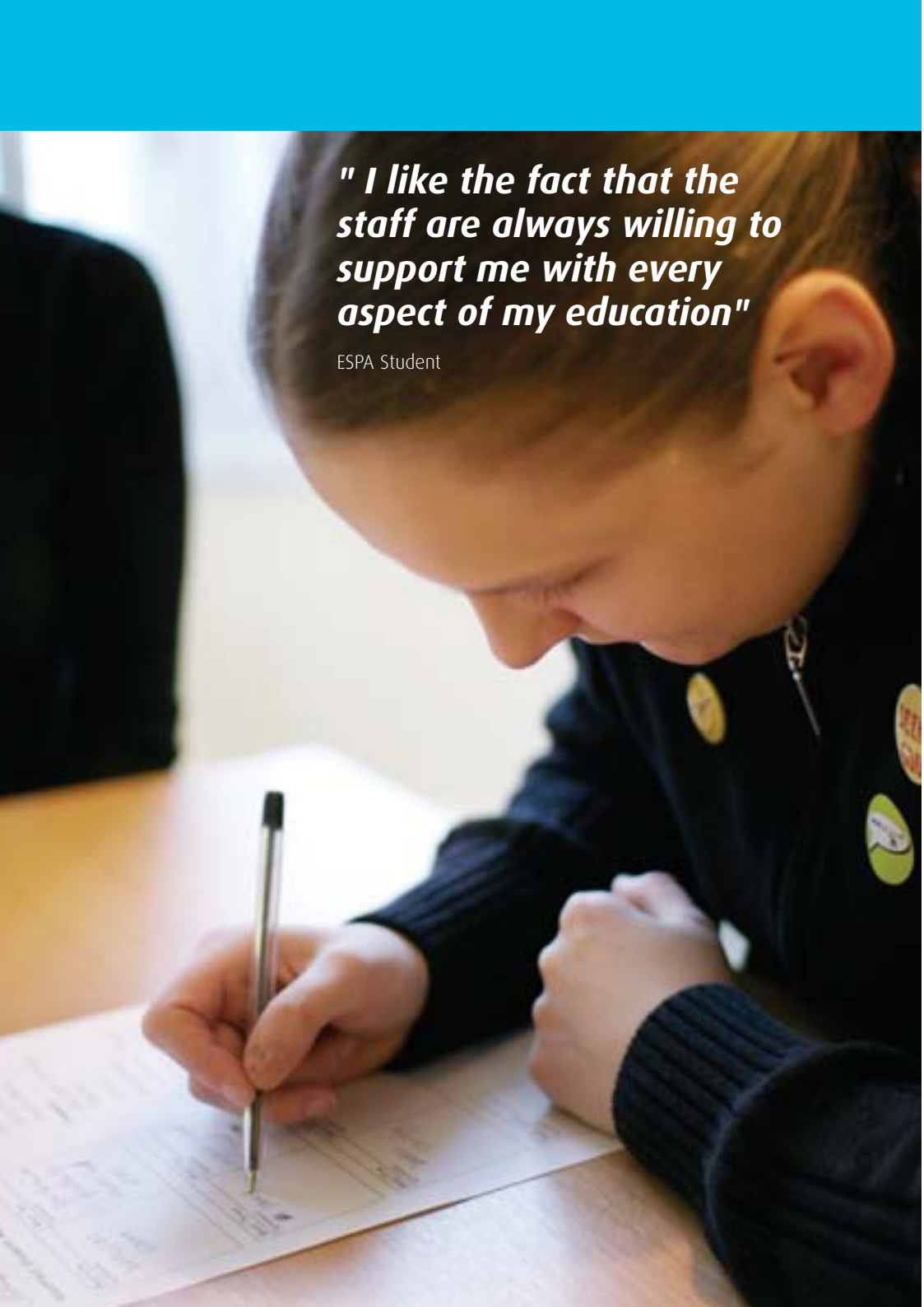
EXTENDED LEARNING

Life and social skills are learned in real environments and for a variety of purposes. These skills are embedded throughout the College curriculum and further developed in the extended and enrichment curriculum. Residential students will learn to develop independent living skills as part of their programme within the halls of residence.

