



The Parents' Guide to

POST 16 OPTIONS

2021-2022





*I'm interactive!
Click me if you want to
go to the chapter*

Contents

How to get the most out of this guide

Useful links

If you want to delve deeper and find out more, we've included useful links to other reliable sources. Simply click on the picture icons to be taken to our recommended websites.

Call out boxes

Information we think is particularly important has been highlighted throughout this guide; pay special attention to these!

Summaries

To help save you time, we have provided useful summaries at the end of each chapter containing the key points.

Key terms

Easy to understand definitions are provided throughout this guide in the key terms boxes. Don't let tricky terminology stop you from supporting your child.

Interactive

To make moving around this guide easier, the contents and chapter headings are interactive. Simply click on a heading to be taken to the chapter or page you would like to read.

This guide does not need to be read sequentially – browse what interests you most.

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Wherever we refer to 'parents' we mean 'parents and carers.' This includes grandparents, older siblings or any other person with significant caring responsibilities for children.

Introduction

What your child chooses to do after Year 11 can have a big impact on their future. The choices they make now will influence how easily they will be able to get a job or enter further education when they are older. The main options at this stage are for them to go on to full time education or take an apprenticeship/training. Things they need to consider are the type of qualification they are going to study; what type of learning suits them best (classroom or practical); and which subjects they enjoy.

If they already know the career path they're hoping to take, they may want to choose subjects that offer a more obvious route to that career. In theory that can make choosing subjects easier, but sometimes there's a conflict in the subjects they enjoy and do well at versus the subjects they will need. Of course, they can also go straight into employment, but this must include some guided learning hours.

There's much more choice at sixth form than GCSE, so there will be many subjects available that are new to them. Don't worry about them taking

something they have never studied and then finding out they don't enjoy it or aren't good at it; they can make changes at the start of Y12.

The most usual way forward is for them to stay on at school or go to college and take either A levels or BTECs. This usually works well for students that enjoy being in the classroom. However, if your child learns more easily through practical experience (rather than in theory), they might achieve better results and be happier by taking a different route towards a career. Don't rule out an option because it's not one you know. We'll outline all their choices in this guide.

It's important to bear in mind that whatever they choose to study in sixth form, whilst it will influence what they do afterwards, it will not close any doors. If they make a mistake, there's still plenty of opportunity to change direction (of course, this may take a little additional work on their part). Additionally, should they choose to go straight into work and change their mind later, there's always the chance to pick up their education at a later date.



Providing the information you need

Post-16 studies are very different from studying for GCSE. They go into each subject in much more depth, there is more information to absorb, and the teaching style starts to transition to independent learning (researching and finding out for themselves rather than being told). It's important to make sure your child is making the right choices when it comes to knowing what to study and, in some cases, where to study.

In September 2020, the new T Level qualification was introduced. Subject choices at T Level will be expanded over the next few years, with the introduction of seven new subjects in September 2021, alongside the three already on offer. It is likely that schools and colleges will begin to focus on T Level, A level and BTEC as

the preferred qualification choices for sixth form, and so other qualifications may be phased out gradually.

This step-by-step guide covers the options available from September 2021. We'll explain everything so you know:

1. what options are available;
2. which type of students they suit;
3. the qualifications they lead to;
4. what doors open when study's over;
5. where's best for your child to study; and
6. what financial and academic support is available.

You'll be able to give your child the right advice at the right time, to help them decide which qualification type will put them on their best path towards a happy and successful career.

Join us

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[Sign up here](#)

What can they do?



“

I really struggled with exams during my GCSEs. Choosing to take BTECs over A levels felt the right choice.

What can they do?

All 16 year olds must undertake further education until they are 18. This doesn't mean they have to stay on at school or go to college, they can get a job with a training element to it, but they cannot work full-time without some training. Their options are to take academic qualifications, such as A levels, BTECs, IB or T Levels or take vocational qualifications, such as an apprenticeship or job with training. If they've struggled to get good results at GCSE, they can do an internship or traineeships to get the experience to progress.

Thinking ahead

If your child thinks they know what they want to do when they leave school at 18, this may influence their choices. For example, someone who hopes to train as a dentist will need to take the sciences at sixth form or someone who has a flair for linguistics may want to study languages.

Keeping their options open

However, in most cases, they won't have a firm idea of what they want to do (and may not even know whether they hope to progress to further education once they're 18). In such instances, it may be a good idea for your child to make choices which give them some experience in lots of areas. This way they can find out more about what they do like rather than limiting their options by taking similar subjects.

Learning styles

Another driver in choosing what to study at sixth form will be the way in which they prefer to learn. Those who like course-work and prefer "doing" will enjoy taking BTECs, T Levels or apprenticeships. Students that prefer listening and exams will enjoy the traditional A level or IB approach.

WHAT YOUR CHILD CHOOSES TO DO AFTER YEAR 11 CAN HAVE A BIG IMPACT ON THEIR FUTURE





Level Qualification / educational routes

8	Doctorate (PhD)			NVQ 8
	Masters degree (MA)			Degree apprenticeship / NVQ 5, 6, 7
7	Bachelors degree BA or BSc			
6	Foundation degree FdA or FdSc		Higher National Diploma (HND)	
5	Higher National Certificate (HNC)			Higher apprenticeship / NVQ 4
4	A levels Grades A-E	International Baccalaureate	T Levels	
3	GCSE Grades 4- 9 (C, B, A or A*)		BTEC first diploma	Advanced apprenticeship / NVQ 3
2	GCSE Grades 1- 3 (D,E,F or G)		Foundation diploma / entry level qualifications	Intermediate apprenticeship / NVQ 2
1	Academic route		Vocational route	Applied / work route

Levels of Education

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are 8 qualification levels (1 - 8) plus an entry level qualification for those just starting. Generally, the higher the level, the more difficult the qualification is. Levels 1-3 are typically taught in schools and colleges.

