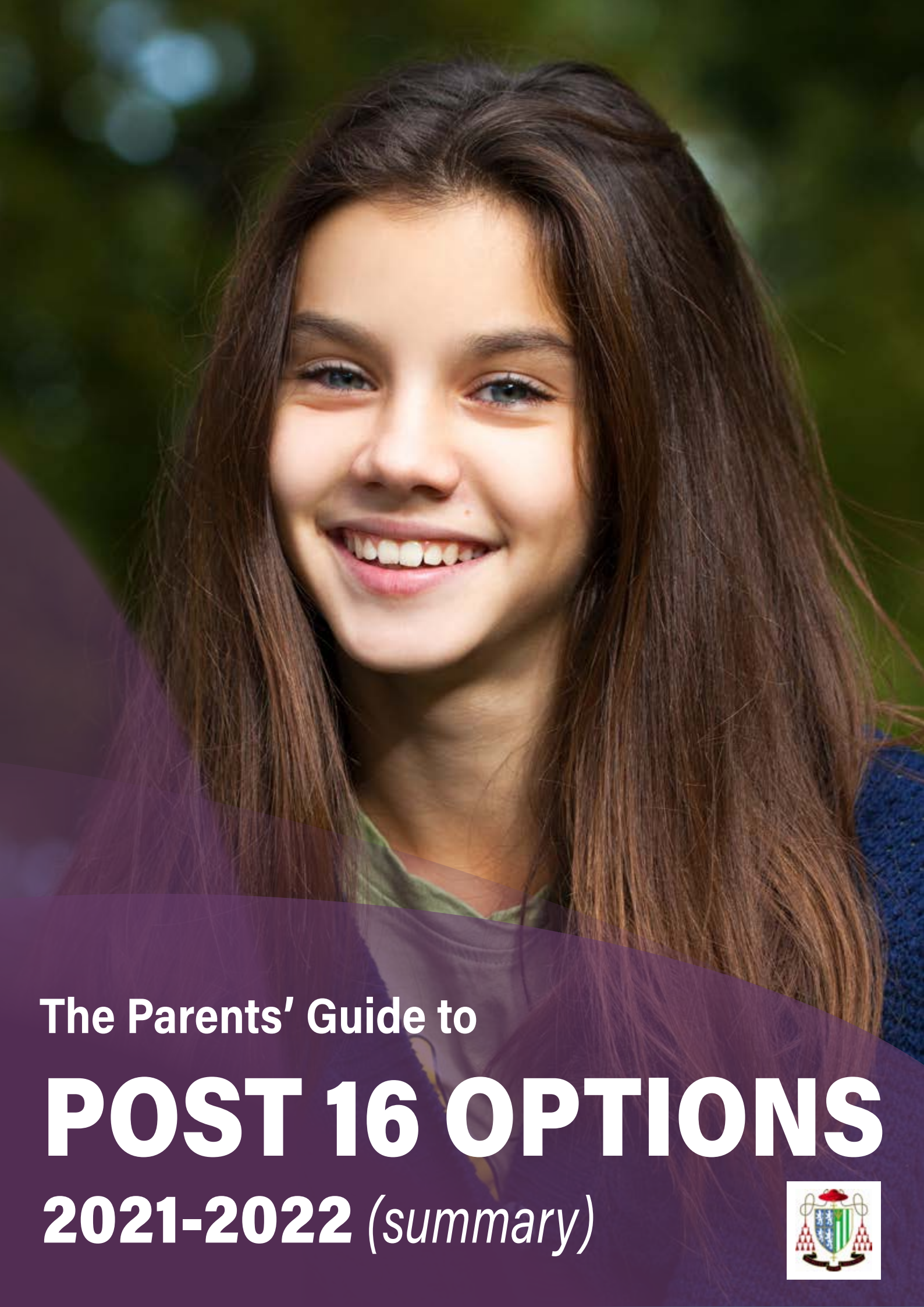

The Parents' Guide to

POST 16 OPTIONS

2021-2022 *(summary)*

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 an apprenticeship and change their mind later, there's always the chance to pick up their education at a later date.

Important information

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). A minimum standard of English and Maths is required for all courses, but help is provided where needed.

As of September 2020, the new T Level qualification will be introduced. Subject choices at T Level will be expanded over the next few years. 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 guide offers a brief summary of all the options your child might want to consider for sixth form and how this might impact their choices after sixth form. 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.