All residential students are provided with the ESPA College 'Code of Living and Learning' and are expected to agree to live and study using these guidelines.

An extensive leisure programme is also available and students enjoy recreational activities such as visits to the pub, cinema, concerts, bowling and dining out. Students can also work towards the Duke of Edinburgh Award.





" I like the fact that the staff are always willing to support me with every aspect of my education"

ESPA Student

DAY COLLEGE SITES

North Rye (Newcastle), Tasker and South Hill (Sunderland)

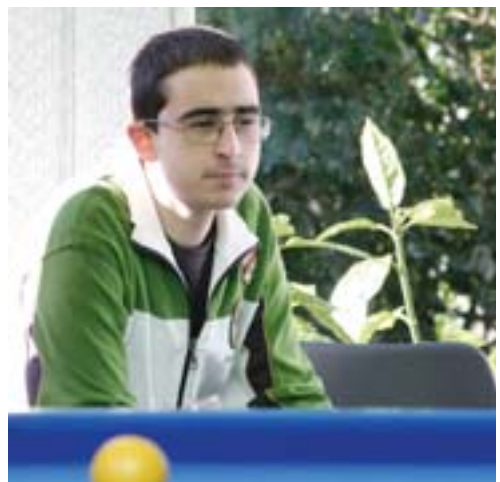
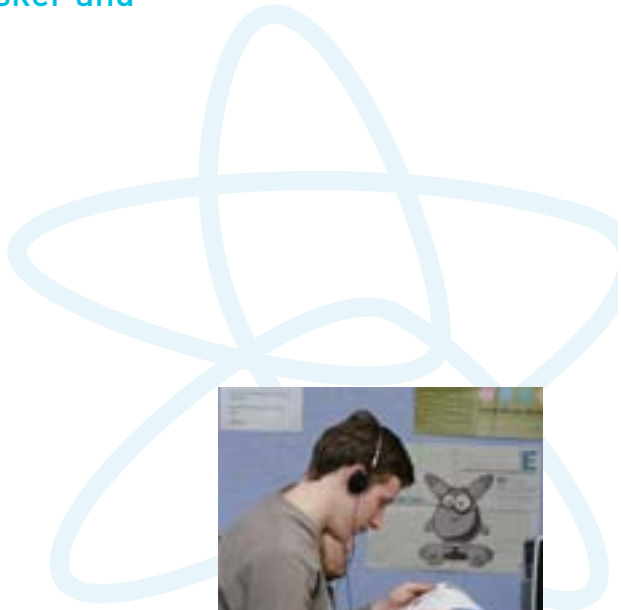
At North Rye most students have high functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome. Many of these students experience significant difficulties as a result of their limited social understanding and awareness.

