

An introduction to post-16 options

Information for parents and carers

The information below is intended to help parents and carers understand the choices young people have in Year 11 and the decisions they have to make. **MyDirections** has more detailed information and advice for young people to explore, as well as 'Careers activities' – five lessons that they can do to help them with their post-16 options.

Under Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation, the minimum age young people can leave learning is 18. After Year 11, they have two main options:

- **full-time education**
- **apprenticeship**

They can **get a job**, **set up a business** or **volunteer** but must combine this with part-time education or training.

Post-16 options in detail

FULL-TIME EDUCATION

After Year 11, a young person can remain in full-time education. This could be at the school they are already at if it has a sixth form, or at **another school**, a **sixth form college**, **college** or with a **training provider**.

Courses young people take between the ages of 16 and 19 may be called 'study programmes'. A study programme is a combination of the qualifications a young person takes, plus English and/or maths if they have not achieved a grade 4 or above in the subject at GCSE and non-qualification activities, such as work experience.

- **Sixth forms and sixth form colleges**

Sixth forms and sixth form colleges mainly offer qualifications at level 3 – some may also offer qualifications at level 2. At level 3 they tend to offer a full range of A levels and some vocational qualifications.

Sixth forms and sixth form colleges are different to further education colleges (below) as they only offer courses for young people aged 16 to 19, rather than to people of all ages.

- **Colleges**

Further education colleges offer a full range of subjects at all levels. All colleges offer vocational qualifications and some, but not all, also offer A levels.



- **Training providers**

Training providers offer study programmes in practical subjects, such as beauty therapy, business, hairdressing, health and social care, and sport. They tend to offer courses at levels 1 and 2 and classes are usually much smaller than those at colleges.

To find out more about courses in their area, young people should:

- Look at school, college and training provider websites
- Check out sixth form, sixth form college and college prospectuses
- Go to open events at schools and colleges. Dates and times of open days and careers events can be found on the **MyDirections** homepage.

How to apply for courses

Applications for sixth form or college are usually made online, on the provider's website. Deadlines for applications vary and are often between November and January, but check closing dates with individual providers.

To apply to a training provider, check out their website. It may be useful to speak to the careers adviser in school about applying to a training provider.

Young people can apply to more than one provider. This means they have a back-up plan in case they don't get the grades they need. Also, some courses may not run if there are not enough applicants. If, on GCSE results day, young people don't get the grades they need for the course they have applied for, they should speak to their careers adviser and/or to the school or college about whether they will be accepted, and to ask about alternatives.

Money while in full-time education

Full-time courses at a school, college or with a training provider are usually free for those aged 16 to 19 – unless it is a private school or college.

Young people may need to buy specialist equipment or clothing for some courses, such as those in hairdressing, catering and construction. Financial support may be available from the school or college to help pay for this.

Child Benefit continues up until a young person's 20th birthday if they stay in approved education or training. Parents/carers are sent a letter in a young person's last year at school asking them to confirm their plans. For more information, visit **www.gov.uk/child-benefit-16-19**

See **www.gov.uk/further-education-courses/financial-help** for other sources of financial support.

APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships combine practical training in a job with study. They are available in jobs across a wide range of sectors, including business, construction, engineering, hair and beauty, health, IT, social care and many more. Apprenticeships enable people to gain the skills employers need by working in the real world and completing studies related to their area of work.

Apprenticeships are available at different levels – from level 2 (GCSE level) to level 7 (Master's degree level). Young people aged 16/17 would usually do a level 2 or level 3 apprenticeship. Higher and degree apprenticeships (levels 4-7) are usually for those aged 18+, as entry requirements often include level 3 qualifications.

Entry requirements for apprenticeships vary. For level 3 apprenticeships, four or five GCSEs at grade 4 or above are usually needed (including maths and English). For a level 2 apprenticeship, some grade 4s at GCSE may be required. An assessment test may be used as part of the selection process, in addition to an interview.

The National Minimum Wage for apprentices under 19, or 19+ and in their first year, is currently £8.00 an hour, but is reviewed every April. This is the legal minimum pay per hour – many employers will pay more.

More information about apprenticeships can be found at **www.apprenticeships.gov.uk**

How to find apprenticeship vacancies

Apprenticeships are jobs, so they are advertised in different places. Some apprenticeships may not be advertised – smaller employers may take on apprentices who apply to them on spec. Unlike college courses that tend to start in September, apprenticeships can start at any time of the year. Vacancies are advertised throughout the year and will have different application closing dates and start dates.

Apprenticeships are open to people of all ages so there can be a lot of competition for vacancies. Year 11 leavers interested in getting an apprenticeship are advised to also apply for a full-time course at college, in case they are not able to secure an apprenticeship.

To find apprenticeship vacancies:

- **Look at and register with vacancy websites** – **www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship** is the government's find an apprenticeship service. Local jobs and apprenticeship vacancies can also be found on the **MyDirections** homepage.
- **Use social media** – check out company websites, Facebook and X accounts for vacancies.
- **Ask around** – friends and family might have contacts or know of companies that are recruiting.
- **Attend apprenticeship events** – in many areas there are events where people looking for an apprenticeship can meet with employers and training providers with a vacancies. Employers may also hold their own events or attend events at schools and colleges.
- **Register with training providers** – information about training providers in your area, and the apprenticeship training they offer can be found at **<https://findapprenticeshiptraining.apprenticeships.education.gov.uk/courses>**
- **Make speculative applications** – send a CV and cover letter to companies, asking if they have vacancies. **MyDirections** includes example CVs, cover letters and spec letters – as well as a CV builder – so young people can create their own CV. Company details can be found at **www.thomsonlocal.com** or **www.yell.com**

FULL-TIME WORK, SELF-EMPLOYMENT or VOLUNTEERING

Research has predicted that there will be less entry-level jobs in the future. This means people will need higher level skills and qualifications. So, under the requirements of Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation, young people who choose to volunteer or work full-time (including self-employment) after Year 11 must also undertake some form of part-time education or training. They may be given time off from work to do this, or they may have to

study in their own time. Training courses are provided by colleges and training providers, and young people can choose one that fits in with their work.