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

The Parents' Guide to Post 16 Options (summary) 2021 - 2022

Level | Qualification / educational routes

Level				
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**

Levels of Education

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland there are eight 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 qualifications and levels mean highlighting academic, vocational and work-based routes to higher education.

A levels

Qualification type

General Certificate of Advanced Level qualification

Type of learning

Mostly theory

Qualifications needed to sign up

At least 5 GCSEs grades 4 - 9
At least grade 5/6 in the subject/s chosen for A level (requirements may vary between schools)

Subject choices

Three subjects

Length of 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

Can lead to

University, further study, training or work

Things to consider

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).

Additionally, many schools offer the 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.

More information

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

UCAS

The Uni Guide

International Baccalaureate

Qualification type

International Baccalaureate Diploma

Type of learning

Mostly theory, some practical

Qualifications needed to sign up

Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs (grades 4-9)

Subject choices

Up to six subjects (three standard level and three at higher level)

Length of commitment

2 years full time

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points awarded for passing

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

Can lead to

University, further study, training, or work

Things to consider

The international Baccalaureate is mostly offered through private schools, although there are a small number of state schools where it is available. 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.

More information

IBO

Good Schools Guide

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BTEC Nationals

Qualification type

Business and Technology Education Council Diplomas

(Level 3 are similar standard to A Levels, with subsidiary diploma equivalent to one A level, BTEC diploma equivalent to 2 A levels and extended diploma equivalent to 3 A levels).

Type of learning

Combination of practical and theory

Qualifications needed to sign up

Up to 5 GCSEs

Subject choices

Up to three vocational subjects

Length of commitment

2 years full time

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points awarded for passing

56 points – D* (distinction)
48 points – D
32 points – M (merit)
16 points – P (pass)

Can lead to

University, further study, training, professional development programmes or work

Things to consider

BTECs offer the chance of earning the same points for UCAS as A levels, but provide a way to learn through much more practical application and coursework whereas A levels focus on written work and exams. 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 their entry requirements to see whether this will influence their sixth form choices.

Most schools offer the option to take a combination of BTEC and A level.

More information

UCAS

T Levels (England only)

Qualification type

Technical Level Qualification

Type of learning

Classroom learning (80%) with industry placement (20%)

Qualifications needed to sign up

Set by the school, up to 5 GCSEs

Subject choices

One industry field, such as construction (includes design, surveying and planning) or Education (includes early years, assisting teaching and supporting and mentoring students)

Length of commitment

2 years full time

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points awarded for passing

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, professional development programmes or work

Things to consider

Technical Level Qualifications (or T Levels) are a new government backed qualification introduced September 2020 in three industries: digital production, design and development; design, surveying and planning; and education. As of September 2021, a further seven industries will be added and further expansion will take place through 2023.

T Levels offer a mixture of classroom learning with an on-the-job placement equating to 20% of the course time with a view to students obtaining the right technical skills to get ahead in their chosen industries.

More information

Gov.uk

The Parents' Guide to

T Levels Gov. UK

The Institute for Technical Education

The Parents' Guide to Standing out

Applying for jobs 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 transferable skills they develop with dedicated sections on music and sports
- ✓ Recommendations for non-curricular online courses
- ✓ Benefits of competitions

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Cambridge Technicals

AN ALTERNATIVE QUALIFICATION FOR STUDENTS WHO MAY STRUGGLE WITH EXAMINATIONS

Qualification type

A Cambridge Technical Extended Certificate (equivalent to an A level) or Cambridge Technical Diploma (equivalent to x2 A levels)

Type of learning

Practical course with lots of coursework based on real life case studies

Qualifications needed to sign up

At least 5 GCSEs

Subject choices

Range of vocational subjects

Length of commitment

2 years

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)

Can lead to

University, further study, training or work

Things to consider

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.

More information

UCAS

Other qualifications

Qualification type

City and Guilds; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or Tech Bac (similar to International Baccalaureate)

Type of learning

Dependent on the qualification, most contain practical on the job training

Qualifications needed to sign up

Usually 5 GCSEs grade 4 - 9, but check individually

Subject choices

Range of vocational subjects

Length of commitment

2 years (level 3)

Tuition costs

Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

UCAS points awarded for passing

In most cases no UCAS points are awarded but there are some exceptions.

Can lead to

Further study, training, professional development programmes or work

Things to consider

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.