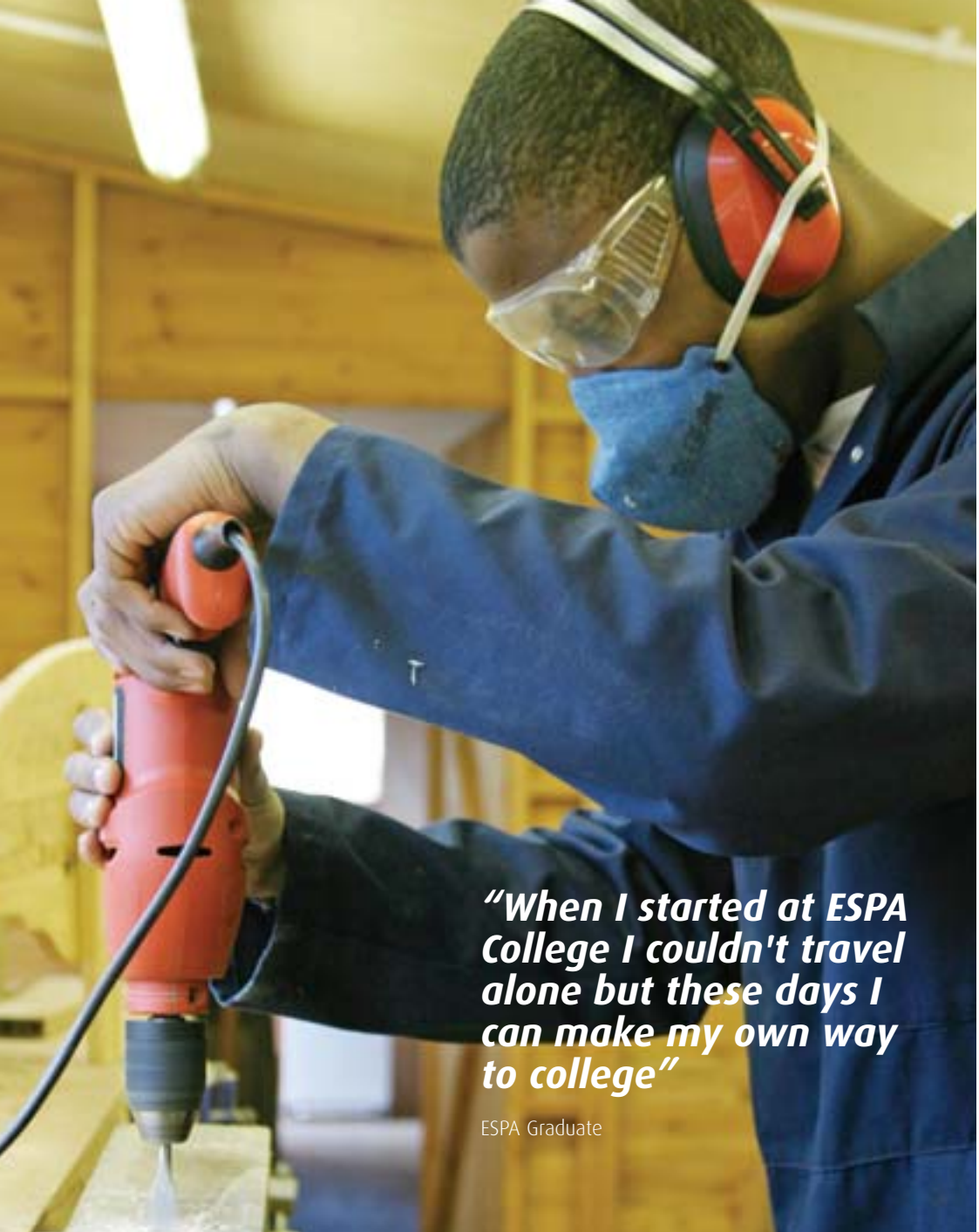
South Hill caters for learners with wide ranging levels of ability and independence. All learners have autism with moderate to profound learning difficulties.

Tasker offers places to people with Asperger Syndrome. Many of the students experience a range of associated difficulties, including mental health problems.

Students are usually assigned to one college site but attend other sites to fulfil their learning programme within the College.

The College provides excellent autism specific facilities such as relaxation rooms, photography studio and IT suites.





“When I started at ESPA College I couldn't travel alone but these days I can make my own way to college”

ESPA Graduate

RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE SITES

Ashleigh (Newcastle) and Westfield (Sunderland)

Ashleigh is a hall of residence offering places to students with high functioning autism, Asperger Syndrome and other related difficulties. It is registered as a Care Home and can provide personal care to students if required. All students have their own bedroom and share other facilities such as the kitchen, lounges and bathrooms. Full time cooks are employed to prepare main meals. All students attend North Rye

Westfield is a hall of residence offering places to individuals with Asperger Syndrome and related difficulties. All students have their own bedroom and share other facilities such as kitchens, lounges and bathrooms. Students are given appropriate levels of support from highly trained, experienced residential learning support staff. They encourage maximum independence while at the same time addressing the difficulties that students may experience as a result of their Asperger Syndrome. All students attend Tasker.

Westfield and Ashleigh provide an extended curriculum. This provides the structure required to enable students to develop practical and meaningful skills, both in their home and in the community. The emphasis is to develop independence, social and communication skills. Individuals are encouraged to manage their own money, budget for and purchase their own personal items such as clothes and have more control over their own life.

The Admissions Team makes the decision as to which college site would be most appropriate for the individual student following a thorough assessment process. Educational achievement obviously plays a large part in this decision but peer group compatibility is just as important, if not more so, to give the student the best chance of succeeding both educationally and socially.