With so many different qualifications, it can be hard to know what they mean and where they might lead to next. To help you understand, we've created a summary of what the levels mean highlighting academic, vocational and work-based routes to higher education.

A Levels

An A level, or General Certificate of Advanced Level qualification, is an in-depth study of a subject over two years with an examination at the end to test knowledge. Learning mostly takes place in the classroom. Students take three A levels, although some may take four. For students wishing to go on to university, UCAS points are awarded for up to three A levels. Points range from 16 to 56 points depending on the grade achieved. If a student takes four A levels, only their top three grades will count towards their total UCAS points.

Subject choices

There are many more subject choices at A level than GCSE, so it's possible they might choose a subject they haven't studied before. If they find they don't enjoy the subject as much as they'd hoped, most schools or colleges

allow them to make changes towards the end of the first term. Students usually need at least a GCSE grade 6 in their subject choice, if it's something they have studied before, although exceptions can be made.

AS levels

If your child chooses to study a subject for Y12 only, they can take an examination and obtain an AS level which counts as 40% of an A level. AS levels count towards UCAS points, ranging from 20 points (A grade) through 6 points (E grade), although not all schools/colleges offer AS levels.

Key tip:

If your child wants to benefit from different learning styles, most schools offer the option to take a combination of A levels with BTEC.

I'm interactive! Click me and I'll take you to their website



Useful links

UCAS

The Uni Guide

A LEVELS CAN BE STUDIED ALONGSIDE OTHER QUALIFICATIONS SUCH AS BTECS OR AN EPQ



Extended Project Qualification

Alongside A levels (or equivalent), many schools offer EPQ (Extended Project Qualification) which is a dissertation or project created on the basis of independent research and worth between 8 and 28 UCAS points. Students can choose the subject matter, so this can be focused around their interests.

A different approach to learning

There's minimum supervision for EPQs, just a little light guidance. This means that research, structure and composition of the project is down to your child, as is meeting deadlines. This approach is much closer to what will be expected at university (or even in the workplace), so it's a good introduction to them finding their own way of learning. However, this style of working doesn't suit everyone, so check whether your child can cope with the added pressures an EPQ may bring.

SOME UNIVERSITIES MAY LOWER THEIR TYPICAL OFFER IF A PARTICULAR GRADE IS ACHIEVED IN THE EPQ



University offers

An EPQ is the equivalent to half an A-level. Unlike a fourth A level, the EPQ points are added to the UCAS total combined with the total achieved from the first three A level passes, so it can be a useful way for your child to increase their UCAS points.

For universities that use subject grades rather than UCAS points for entry, some may even make two offers: one without the EPQ and one including the EPQ. For example, the standard offer might be BBB but the second offer (with the EPQ) could be BBC plus a pass grade in the EPQ. This might allow your child the flexibility they need to meet the entry requirements of competitive universities.

Key tip:

Students can choose the subject matter for their EPQ, so this can be focused around their interests or future degree / career plans.

Useful links

CIFE

What skills will your child develop

In developing their own way of working, they're likely to become better at:

- Managing their time;
- Conducting research;
- Summarising lots of information clearly;
- Motivating themselves;
- Presenting to an audience;
- Reflecting;
- Working independently;
- Responding to feedback;
- Accepting when things don't go to plan.

These can be excellent qualities to mention in personal statements (if they are applying to university) or for discussion in interviews for jobs.

IB ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO BECOME ACTIVE, COMPASSIONATE AND LIFE-LONG LEARNERS



The International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma is offered by schools worldwide and aims to provide both breadth and depth of knowledge. Students choose up to six subjects (three standard level and three at higher level) as well as undertaking some compulsory core modules. Most learning is theory, although there are some practical elements.

IB is graded by levels, with Level 7 (IBO certificate in higher level) earning 56 UCAS points. There are over 200 schools in the UK offering the IB diploma, although many are fee-paying schools.

Key tip:

The International Baccalaureate Organisation ("IBO") does not inspect schools once they have been approved to run IB, believing that results reflect standards, so it's important to check recent results.

Core modules

In addition to their six subjects, each student must undertake three core modules designed to encourage them to become active, compassionate and life-long learners. These are:

- An extended essay - an in-depth study of a question relating to one of their chosen subjects, which requires independent research.
- The theory of knowledge - a course on critical thinking assessed through both an oral presentation and a 1,600 word essay.
- Creativity, action, service (CAS) - a series of activities alongside the student's academic study in creative thinking, healthy living and service to the community. The three strands of CAS are designed to grow a student's personal and interpersonal development through a journey of self discovery.

Useful links

[IBO](#)

[Good Schools Guide](#)

BTEC Nationals

BTECs at Level 3 are a similar standard to A levels with a focus on vocational subjects. The subsidiary diploma is equivalent to one A level, the diploma is equivalent to two and the extended diploma is equivalent to three A levels. Study takes place over a two year period and is a combination of both practical and theory. Knowledge is tested through course work and a final examination (comprising 40% of the total grade).

For those wishing to go to university, subsidiary diplomas offer the same opportunity to earn UCAS points as A levels (15 to 56 points). UCAS points for BTEC diplomas and extended diploma are double and trebled respectively.

If your child prefers learning through practical application, they will more likely do better taking BTECs than A levels. However, some universities have a preference for A levels over BTEC, so if your child has their heart set on a specific university or course, it's worth checking entry requirements to see whether this will influence their sixth form choices.

Most schools offer the option to take a combination of BTECs and A levels.

Key tip:

BTECs offer the chance of earning the same points for UCAS as A levels and provide a way to learn through practical application and coursework.

