

Post-16 choices – where to start???

Important choices can be really difficult to make, especially in challenging times. If you're in Year 10, you might be making important decisions soon about what you want to do after you finish Year 11. If you're unsure about what your options are then don't panic! Hopefully this blog post will give you a few ideas.

A little about me. I remember being confused quite a lot when I was thinking through my options! I ended up going to a further education college because my school didn't have a sixth form and that's what everyone did – I didn't have a clue what a sixth form was back then. I was lucky things worked out for me so let's have a look at the different options open to you so you can make the best possible choice.

Different types of qualifications

Before we delve in, let's just pause for a moment. There are lots of different qualifications open to you when you finish Year 11 and you might not have heard of these before. Some common qualifications include:

- [A Levels](#)
- [Applied General Qualifications](#) (previously called BTECs)
- [T Levels](#)
- [Apprenticeships](#)

If you'd like to learn more about these qualifications – and lots of others – then UCAS has a really useful list [here](#). Some of these qualifications may only be on offer at **some** of the places mentioned below so bear that in mind when thinking through your options.

Sixth form

Many schools have 'sixth forms'. If your school has one, then you've probably heard of Year 12 and Year 13. These are the year groups that make up the sixth form. Some people decide that the best option for them is to join their school sixth form once they finish Year 11. Others might decide to go to a sixth form at another school in the area. It really depends on what you think you'd like to learn more about. Many people study A Levels at sixth form, but you can sometimes study vocational courses too (like Applied General Qualifications) – remember, even if your school has a sixth form, it might not teach the subjects or courses you're interested in so it's important to have a look around.

Sixth form college

Depending on where you live, there might be a local sixth form college that you could go to instead. Sixth form colleges focus their teaching on 16-18 year olds and tend to be larger institutions that teach a range of subjects and qualifications. Their main focus is usually academic qualifications (like A Levels), but you might also be able to study more vocational options too (like Applied General Qualifications or T Levels).

Further Education (FE) college

There are hundreds of FE colleges across the UK. These places offer a whole range of courses for both young people and adults. They also tend to offer qualifications at different levels – for example, many teach GCSE-level courses all the way through to degree-level

courses. FE colleges are large institutions and they can be quite different to school. You might find that your courses are timetabled in a way that means you aren't required to be in college for full days, for example. You might also be able to study part-time if that works better for you. A college feels a bit more like an adult learning environment and you're therefore encouraged to take responsibility for yourself and your learning.

Apprenticeships

If you have a particular job in mind, then an apprenticeship might be the best option for you. People who complete an apprenticeship are employed by a company and are supported to complete their qualifications whilst working. As well as learning 'on the job', you'll also have time away from the workplace for training. This training usually takes place at a local FE college. This [website](#) has lots of useful info if you're interested in learning more about apprenticeships.

My top tips!

So, there's definitely a lot of choice out there! If you still aren't sure where to start, these are my 3 biggest top tips:

1) Think about what you'd like to study or learn about first:

For example, if you're think of A Levels, which subjects interest you? This will help you to work out where you might be able to study. If you're more interested in a particular job, then be open to exploring apprenticeships instead.

2) Do your research:

Make sure to look at the useful links below so that you have as much information about your choices as possible. Once you know what you think you'd like to study or learn about, have a look at what's available in your local area and check out things like college prospectuses and employer websites. Also bear in mind any ideas you have for the future – for example, through your research, you might find that you need to choose certain A Level subjects in order to study a university subject that you like the look of.

3) Visit (if you can):

If you're able to attend open days or fairs then it's really useful to go along. Lots of schools, colleges and training providers have open events or offer other opportunities to visit. This is the best way for you to explore the environment and might also be an opportunity to speak to apprentices or students who are already completing training or studying the courses you're interested in. If it isn't possible to visit for any reason then see what else sixth forms/colleges/employers that interest you are offering.

Most importantly, remember that this is your decision. It's really helpful to speak to people (friends, family, teachers) about your options but the final decision is yours so make the one that's right for you 😊

Useful links

[UCAS – Post-16 Qualifications](#)

[BBC bitesize – Post-16: What next?](#)

[Career Pilot – Your Choices at 16](#)

[Target Careers – A Level Choices](#)

[Department for Education – Apprenticeships](#)

[UCAS – Post-18 Options](#)