***“College is fun and
it helps me a great
deal with the
general skills that
I need in life”***

ESPA Graduate

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

We encourage student involvement at many organisational levels and have a strong commitment to our students taking a proactive part in College activities. The Student Committee is made up of students who represent the interests of their peers. The Student Committee meets half termly with members of the College Senior Management Team to discuss any current issues and provide suggestions and comments. There is also significant student representation at Equality and Diversity and Health and Safety meetings.

We recognise and celebrate student ability and talent. There are competitions, exhibitions and performances to showcase the broad range of talents in our student population. These may be within College, such as designing the ESPA College Christmas Card, or they may be open for more public appreciation such as participation in a photography exhibition at Sunderland Museum/Winter Gardens and on the BBC website.





***"It has helped
my social skills"***

ESPA Graduate

MONITORING PROGRESS


The College uses a process of documenting achievement known as Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA). This is evidenced in each individual's Record of Achievement and Development (ROAD) file. Each student's ROAD file clearly shows how learning is evolving and identifies new areas for improvement.

An initial review is held at the end of the student's first 3 months in College. This is followed by an annual review towards the end of the academic year where the focus is on transition. Students take an active part in the review process and some present their own views on their achievements using multi-media applications.

Students must attend their College sessions as part of their educational agreement. College sessions start at 9am and conclude at 4pm Monday to Friday. Any sustained failure to attend will result in suspension or termination of their programme.

We publish our students' achievements annually. This is available on the attached sheet and on our website.





*"I think ESPA provided me
with a lot of what I needed"*

ESPA Graduate

LIVING LIFE

Like most adolescents and young adults our students like to take advantage of the opportunities and experiences to be gained from venturing out into the wider community. Nights out at the pub, cinema or tenpin bowling with friends are a normal part of typical student life. Experiences from developing relationships, whether they are friendships, girlfriend/boyfriends or working partnerships are valued as a normal part of life. We provide support for learning the essentials in forming such relationships. Many students make lifelong friendships.

We believe in the students' right to follow a chosen religion and will support the observation of a variety of religious practices. ESPA College has access to a Chaplain based at Sunderland Minster.

We also provide support for the necessary trips to the doctor, dentist, optician and other health appointments.

Programme costs are government funded. Students may also be entitled to receive government benefits, grants or payments to assist with any expenses they may incur, such as DLA, Incapacity Benefit, and EMA. Students can be individually advised on benefits by ESPA staff.





“When I first left school I knew less about the world than I do now. To be honest it was my parents' idea. Coming here has greatly improved my self-confidence”

ESPA Student

GRADUATION

Students celebrate their success at the annual Graduation Ceremony. Previous years have seen this ceremony held at the Sunderland Empire Theatre, the Customs House, South Shields and the Tyne Theatre, Newcastle. The Graduation Ball is also a key feature of the final year.



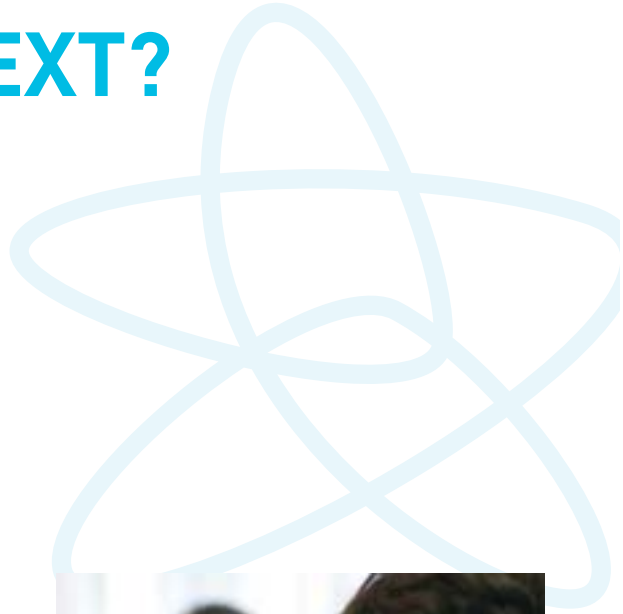
WHAT'S NEXT?

Each student works towards a transition goal. This may be to live more independently, to gain full or part-time employment or move on to additional further or higher education.

Whatever the long term goal may be, and it may change during their time with us, we support the student by teaching the key skills needed to help to make their goals a reality.