More information

UCAS

**BTECS COMBINE
PRACTICAL LEARNING
WITH CLASSROOM STUDY**



T Levels (England only)

T Levels, or Technical Level Qualifications, are a new government backed qualification introduced as of September 2020 and equivalent to 3 A Levels. These 2-year courses have been developed in collaboration with employers and businesses so that the content meets the needs of industry and prepares students for working life.

T Levels offer students a mixture of classroom learning with an 'on-the-job' placement equating to 315 hours (approximately 45 days or 20% of the course time). They provide the knowledge, skills and experience needed for students to get ahead in their chosen industries or go on to further study or a higher apprenticeship. T-Levels offer the chance to earn between 72 and 168 UCAS points.

Subjects

In September 2021, seven new areas of study were added to the three available

for the September 2020 launch:

- building services engineering for construction (new)
- design, surveying and planning for construction
- digital business services (new)
- digital production, design and development
- digital support and services (new)
- education and childcare
- health (new)
- healthcare science (new)
- on-site construction (new)
- science (new)

Further expansion will take place through 2023. T Levels are currently only available in England and differ from apprenticeships because the proportion of study time and working time is reversed.

Key tip:

Some schools will offer T Levels, but most will be found through colleges due to the type of training required.

More information

Gov.uk

Pearson Education

T Levels Gov. UK

The Institute for Technical Education

T LEVELS ARE A NEW TECHNICAL BASED QUALIFICATION BEING INTRODUCED FROM 2020



Other qualifications

Other qualifications available include Cambridge Technicals, City and Guilds, National Vocational Qualifications and Tech Bac (similar to the International Baccalaureate). They are vocational driven courses – i.e. centred around jobs and are well suited to students who know what type of job they want to do when they leave education or who prefer a more practical working style but still want to include classroom learning in their education.

Key tip:

In most cases no UCAS points are awarded but these qualifications provide an excellent route into industry.

Cambridge Technicals

With examination marks split 50%-50% between coursework and examinations, the Cambridge Technicals offer a very practical route to learning, but students must be well-organised, able to handle lots of projects at once and be able to meet deadlines in order to succeed.

National Vocational Qualification

National Vocational Qualification is a work-based way of learning. There are no examinations, assessment is made on a student's competence to complete the task. Whilst NVQs are vocationally focused, they can be studied at school and college as well as at work.

Useful links

Cambridge
Technicals

City and
Guilds

National
Vocational
Qualifications

Tech Bacs

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are real jobs which include learning elements which might take place at university, college or an education provider. Apprenticeships were developed to help address the skills shortage in UK businesses. They provide a way of combining learning with on the job training to build professional skills transferable from one organisation to another.

Sixteen year olds can start an apprenticeship at Level 2 (few qualifications required) or Level 3 (5 GCSEs required). There is no level one as enrolling on an apprenticeship requires demonstrating a certain ability. Students with no qualifications can take on a traineeship or internship to help them achieve the necessary skills to start an apprenticeship - see page 32.

Most apprenticeships work towards one or more qualifications. These qualifications correspond to the level of apprenticeship. Advanced apprenticeships (level 3) provide qualifications equivalent to 2 A levels. Level 3 qualifications may include National Certificates, National Diplomas or NVQs which will open up choices once your child is 18.

Flexibility

Apprenticeships are often flexible in that it may be possible to extend the apprenticeship period and obtain a higher qualification. For example, some apprenticeships will allow students to continue on to a higher apprenticeship (level 4 / 5) once the advanced apprenticeship is complete. Always check with their employer whether such progression is possible.

RESEARCH STARTS BY DECIDING WHAT LEVEL APPRENTICESHIP YOUR CHILD WOULD LIKE TO TAKE

Useful links

[Amazing Apprenticeship](#)

[GOV.uk](#)

[Pearson Education](#)

[The Parents' Guide to](#)



Apprenticeship levels



LEVEL 2 *Intermediate apprenticeships*

Typical length
12-18 months

Entry requirements:
None or few

Qualifications obtained:
GCSE, BTEC or equivalent

Who's it for?
Mostly for 16-year-olds with limited or no academic qualifications.



LEVEL 4/5 *Higher apprenticeships*

Typical length
3-5 years

Entry requirements:
A levels or equivalent

Qualifications obtained:
Higher national diploma / foundation degree

Who's it for?
Mostly for those who want to qualify for professional career paths without attending university or college. Sometimes referred to as 'school leaver' or 'non-graduate' programmes.



LEVEL 3 *Advanced apprenticeships*

Typical length
12-24 months

Entry requirements:
Usually 5 GCSEs

Qualifications obtained:
A levels or equivalent

Who's it for?
Mostly for 16-year-olds with reasonable academic achievements but who don't want to study in sixth form.



LEVEL 6/7 *Degree apprenticeships*

Typical length
3-7 years

Entry requirements:
At least 2 A levels or equivalent

Qualifications obtained:
A BA or BSc degree or higher

Who's it for?
Mostly for those with excellent sixth form results that want to study for a degree or similar whilst working. Aimed at attracting high-calibre candidates to bridge professional skills gaps.

Traineeships and internships

Traineeships

Traineeships are short-term work placements lasting up to a maximum of six months to help young people become “job ready”. The work experience element includes at least 100 hours on the job training to help provide the necessary experience to undertake apprenticeships or other employment.

Internships

Whilst internships can be useful, they should not be confused with apprenticeships. Internships are informal arrangements with an employer, there is rarely a signed contract, they are usually short-term (less than one year) and they do not result in a formal qualification. They do offer an insight into business,

networking opportunities, the possibility of job offers afterwards and the ability to learn practical, transferable skills. They may be useful in giving a student enough experience to start an apprenticeship.

Supported internships

Supported internships are for students with learning difficulties or impairments who want to get a job and need extra support to do this. They're a good way to get the training and experience your child needs to get into work.