More information

Gov.uk

City and Guilds

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

BTEC Apprenticeship (job with training)

Qualification type
Advanced Level 3
(equivalent to 2 A levels)

Type of learning
Work based including off-site learning

Qualifications needed to sign up
Advanced Level 3 - depends on employer, some require at least 3 GCSEs. Students need to show they can complete the programme

Subject choices
Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered

Length of commitment
1-2 years

Tuition costs
Free (unless parents choose to pay privately)

Can lead to
Further study, training, professional development programmes or work

Things to consider
Unlike BTECs, which are studied at school or college, BTEC apprenticeships also include an element of study at work, so there is a real-life component to the course.

More information

UCAS

Pearson Education

City Gateway

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

Other options

Qualification type

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

Work based

Qualifications needed to sign up

None

Subject choices

Range of vocational subjects, driven by the job offered

Length of commitment

6 weeks – 6 months

Tuition costs

None

Can lead to

Further study, apprenticeships, job offers

Things to consider

If your child is struggling to get the minimum qualifications required to move on to sixth form studies, they can undertake a traineeship (or they can volunteer) which will help them get some skills so they are ready to take the next stage in studies / development. This can be very helpful for non-academic students who may be better at picking up practical skills.

More information

Gov.uk

Personal contacts

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 (Level 3 are similar standard to A Levels, with subsidiary diploma equivalent to one A level, BTEC diploma equivalent to 2 A levels and extended diploma equivalent to 3 A levels).	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, such as construction (includes design, surveying and planning) or Education (includes early years, assisting teaching and supporting and mentoring students)
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) *Points are doubled for diploma and tripled for extended diploma*	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 Students need to show they can complete the programme	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

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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.

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

Blog

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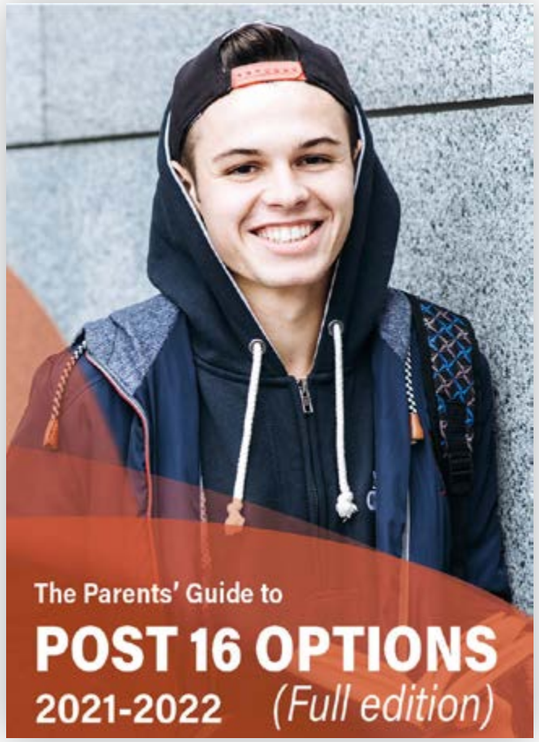

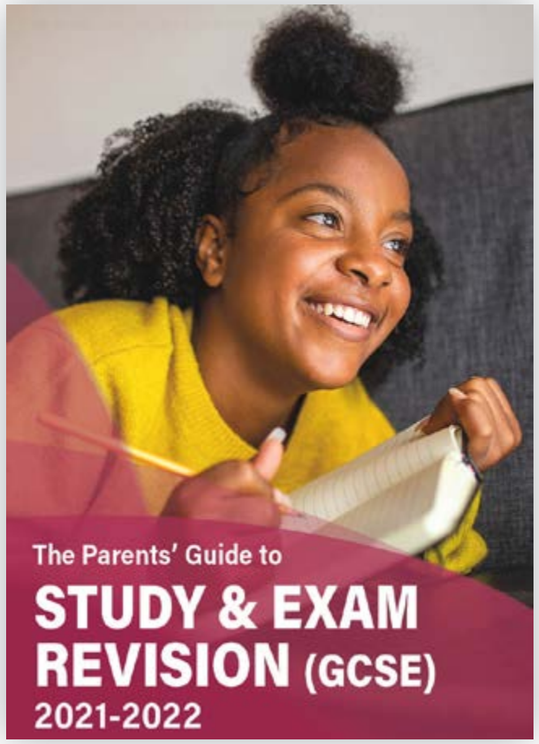

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