

Guide to Career Pathways

Options after GCSE:	Options after Sixth Form:	Options after Higher Education:
Full time study	Full time study	Full time study
A levels (level 3)	University (levels 4,5,6,7)	Postgraduate study e.g Masters degree or PHD (levels 7,8)
T Levels (level 3)	Higher technical skill courses (levels 4,5)	Work / Work and study
BTECs (levels 1,2,3)	Work and study	Graduate jobs or paid employment
Other technical qualifications (levels 1,2,3)	Apprenticeships (levels 3,4,5,6,7)	Apprenticeships (levels 6,7)
Exam retakes	School leaver programmes / Internships	Internships / work experience
Work and study	Work	Non-paid employment / volunteering
Apprenticeships (levels 2,3)	Employment	Start a business
Supported internships	Start a business	Other
Study Programme	Other	Gap Year / travel
	Gap Year	
	Exam retakes	

Strengthen job applications with:

Work experience	Volunteering
Academic enrichment opportunities	Travel/gap years
Hobbies and interests demonstrating soft skills e.g. communication, organisation, teamwork, problem-solving	Testimonials and references https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice/how-to-develop-your-soft-skills

Levels of Education

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

Academic Route	Vocational Route	Applied / Work Route
Assessment method: Mostly 80%-100% exam-based, depending on subject	Assessment method: Combination of exams/ tests and coursework/ assignments	Assessment methods: Assessment in the workplace; may include coursework, exams/tests/ assignments

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 comparing the different routes to higher education.