Key tip:

These routes can be very helpful for non-academic students who may be better at picking up practical skills.

Useful links

[Gov.uk
Traineeships](https://www.gov.uk/traineeships)

[GOV.uk
Internships](https://www.gov.uk/internships)



Summary table - part 1

	A levels	International Baccalaureate	BTEC Nationals	T-Levels (England only)
Qualification type	General Certificate of Advanced level qualification	International Baccalaureate Diploma	Business and Technology Education Council Diplomas	Technical Level Qualification
Type of learning	Mostly theory	Mostly theory, some practical	Combination of practical and theory	Classroom learning (80%) with industry placement (20%)
Qualifications needed to sign up	At least x5 GCSE grade 4 – 9. At least grade 5/6 in the subject/s chosen for A level	Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs	Up to 5 GCSEs	Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs
Subject choices	Three subjects	Up to six subjects (three standard level and three at higher level plus some compulsory modules including an extended essay)	Three vocational subjects	One industry field, construction, digital production or education.
Commitment	2 years full time			
Tuition costs	Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)			
UCAS points awarded for passing	56 points – A* 48 points – A 40 points – B 32 points – C 24 points – D 16 points – E	56 points - Higher Level 7 48 points - Higher Level 6 32 points - Higher Level 5 24 points - Higher Level 4 12 points - Higher Level 3	For subsidiary diploma: 56 points – D* (distinction) 48 points – D 32 points – M (merit) 16 points – P (pass) <i>Points are doubled for diploma and tripled for extended diploma</i>	168 points - Distinction* 144 points - Distinction 120 points - Merit 96 points – Pass (C or above) 72 points – Pass (D or E)
Can lead to	University, further study, training or work	University, further study, training or work	University, further study, training, professional development programmes or work	University, further study, training, professional development programmes or work

Summary table - part 2

	Cambridge Technicals	Other qualifications	BTEC apprenticeship	Other options
Qualification type	A Cambridge Technical Extended Certificate (equivalent to an A level) or Cambridge Technical Diploma (equivalent to x2 A levels)	City and Guilds; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or Tech Bac (similar to Baccalaureate)	Advanced Level 3 (equivalent to x2 A levels)	Traineeship / Volunteer with training / internship – all to help your child get enough skills to take on an apprenticeship or other form of qualification if they do not already have the minimum qualification requirements.
Type of learning	Practical course with lots of coursework based on real life case studies	Dependent on the qualification, most contain practical on the job training	Work based including off-site learning	Work based
Qualifications needed to sign up	At least x5 GCSE passes	x5 GCSE passes	Advanced Level 3 - depends on employer, some require at least 3 GCSEs	None
Subject choices	Range of vocational subjects	Range of vocational subjects	Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered	Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered
Commitment	2 years	2 years (level 3)	1-2 years	6 weeks – 6 months
Tuition costs	Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)			
UCAS points awarded for passing	Cambs Tech level 3: 56 points – D* (distinction) 48 points – D 32 points – M (merit) 16 points – P (pass)	In most cases no UCAS points are awarded but there are some exceptions.	n/a	n/a
Can lead to	University, further study, training or work	Further study, training, professional development programmes or work	University, further study, training or work	Further study, apprenticeships or job offers

Summary

There are lots of choices available to your child once they've completed GCSEs, so make sure they know what's on offer.

1. A level and IB are more suited to theoretical learning;
2. BTECs and T Levels are great for those who enjoy practical

experience and coursework;

3. EPQ offers the chance to earn more UCAS points as well as undertaking a project centred around your child's personal interests;
4. Apprenticeships, traineeships and internships provide on the job training and valuable experience.



Advice from parents



There are lots of options open to your child, so make sure they understand them all before making a final decision. It's OK if your child doesn't know what they might want to do after school – try to help them make choices that will keep their options open.



Attend open days to get first hand experience of the atmosphere at different learning providers if your child is thinking of making a switch from school. Finding the right learning environment is very important for their future success.



Make sure your child's contact details are up-to-date on CVs and applications, especially if using personal email addresses, otherwise they could miss out on potential offers.

The Parents' Guide to Standing out

Applying for jobs and/or university is incredibly competitive, often with hundreds of applicants for just a few places. So how can your child stand out from others? By demonstrating interests outside their academic studies.

In The Parents' Guide to Standing out from the crowd, we explore different things your child can do to expand their interests and find out more about subjects they might like to study in future. This includes taking up healthy habits, improving their skillset and harnessing their personal strengths.

Put them onto the path to success:

- ✓ Self-development and increasing confidence through reading, audiobooks and podcasts;
- ✓ Getting work experience (including virtual placements);
- ✓ Benefits of research and how to take a different approach;
- ✓ How different hobbies impact mental and physical health – and what transferrable skills they develop with dedicated sections on music and sports;
- ✓ Recommendations for non-curricular online courses; and
- ✓ Benefits of competitions and awards.



HELPING YOUR CHILD
**STAND OUT FROM
 THE CROWD** 2021-2022

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Making informed choices



“

At 16 I was ready to leave school. I went to my local college where I was able to have a fresh start in a more adult environment.

Choosing the right qualifications

For some children the decision on what to study after their GCSEs will be fairly straightforward. For others, narrowing their subject choices may prove trickier. If your child needs some extra guidance, it's important to consider the following:

What your child is good at and enjoys

Almost all of us tend to be better at things we enjoy than things we don't. If your child has a natural passion for certain subjects, they will likely make good sixth form choices. Additionally, your child will need to spend a lot of time on each sixth form option they select, so it's a good idea that they have an interest in the subjects they study.