Young people considering full-time employment, including apprenticeships, should think about developing the skills and qualities employers are looking for. They could undertake activities at school or in their spare time that help develop their skills, or get work experience or a part-time job. Some key skills and qualities include :

communication skills
punctuality and reliability
able to meet deadlines
flexibility

digital skills
resilience
being organised
creativity

literacy and numeracy skills
problem-solving skills
willing to learn
able to work as part of a team

For more information about getting a job, voluntary work and self-employment, young people can use **MyDirections**, as well as looking at the following websites:

- **<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/careers-advice#getting-a-job>** – information about how to get a job.
- **www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/volunteer** – information about volunteering.
- **www.gov.uk/set-up-business** – information about self-employment.

Post-16 qualifications

After Year 11 young people can choose to study academic qualifications or vocational qualifications. Academic qualifications are assessed by exams, vocational qualifications are mainly assessed by coursework, but some units will include an exam or an assessed task or performance.

Qualifications are available at different levels. The level a young person studies will depend on their GCSE grades. Below is an example of the grades that are likely to be required for different levels of courses – but check with individual providers. It is possible to move up the levels after successful completion of the previous level.

Level 3	5 GCSEs at grades 9-4, often including English and maths
Level 2	GCSEs at grades 9-3
Level 1	GCSEs at grades 3-1

At level 3

- **A levels** are academic qualifications and are offered in subjects such as English, chemistry, history and maths. Usually, three subjects are taken. Assessment is by exams at the end of two years.
- **T levels** are two year vocational qualifications, equivalent to 3 A levels. They are available in subjects related to an area of work – such as construction, engineering and health, and offer a mixture of classroom learning and an ‘on-the-job’ experience of at least 45 days. Look at **www.tlevels.gov.uk** for more information.
- **V levels** will first be introduced in some subjects in September 2027 and in more subjects in following years. They are equivalent to one A level and are intended to be studied alongside A levels or other V levels. They will be available in subjects related to an area of work such as finance and accounting, legal services, health, science and engineering.

At levels 1, 2 and 3

GCSEs are level 2 academic qualifications that young people can choose to retake, or take alongside a vocational qualification.

Vocational or work-related qualifications (such as BTECs) are available in different sizes and at all levels but often just one subject is studied. A wide range of subjects is available, such as bricklaying, hairdressing, health and social care, IT and professional cookery.

How to decide what to do after Year 11

Young people in Year 11 should think about:

- The grades they are going to get and the entry requirements for different courses or apprenticeships
- What they do and don't like doing – at school and in their spare time
- Their career ideas
- How they prefer to learn – exams, coursework or by doing a job
- The size of the place they want to learn in – colleges tend to be bigger than schools and training providers
- If they want to stay somewhere that is familiar (their current school) or start somewhere new
- Which school, college or training provider offers the course they want to do and whether they can get there easily
- If they want an apprenticeship – are there vacancies in the skill area they want and what is the competition like?
- If they want to study a higher education (HE) course at university or college in the future, which subjects are needed for the course they want to do? Some HE courses require specific subjects at level 3 and some institutions may not accept certain qualifications or subjects. Entry requirements for HE courses can be found at **www.ucas.com**

Whichever option a young person chooses, they will have to continue to study maths and/or English if they have not achieved a grade 4 or above in the subject at GCSE.

Young people can apply for more than one course with more than one institution or organisation – and apply for apprenticeships too.

How parents/carers can help a young person with the decisions they have to make:

- **Listen** – let them talk to you about their ideas.
- **Encourage them** – get them to think through their ideas by talking to their careers adviser and looking at careers information online. They could try doing a career matching program that their school may subscribe to – such as Jed, Kudos or Start. **MyDirections** includes a self-assessment to encourage young people to think about their preferred subjects, pathways and job sectors.
- **Research** – find out about the pros and cons of each option. Use **MyDirections** for information and advice about how to decide what might suit them best. Attend careers events and open days at sixth forms and colleges
- **Be organised** – keep an eye on dates and application procedures.
- **Check** – make sure they are organised and have completed applications clearly and accurately and sent them off on time.
- **Be positive** – there are opportunities available for all young people.
- **Be supportive** – help them to work hard, do the best they can in their exams and attend school regularly. Schools, colleges and employers will ask for references from their school.

Sources of help for young people

At school

Most schools have careers advisers to help young people make plans for the future. Many hold drop-in sessions each week as well as appointments.

Careers advisers will also help if, because of special educational needs and disabilities, extra help, equipment and support will be needed after Year 11.

Careers advisers can be contacted at school if parents and carers have any questions and would like to speak to them. They are also available in school on GCSE results day, if young people need to discuss their grades and any changes to their plans.

Careers information

MyDirections provides young people with a wide range of careers information, as well practical tools to help them make decisions and apply for opportunities. Schools may subscribe to other careers information programs too.

Websites providing careers information include **www.prospects.ac.uk/job-profiles** and **<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers>**

After Year 11

Careers advisers often stay in touch with a Year 11 leaver until they are settled on a course, or in an apprenticeship or job. They also work in sixth forms, sixth form colleges and colleges.

Local councils or career services may offer services for young people who are not in education, employment or training.