The transition process begins during the students first year and often includes discussion and collaboration with other agencies such as Connexions and Social Services.

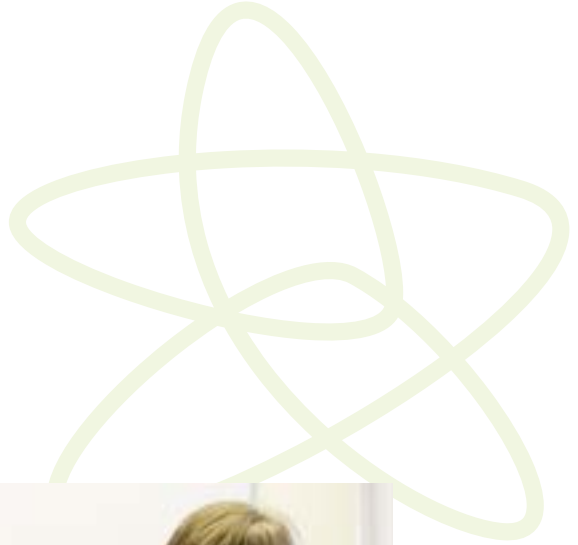
Many graduates have joined the ESPA Reunion Group to keep in contact with their friends.





SUSTAINABILITY

ESPA College is also committed to the ideal of sustainable development in accordance with government guidelines. Staff and students are encouraged to work using sustainable methods from recycling to product choice and energy efficiency. This also involves the wider education of our students about the benefits of sustainability in the longer term for their lives and that of future generations.





BECOMING A STUDENT AT ESPA COLLEGE

The College year starts in September but places can be limited so we strongly advise that for both day and residential college places, students apply at least 18 months in advance of their preferred start date.

We actively welcome all applications in accordance with our Equal Opportunities and Equality and Diversity Policies.

The application process:

- 1** The applicant and family can attend an ESPA College Open Day (desirable but not essential).
- 2** Connexions send a written referral to ESPA's Admissions Department.
- 3** We gather reports and information from relevant sources such as the student, their family, school and other professionals involved. For families/primary carers this involves the mandatory completion of our Pre-Assessment Questionnaire and any additional Connexions documents.
- 4** This information is reviewed by the Admissions Team to identify what they consider to be the most appropriate educational site.
- 5** Prospective applicants are invited to attend an assessment visit, with a residential assessment if applicable.
- 6** If a suitable educational programme can be offered, all written reports and documents are sent to the individual's Connexions Adviser or funding authority.
- 7** When written confirmation of funding is achieved then ESPA College will confirm the place and a start date is given.
- 8** The prospective student will be sent a 'Welcome Pack' from the College which will include the 'Code of Living and Learning' and other essential information.

ESPA College offers 2 or 3 year educational programmes.

***"I have made
new friends"***

ESPA Student



CONTACT US

Admissions Department: 6-7 The Cloisters, Ashbrooke, Sunderland, SR2 7BD
Tel: 0191 510 2611

Placements and Transitions Manager: Michael Smith
Email: mike.smith@espa.org.uk

Admissions Co-ordinator: Gill Linfoot
Email: gill.linfoot@espa.org.uk

College Management Team:
Principal Chris Pickup (part time)
Deputy Principal Sara Everett
Quality Manager Patrick Cahill
Tel: 0191 510 2600

**General Manager
(Residential) and Clinical Lead** Patrick Shannon

Multi-Disciplinary Team:
Senior Speech & Language Therapist Yvonne Houghton
Consultant Psychiatrists Dr Berney, Dr Dover, Dr Ripon
Consultant Psychologist Lynne Moxon

General Management Committee:
Chief Executive Lesley Lane
Deputy Chief Executive Stephen Levy
Finance Executive Karl Hardy

Board of Trustees:
Chairman Paul Shattock O.B.E.
Malcolm Hooper
Philip Moxon



This prospectus can be made available in alternative formats and language if required.

www.espa.org.uk

EDUCATION AND SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM LTD

Registered Office: 2A Hylton Park, Hylton Park Road, Sunderland, SR5 3HD

Registered Charity Number 1037868. A company limited by guarantee. Company Number 2909953