GCSE results can be a useful indicator of whether they'll do well in a subject. If they have not already studied the subjects at GCSE, speak to their teacher to get advice on whether they're likely to do well. For example, if they want to study a language that wasn't offered at GCSE, how well did they do in their compulsory language subjects?

Also, consider whether your child excels in practical studies or theoretical studies. This can also be a big influencer in subject choices.

What your child wants to do next

If your child knows what profession they want to work towards, or which subject they want to read at university, their sixth form subject choices may be more obvious. For example, to study pharmacy they must take chemistry and at least one from biology, physics or maths; or if they want to take a degree in engineering, they will likely require Maths.

Where conflict can appear is if they have their heart set on a career choice but little aptitude for the subjects needed to progress towards it. That's where vocational courses can be helpful. Someone that wants to go into business could avoid a maths-heavy Economics A level and choose to take a BTEC in Business Studies instead. Alternatively, they may choose to start an apprenticeship in an industry area they are interested in (such as hotels and leisure).

FOCUSING ON WHAT YOUR CHILD HAS A NATURAL PASSION FOR WILL LIKELY MAKE GOOD SIXTH-FORM OPTIONS





University preferences

Different universities have different entry requirements, so it is important to check the university's website for details if your child has a particular university or degree course in mind. Subject combinations, types of qualification and subject grades needed for entry not only vary from university to university, but may also differ within the same university for different degrees. If in doubt, call the university and speak to admissions.

Not all sixth form qualifications are considered equal by top universities. Some do not accept BTEC and others consider certain A levels more weighty than others. To maximise the universities open to your child, it's a good idea for them to take a mix of commonly approved subjects ("facilitating subjects") such as biology, chemistry, English, geography, history, maths, modern/classical languages or physics. These are recommended by Russell Group universities (17 British research universities). Be careful not

to take subjects which are too similar, as certain universities will not accept certain subject combinations (such as business studies and economics). If your child is not sure what they want to study after sixth form, don't worry too much about subject combinations. It's far better for them to achieve good grades and widen their university options, than sit "winning" subject combinations but fail their examinations and not meet universities' minimum entry standards.

Where to find out more:

- Speak to your child's current teachers;
- Speak to sixth form teachers;
- Speak to other students;
- Read subject guides;
- Review university websites – or speak to admissions;
- Check text books and reference books;
- The Parents' Guide to website

Choosing the right learning environment

The 16-18 age range is a very important time for a teenager because it marks the transition from child to adult. If they are going to continue with full time education (rather than joining the workplace through an apprenticeship, traineeship, internship or voluntary role), where they study is an important consideration.

It may seem an easy decision to continue studies at their current school; however, this is not always

the best option and is sometimes not possible. Some schools may not offer the subject or qualification choices your child wants to study, some schools don't have a sixth form, some schools have a joint sixth form (which your child may not like) and some students are just desperate to leave the school environment.

It is important that your thoughts and feelings are taken into consideration when making the decision about "what next", but remember, the choice should ultimately be your child's.

THIS IS A GOOD TIME TO CONSIDER DIFFERENT OPTIONS



Continuing at the same school

There are lots of benefits to this for your child: they know the staff, they will have friends there and they are familiar with journey times and routes. It's also nice for them to be role models to younger pupils and this, combined with the familiar environment, can help build self-confidence. In most cases, sixth forms are smaller than colleges and provide more support. For students with special educational needs, they know what support is provided and whether their needs are met (support can vary widely from one institution to another).

However, because they are smaller, they are unlikely to have as many subject choices or vocational courses as colleges and they need to watch out about becoming complacent by being the "big fish in a small pond". Staying at the same school may well be the right choice, but don't automatically assume this, even if it is the most convenient option.

Useful links

UCAS

Applying to sixth form in another school

Providing the school is offering the right subject and course options for your child, this can be a good compromise between staying at the same school or going to college. The challenge of meeting new teachers, new friends and working in a different atmosphere with a different daily journey still exists, but the smaller numbers, greater guidance and nurturing environment also applies. It can prove a good way for your child to start to take control of their own lives, increase confidence and improve communications without everything changing at once.

Depending on GCSE results, changing schools can provide the opportunity of going to a more academic school or one that has greater focus on co-curricular interests that may provide job opportunities in the future (such as rowing, music, drama etc). A fresh environment can inspire fresh ideas.



Going to college

The great thing about colleges is that they have a huge range of academic and vocational courses to study, so there will be plenty of choice. Also, all their focus is on the 16-19 age-range so all facilities and additional offerings are aimed at the same age group, unlike schools who are caring for children of many different ages, sometimes as young as early years. Teachers and lecturers will all be experts in their specialist subjects for this age range.

Colleges tend to be larger and less personal than school sixth forms; the experience is much closer to life at university. This is ideal for students who are disciplined at managing their own studies and can meet deadlines on their own, but students that need nudging, coaxing and reminding are less likely to do well. Of course, learning these skills is important regardless of whether they want to go onto university or start work after sixth form, but some sixteen year olds need a little more guidance than others.

The question is whether your child will do well with new teachers to get to know, a new environment and, in

most cases, a whole new set of friends to make. If they like the challenge of stretching beyond their comfort-zone, it can be a great stepping stone from school to university but if they are reserved, it could be over-whelming.

Independent learning providers

It doesn't have to be a choice of school or college. There are independent organisations that offer entry level courses and employability training for young people who want to get a qualification or learn the skills to help find a job.

Vocational learning

If they are taking vocational learning, such as an apprenticeship, the learning location will be chosen by their employer, who will have an arrangement with a local school, college or other education provider. They will not be able to influence this.

Creative Courses

If your child is looking to study art, design, photography, media or illustration they will need to put together a portfolio of work showcasing their abilities.

Other considerations



Academic or vocational?

