SubjectWorks by True North

Qualifications & pathways

Different routes. More possibilities.

After GCSEs, your starting point depends on the course and your existing skills as well as your grades. These are some of the routes available.

LEVEL 3 STUDY OPTIONS - OTHER STARTING POINTS ARE AVAILABLE

Academic

A Levels

AVAILABLE NOW

Explore subjects in depth.

Usually choose three subjects, such as English, biology or history.

Mostly subject-based learning, with assessment varying by subject.

Usually two years.

Vocational

V Levels

FIRST SUBJECTS: SEPT 2027

Explore a work-related sector.

Apply knowledge to real situations and explore areas before specialising.

Each is the size of one A Level. Combine V Levels with each other or A Levels.

Introduced in stages.

Technical

T Levels

AVAILABLE NOW

Focus on a technical career.

Study one sector with classroom learning and an industry placement.

One T Level is broadly the size of three A Levels. Includes at least 45 days with an employer.

Usually two years.

Strong GCSEs? You may still start at Level 1 or 2 in a new practical trade. These courses build the skills needed for that occupation. GCSE grades alone do not replace practical experience. Other routes, including T Levels, can start at Level 3 after GCSEs.

EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

Apprenticeships

A paid job with training. Available from Level 2 to Level 7, including higher and degree apprenticeships. Apply for a vacancy; requirements vary by role.

Where can these routes lead? Further study, higher education, apprenticeships or employment. Your subjects, results and the entry requirements of your next step matter.

Your starting level reflects what you need to learn for your chosen route.

The qualification ladder

Level tells you how demanding the learning is. It does not tell you the length of a course or make one pathway better than another.

LEVEL	FAMILIAR EXAMPLES
8	Doctorate, such as a PhD
7	Master's degree; postgraduate certificate or diploma
6	Bachelor's degree, such as a BA or BSc
5	Foundation degree; Higher National Diploma (HND)
4	Higher National Certificate (HNC); Certificate of Higher Education
3	A Levels; T Levels; V Levels*; Level 3 vocational diplomas
2	GCSE grades 4-9; Level 2 vocational qualifications; new certificates*
1	GCSE grades 1-3; Level 1 vocational qualifications
Entry	Entry Level certificates; Entry Level Functional Skills

Higher technical study: approved Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) are at Levels 4 and 5.
Apprenticeships: Level 2 foundation/intermediate; Level 3 advanced; Levels 4-7 higher; Levels 6-7 degree.

*** NEW OPTIONS FROM SEPTEMBER 2027**

Foundation Certificates

Level 2: prepare for further study at Level 3. First subjects roll out from 2027.

Occupational Certificates

Level 2: prepare for skilled employment or an apprenticeship. Rollout starts in 2027.

V Levels: first subjects are accounting and finance, digital systems and data, and education. More follow in later years. Local availability will vary.

Existing vocational courses: BTECs and other diplomas remain during the transition; check local availability. Ask a careers adviser about the right starting point, support and progression. Same level does not mean same course size.

Sources: qualification levels | Post-16 reform plan | T Levels | Apprenticeships | HTQs

How will I be assessed?

Assessment means how you show what you know and can do.

Most courses use more than one method. Practical courses can include exams too. The mix depends on the exact qualification, subject and year you start.

COURSE OR TRAINING	WHAT YOU MAY BE ASKED TO DO
A Levels	Usually written exams. In biology, chemistry and physics, teachers also check practical skills and give a separate practical result. Some other subjects include coursework.
Level 2 practical diplomas	**Electrical installation:** assessment can include online exams, practical assignments and theory work. **Boatbuilding:** assessment can include written work, exams and practical tasks. Check the exact course.
Level 3 vocational courses	Assessment can include coursework, practical investigations, projects and exams. The mix depends on the subject and qualification. Ask how each part contributes to your final result.
T Levels	Exams, an employer-set project and tasks testing your job-related skills. Digital students may design and test software; engineering students may complete practical tasks. A work placement is also required.
Apprenticeships	Assessment depends on the apprenticeship. For example, Mechatronics Maintenance Technician includes someone watching you work and asking questions, plus a discussion supported by a record of your work.
Degrees	Assessment can include essays, exams, presentations, lab reports, practical projects and a dissertation: a longer piece of research and writing. The mix depends on the subject and course.
V Levels - from 2027	For the first three subjects: 40% of marks come from assessments taken at a set time, and 60% from other assessments. Set-time tasks can be practical as well as written. Later subjects may use a different mix.

THREE TERMS EXPLAINED

Coursework: assignments completed during your course. **Practical assessment:** showing a skill by doing a task. **Portfolio:** a collection of work showing what you have learned.

Ask before choosing: How much is exams or coursework? Are tasks timed? What support or assessment adjustments can I get?

General examples: assessment methods vary. Ask for the details of your course.