

# Next Steps

With the breadth and choice of qualifications available it can be confusing deciding what to do after you've completed your GCSEs. Our quick guide highlights some of the qualification types available and what different education levels mean.

## **Types of qualifications**

### **GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education**

GCSE are academic qualifications typically studied from age 14 up to 16. They are taken at the end of school year 11 by ages 15-16. New GCSEs will be graded 9–1, rather than A\*–G. Grade 9 is the highest grade, set above the current A\*. Grade 4 is equivalent to a low C; grade 5 is a high C. The new system is intended to help provide more differentiation, especially among higher achieving students.

### **BTEC Business and Technology Education Council**

BTECs are vocational and work-related courses, designed to accommodate the needs of employers and allow students to progress to further and higher education. A BTEC takes a practical approach to learning, without missing any of the important theory on the subject. They can be studied at level 1, 2 and 3. Level 3 BTECs are an alternative to A Levels and give you the relevant UCAS points to progress to higher education.

## **T levels**

[T Levels](#) are a level 3 qualification (the same level as A Levels) and are for young people (under 19) after their GCSEs. They include a significant work placement to put learning into practice. With a T Level you spend about 20% of your time in the work place and 80% in college.

## **Apprenticeships**

To start an [apprenticeship](#) you must be 16 or over and not in full-time education. Apprentices study for qualifications while working and they learn the skills they need for the job they are doing. There are different levels of apprenticeships from Intermediate which is equivalent to 5 GCSEs to a full degree.

## **NVQ National Vocational Qualification**

NVQs are great if you know what job you would like to do. There are five NVQ levels, you can start at a level that suits you and work your way up. There are no age limits or special entry requirements, although you may have to work your way up the levels. You can do NVQs in various subjects at all levels. You obtain the qualification by completing units step-by-step.

- Level 1 – Basic or Foundation Level
- Level 2 – equivalent to GCSEs or First Diploma Level
- Level 3 – equivalent to A levels or Extended Diploma Level
- Level 4 – equivalent to a Foundation Degree or Higher National Diploma

## **Foundation Degrees**

Foundation Degrees are higher education qualifications designed to equip you with the skills needed for a particular area of work. The entry requirements tend to be

lower than a full degree and take into account work experience. As with other higher education courses students are able to apply for financial support. Once the Foundation Degree is complete students can apply to progress on to the final year of an Honours degree programme in a relevant subject.

### **Higher National Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND)**

HNCs and HNDs are roughly equivalent to one or two years of degree. They are work-related higher education qualifications with a focus on practical skills and specialist knowledge related to the industry/sector of choice. They are highly valued by employers both in the UK and overseas. They were developed to give students the opportunity to easily “top-up” to an honours degree.

### **Bachelor’s Degree**

Bachelor’s degrees are academic qualifications for people who want to study one particular subject area. Degrees are normally taken after A-levels, Foundation Degrees, HND/HNC or BTECs. There are entry requirements of some form of all degree subjects. A bachelor’s degree usually lasts three to four years full-time or six to nine years part-time. Bachelor’s degree usually have the option to be studied ‘with honours’.

### **Masters**

Once you have completed your bachelor’s Degree the next level of study is a masters degree at a University. This typically takes one year full-time and two years part-time to complete. You can choose to continue to study the same subject area or you can complete a conversion course which allows you to study a totally new subject.

## **Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas**

Postgraduate certificates and diplomas allow learners to build on the skills and knowledge gained during their bachelor's degree and are available in wide range of subjects. They are required for entry to some professions, for example, Teaching (PGCE) and Law (GDL) and take up to a year to complete full-time.

## **Doctorate**

A doctorate (PhD) is the highest level of academic degree. You are expected to produce an independent research project which can take years to complete. The qualification is highly regarded and many students use their doctorates to become academics or industry researchers.

## **Levels Explained**

### **Entry Level**

If you're looking to build skills, increase your knowledge, get back into education and boost your confidence to take the next step Entry Level qualifications can help you. They are known as 'certificates' or 'awards', and are open to anyone interested in gaining recognised qualification. There are no entry requirements. The qualification is recognised across the UK.

- Entry Level 1, 2, and 3 Certificates
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Functional Skills (English, Maths and ICT)
- Skills for Life (English and Maths)
- Entry Level BTEC Award/Certificate/Diploma
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## **Level 1**

If you're looking for an introduction into general work and practical hands-on activities, the foundation level courses allow you to gain skills that will help you get a job or qualification.

- GCSE grades 3-1 (D-G)
- BTEC Level 1 Award/Certificate/Diploma
- BTEC Introductory Certificate/Diploma
- Functional Skills
- VRQ Level 1
- NVQ Level 1
- Skills for life (English and Maths)
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Foundation 14 to 19

## **Level 2**

Level 2 courses are intermediate level. They provide a good knowledge and understanding of a subject and require the learner to do a variety of tasks with some guidance or supervision. The qualifications gained at this level are suitable for many job roles.

- GCSE grades 9-4 (A\*-C)
- BTEC Level 2 Award/Certificate/Diploma
- BTEC First Certificate/Diploma
- Intermediate Apprenticeship
- Pre-Access to Higher Education
- NVQ Level 2

- VRQ Level 2
- Skills for Life (English and Maths)
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Functional Skills

### **Level 3**

If you're planning on going to university getting your level 3 qualification is important.

Level 3 qualification enable you to gain or apply a range of knowledge, skills and understanding at a detailed level. Study at this level is more challenging as they are preparation for careers or further and degree level study.

- A and A2 Level
- BTEC Level 3 Award/Certificate/Diploma and Extended Diploma
- T level
- Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE)
- Access to Higher Education
- NVQ Level 3
- Advanced Apprenticeship
- Education and Training Award Level 3

### **Level 4**

Specialist learning, involving detailed analysis of information and knowledge in an area of work or study. Courses are run in collaboration with partner universities.

Suitable for people working technical and professional jobs, and/or managing and developing others.

- Higher National Certificate (HNC)

- BTEC Professional Award
- Education and Training Award Level 4
- Higher Apprenticeship (Year 1)
- Professional Development Diploma (PDD)

### **Level 5**

Level 5 involves high level of work expertise and competence in managing and training others. Suitable for people working as higher grade technicians professionals or managers. This level gives you increased depth of knowledge and understanding of an area of work or study.

- Foundation Degree
- Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)
- Higher National Diploma (HND)
- Higher Apprenticeship (Year 2)

### **Level 6**

High-level of knowledge in an area of work or study, to allow you to use your own ideas and research. Suitable for people working as knowledge-based professionals or in professional management positions. Courses at this level are in partnership with De Montfort University.

- Bachelor's Honours Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Graduate Certificates and Diplomas

### **Level 7**

- Masters Degrees

- Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas
- PGCE

### **Level 8**

- Doctorates