If your child's keen to focus on vocational qualifications they are likely to find more choice at colleges than at schools. If they do want to stay at school, BTEC courses might be more appealing than A Levels.

Single sex or co-ed?

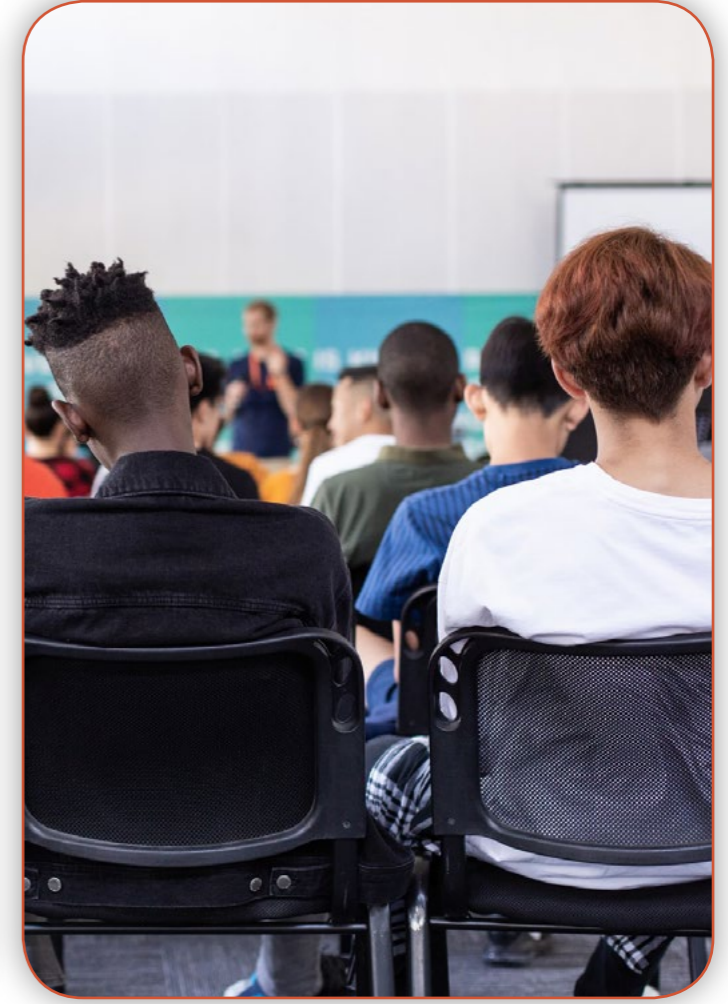
Great opportunity to move from single sexed schools to mixed schools (or vice versa). This can be a good time to go co-ed and start acclimatising to the atmosphere with both sexes, which is what they will experience at work and in post-18 education. However, there can be a lot of social pressure so is this the right time for your child to adapt?

State to private?

Private education is expensive, but sixth form does offer the opportunity of benefiting from smaller classes, greater pastoral care and more guidance whilst knowing the financial commitment is just two years.

Private to state?

If your child's at private school and finances are beginning to pinch, this can be a good time to move. Your child won't get the same level of personal attention but a stronger atmosphere encouraging self-management and accountability can put them on a good path for the future.



Day school to boarding?

If your child is sure they want to go to university, experiencing boarding can get them used to living away from home whilst still under the protective guidance of a school so they don't go off the rails.

Small or large?

Will your child work better with close supervision in a smaller school or will they thrive with more independence in a larger college?

Leaving education

Jobs with training or short-term apprenticeships offer the chance to get into work without continuing intensive, academic study. There are training elements that will include theory, but it is much more practical and competence is often assessed on the job rather than via examinations.

They can take full time or part time work, so long as they are spending one day each week (or the equivalent) studying.

Behaviour

It's not uncommon for teenagers to think that poor behaviour won't have a lasting impact. Help them be aware! Not only is it more likely that students that behave poorly won't do as well in their GCSEs (it will impact what options are available to them at sixth form if they don't meet minimum requirements) but behaviour counts too. Some schools, whether the school they're already at or a different one, won't accept students into sixth form if they have regular records of poor behaviour.

Results Day

When GCSE results come out in August 2022, your child may not have done quite as well in the subjects they have selected to study at sixth form as they had hoped. Please be reassuring and supportive at this time, and try not to get angry, disappointed and frustrated – especially if it is a case of “I told you so”! There are usually alternatives and a positive approach offers a faster route to finding happy solutions.

Low grades do not mean they cannot study their chosen subject at sixth form. There may be an option to retake the GCSE, or commence the sixth form subject without a retake. However, in some cases, GCSE results are a strong indicator of future performance and it may not be wise to pursue a subject for which they do not have a natural aptitude; choosing an alternative subject might be a better option. Speak to their school teachers and get advice about next steps.

Useful links

The studentroom

The Parents' Guide to

Possible options if they don't do well in their GCSEs

1. Speak with their chosen place of study. Will they accept them even though they have not met minimum standards? It's worth asking - they may say yes so long as your child commits to some additional work
2. Retake failed subjects
3. Do similar sixth form studies somewhere different without having to retake exams
4. Do an internship, traineeship or volunteer placement to obtain and be able to prove that they have the skills needed to continue further studies
5. Start an apprenticeship

GCSE Results Day 2022:

GCSE results day is usually the third Thursday in August. In 2021, this date was brought forward to the second week in August to provide more time for students to action options given their grades were awarded through assessment rather than examinations. It has not yet been decided how GCSE grades will be awarded in 2022, therefore GCSE results day has yet to be confirmed (at the time of writing this guide). We'll include live updates on *The Parents' Guide* to website – [click here to know the latest.](#)

THERE ARE PLENTY OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS IF YOUR CHILD HAS NOT DONE WELL IN THEIR GCSEs



Summary

Choosing the next steps after GCSE should be given plenty of thought

1. Are they academic or practical?
2. Do they thrive on independent learning or do they need more help and guidance?
3. Do they want to stay in full-time education or are they keen to go out in the workplace?
4. Will their choices put them on the right path for their future?
5. Do their choices reflect their passions and interests?
6. Plans might change on results day but there's no need to panic.



