

Which qualifications  
are **right for me?**



## Where to start

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I want to keep my career options open – I'm not sure what I want to do

- Academic, or subject-based qualifications can help you keep your future options open both for employment and higher education.
- Some subject combinations are more appropriate than others – you may need specific subjects for certain careers and degrees so choose carefully.
- You may also be able to combine academic qualifications, such as A levels, with an applied general qualification, like a BTEC diploma.
- As a rule, job-based qualifications start to reduce the range of careers and higher education courses open to you. Technical qualifications and apprenticeships offer the most job specific route to a career, whereas applied general qualifications (e.g. business) offer a pathway to a broader range of job roles.

- Check out [A levels](#), Highers, [Cambridge Pre-U's](#) and International Baccalaureates for subject-based qualifications.
- Consider [applied general qualifications](#) – they provide broad study of subjects/job family areas and can be done alongside A levels.
- Have a look at some [career areas and job roles](#) to see if there are any which appeal, then look at the entry requirements.

I know what job I want to do

- That's great – it's a good idea to find out if there are different pathways and entry requirements for this type of job and the qualifications, skills and experience you need to help you get there.
- Remember, ideas can change, so keep exploring all your interests and ideas.

- [Check the job profile](#) – it's important to know what qualifications you will need and to see if there are vocational or academic pathways you could take.
- [Explore the job family](#) – why not look at other job roles in the same family as you may find some others that are of interest.

I don't know what job I want to do

- Don't worry – most young people aren't sure what career they'd like to do when they're 16!
- It's a good idea to choose qualifications and courses which keep your options open - like a range of A level subjects, applied general qualifications or a combination of the two which provide broad study of subjects/job family areas.
- Start exploring any careers ideas you have as they come up.

- [Filter jobs by subjects you like](#) to see the next steps you can take if you have favourite subjects you're studying now.
- Find out [more about academic qualifications](#) like [A levels](#), particularly ones related to subjects you like now.
- Explore the range of applied general qualifications – they provide broad study of subjects and careers and can be taken alongside academic qualifications.
- [Do the Buzz quiz](#) to get some ideas about what you might want to do.
- [Explore job families and roles to](#) see if any look interesting.

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I get better marks in coursework than in exams

- We all have different learning styles some people find it difficult to really show what they know and can do in exams. If this is a concern, it may be helpful to talk about it with your teachers.
- In general, subject-based courses have more exams, whereas vocational courses usually include project work and coursework, so you could consider doing applied general or vocational qualifications.

- [Look at the range of applied general qualifications](#) – they provide broad study and include project work and assignments rather than exams.
- [Check out the range of technical qualifications](#) – these are more practical and focus on training for particular jobs.
- If you don't know what sort of career area or job you might want to do, [explore some career areas](#) and a range of job roles to see if any look interesting then find out more about the qualifications you need.

I want to continue studying some of my GCSE/National subjects at a higher level

- If you like the idea of studying subjects in greater depth and at a higher level than A levels, Scottish Highers, Cambridge Pre-U or IB might be for you.
- It can be useful to start by looking at the subjects you are taking now and considering:
  - What is it you like about the subject?
  - Does it suit your preferred learning style and skills? For instance, do you like English and drama because you get to talk and listen? Or do you like design technology because you can get stuck in and learn with your hands?
  - Is it going to help you in the future – whether it's to get to a particular career or job role, or go on to university or further training?

- Check out [A levels](#), Highers, [Cambridge Pre-U](#)s and [International Baccalaureates](#) for more information about [academic qualifications](#).
- [Explore other career areas](#) and job roles to see what qualifications and subjects you may need to do any jobs you're interested in.
- [Check entry requirements for any university courses](#) you're thinking of applying for in future.

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I'd prefer to study a more practical course that covers the skills and knowledge I need for a particular career area

- You might want to look at the applied general and technical qualifications because these are usually more practical and are designed to give you the skills and knowledge you need to either work in a particular job family or career. Remember, vocational courses start to narrow future careers and degree choices, so it's important that you think this through carefully.
- If you know what career you want to aim for, you need to find out more about any particular qualifications or subjects you may need to get.

- [Explore the range of applied general qualifications](#) – they provide broad study of subjects/job family
- [Check out the range of technical qualifications](#) – these are more practical and focus on training for particular jobs.
- [Explore career areas](#) and job roles to see what qualifications and subjects you may need to do any jobs you're interested in.

I'd prefer to do more learning in a working environment than in the classroom

- If this is you, they you may want to look at the range of technical qualifications as these are all designed to give you the skills and knowledge for a particular job role.
- Apprenticeships and traineeships are programmes which include learning in a work environment. These are job-specific so you need to know what sort of job you want to do.
- Don't forget – these pathways are more specialised so they are suitable for those who have a clear idea of the type of career they want to do.
- If you're not sure what job you want to do, you could consider an applied general qualification which provides broader study of particular subjects.

- [Check out the range of technical qualifications](#) – these are more practical and focus on training for particular jobs.
- [Explore the range of applied general qualifications](#) – they provide broad study of subjects/job family areas.
- Find out more about [apprenticeships](#) and [traineeships](#) – these offer you the opportunity to learn in a working environment.
- [Explore career areas and job roles](#) to see what qualifications and subjects you may need to do any jobs you're interested in.

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I am likely to get mainly D or E grades or below at GCSE

- There are quite a few options to choose from. Many of the applied general and technical qualifications can be studied starting at entry, level 1 or level 2. This means you could start there and progress to the higher levels if you want to.
- You could consider apprenticeship or traineeship programmes. These are qualifications which include learning in a working environment. These are job-specific so you need to know what sort of job you want to do.
- In England, if you do not get grades A\*– C in maths and/or English, you will need to either retake these GCSE subjects or you can take equivalent level qualifications such as functional skills programmes alongside other qualifications and courses you decide to do next and as part of your study programme.
- There are some job roles where employers recruit people with specific level 2 technical certificate qualifications which might be right for you.
- There are a range of learning and training opportunities which can be combined with work experience or volunteering in a study programme which is tailored just for you. Your study programme can include one or more technical or academic qualifications, or other non-qualification activities to help get you into a job or higher level of training or education. Speak to your teachers and local colleges to find out more about these.

- [Check out the range of technical qualifications](#) – these are more practical and focus on training for particular jobs.
- [Explore the range of applied general qualifications](#) – they provide broad study of subjects and job families.
- Do the [Buzz quiz](#) to get some ideas about what you might want to do.
- [Explore career areas and job roles](#) to find out more about jobs and career areas you're interested in and what skills and qualifications they require.
- Find out more about [apprenticeships](#) and [traineeships](#) – these offer you the opportunity to learn in a working environment.
- [Find out more about study programmes](#) and how your post-16 next steps can be tailored to fit you. Speak to your local college about what range of entry and level 1 or 2 qualifications they offer as well as the study programme courses and activities they offer.

I am likely to get five GCSEs grade C or above

- You should be able to choose from all the qualifications types and the different pathways.
- It is important that you explore all the post-16 options and consider which one is best for you – whether it is focused on subjects you like and want to study further or careers you want to aim for.
- It is a good idea to have a back-up plan – just in case you don't get the grades you expect.

- [Find out more about your post-16 options](#) and see which ones appeal to you most.
- [Explore jobs and careers](#) to see what qualifications and subjects you may need to do any jobs you're interested in.
- [Check entry requirements for any university courses](#) you're thinking of applying for in future.