Advice from parents



“ Try not to let your child's decisions be based on what their friends are doing or where their friends will be – get them to think about what's really right for them - even if this might seem like a tougher challenge initially.



“ There's something for everyone – no matter what your child's ability, there will be further education options to help them move on to the next stage of learning or work.



“ After GCSEs is a great time to think about whether a change in environment would be a good thing. Staying at the same school may be an easy option but it's not right for every child.

The Parents' Guide to Exam Revision

We want our children to do well in their exams and it's not all down to what happens at school or college, homelife plays a crucial role.

Find out what you can do at home to give your child the best chance of success, from setting up the right routines to helping them cope with exam nerves. The Parents' Guide to Study and Exam Revision (GCSE) is full of practical advice that's easy to action:

- ✓ Keeping them healthy – covering diet, caffeine, sleep and screen time
- ✓ Providing the right homelife – why setting a routine is vital
- ✓ Simple steps to create a helpful study space
- ✓ Ways to help them revise – you can't revise for them, but you can help. We've provided different options to make facts easier to remember
- ✓ How to build resilience and manage stress to form lifelong good habits and protect their mental health
- ✓ How to support them during exam time
- ✓ How to help them with exam nerves



The Parents' Guide to
STUDY & EXAM REVISION (GCSE)
 2021-2022

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Key milestones

<p>SEPTEMBER 2019</p> <p>UCAS references Local authority applications are being prepared, subject teachers are beginning to write your child's references including their predicted grades, a good reference and early revision is a positive approach.</p>	<p>Back to school Your child may or may not have exams as they begin back in 20. Journey home for 5 is essential that they start the year as they mean to go on. Help them prepare a clear space for study.</p>
<p>OCTOBER</p> <p>Mock examinations By to approach these with an attitude similar to those of the official exams. Mock exam conditions will help build confidence when the final exams begin.</p>	<p>Christmas holidays Most schools will schedule mock examinations either just before or just after the Christmas holidays. Encourage your child to approach the holiday period naturally with a healthy balance between revision and enjoying the holidays.</p>
<p>DECEMBER</p>	<p>Easter holidays The emphasis here is independent learning. Schools are closed for 2-3 weeks and your child will have a significant period of time to revise and study. If your child hasn't created a revision timetable yet, now is the time. They will help focus and structure their revision efforts.</p>
<p>JANUARY 2020</p>	<p>May Half Term/ examinations Your child may or may not have a half term in the middle of the year already. May half term is a crucial time for consolidation and reflecting on their past exam performance.</p>
<p>APRIL</p>	<p>Examinations This could be the last time for revision.</p>
<p>MAY</p>	
<p>JUNE</p>	

Additional support



“

Finding out I was entitled to 25% extra time in my A level exams took off a lot of the pressure.

SEND (special educational needs and disability)

If your child has SEND and is moving to a new educational establishment (whether a different school, college or other education provider), make sure you advise them in advance so that they can be involved in ensuring they are able to meet your child's needs or get support from outside if necessary.

Regular Assessment

The school or college should regularly assess your child's needs and keep written records of reviews. They will communicate directly with your child, so you'll need to come to an agreement about how you'll be kept up to date so that you can be involved and provide the right level of support.

Finding local support services

All local authorities are required, by law, to provide information and advice for children and young people with SEN. This is available online, by phone or face to face. If you check your local government's website, you will find the Local Offer section which provides information on education, health and social care services in your area.

You can also approach your child's existing school, your doctor or charities and other organisations that offer support and services.



EHCs

If your child has an education and healthcare plan ("EHC") this will continue to apply through their post-16 studies (but not if they progress to higher education after they are 18). If they have an EHC and they have additional needs outside of those met by the school or college in order to deliver on the provision set by the plan, you can request a Personal Budget to help (such as therapy or transport costs). Applications are considered by the local authority on a case by case basis.

If your child does not have an EHC but you think they need one, you (or they) can request an assessment.

Benefits

If your child has SEND they might get some help during exams, such as more time, permission to use technology (such as being able to type a paper rather than handwrite it), a reader, a scribe, rest breaks and even a separate room. However, they will have to demonstrate a history of need.

Key tip:

All Further Education providers should have a named individual in charge of SEND provision.

Financial support

Education and training is provided free of charge (unless at a private school). If you claim Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit or Universal Credit for your child, these automatically stop when your child reaches 16 but can be extended until 19 if your child is in full time education. Make sure you notify the relevant authority. Some other financial support is available depending on specific needs.

Free meals

Students of families on low incomes can apply for free meals, so long as they are studying at an institute funded via the Education and Skills Funding Agency.

Residential loans

Students needing specialist provision which means they have to live away from home to study can apply for residential loans via the [Residential Bursary Fund](#).

Vulnerable Groups

Students classed as vulnerable groups (such as in care, receiving income support or disability allowance) can claim a bursary up to £1,200 each year.

Discretionary bursary

It may be possible to get a discretionary bursary if students need financial help but do not qualify for a bursary for students in vulnerable groups. The education or training provider decides how much is awarded and what it's used for.

Grants

It may be possible to get a grant from the [Family Action Trust](#), who provide small grants for additional costs associated with a course of study such as clothing and/or equipment required for the course, travel, examination costs, computers/laptops.

Care to Learn

Students under 20 years old with their own children can apply for "care to learn" grants to provide childcare while they are studying up to a maximum of £160 per week (£175 in London) via the [Student Bursary support service](#).

Find out more

There's heaps of information about post 16 options on the [Government's website](#). You can find details of what's available in your local area by checking your Local Authority's website – [find your local council here](#).

Your child's current school should also be able to help and you can approach any further education institute directly.

There's free advice from the [National Careers Service](#).



Useful links

Gov.uk

National
Careers
Service



Final words

Sixteen marks a milestone for you and your child. It's a great opportunity to take stock and consider how well things have worked in the past and what adjustments are needed so they will work well in the future.

If your child has had a difficult time up to this point, it's a chance to consider why this is, and change either the style of study or place of study (and perhaps even both), so they can make a fresh start. If your child loves their school and they can take the right qualifications, there's no need for them to leave; if they've enjoyed it up to this point but now feel they've outgrown it, it's the perfect time to move on. If they feel they want to get into the workplace, there are plenty of different options

whether they want to include an element of academic learning or focus more strongly on practical experience.

Sixteen is possibly the first time your child is making decisions for themselves that will have a significant impact on their future. It's important for them to realise that they will need to make choices that are right for them and not follow what their friends are doing; it's the first step toward their independent future.

Whilst they should be making decisions for themselves, it's still important that they get help, guidance and reliable advice from you.

Join us

If you're interested in regular updates about other ways you can help your teenage children, [click here](#) and join our online community.

[Sign up here](#)



Visit **The Parents' Guide to** website for more support and resources:

All our resources are ready for immediate download

Parent Guides

Our range of interactive guides provide you with easy to follow advice, hyperlinks to reliable sources and the most up-to-date information.

Support articles

Browse through our collection of online articles covering a range of topics from supporting your child with their revision to helping them apply to university through UCAS.

Parent Q&A

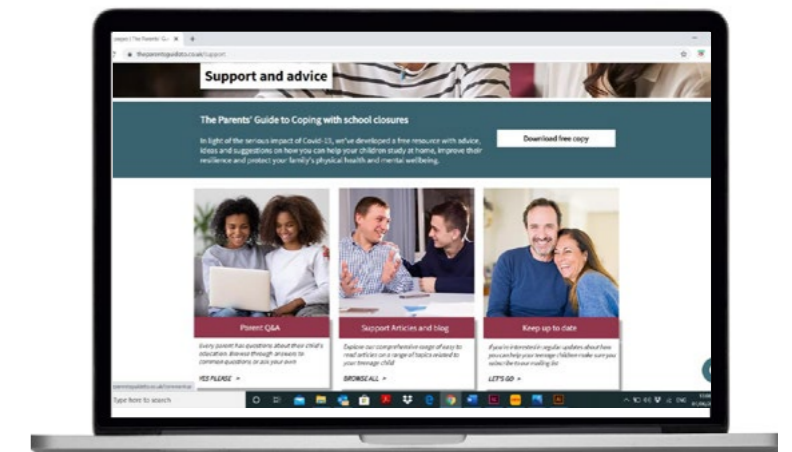
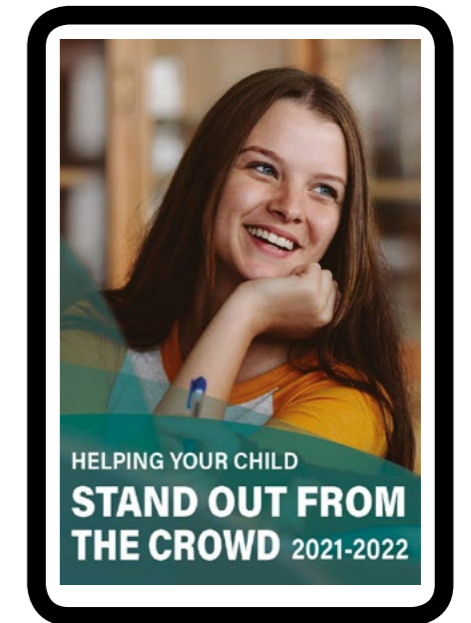
Almost every parent has questions about their child's education. Read through answers to commonly asked questions or ask your own.

Blog

Our blog provides reliable and timely advice and support to changes taking place across UK schools and colleges.

Parent newsletter

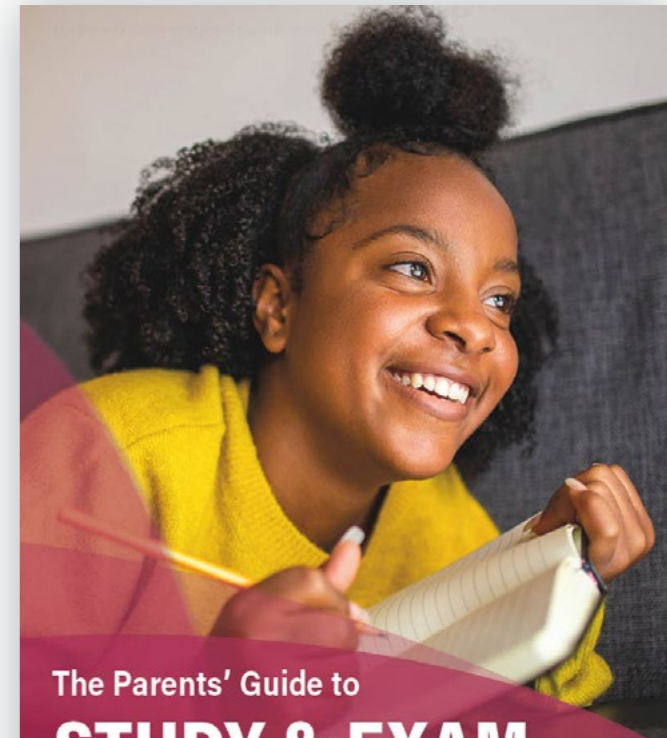
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