

# Careers decisions in secondary education: A guide for parents and carers

A practical resource for supporting your child's career decisions: guidance on pathways, opportunities, and fostering future aspirations.



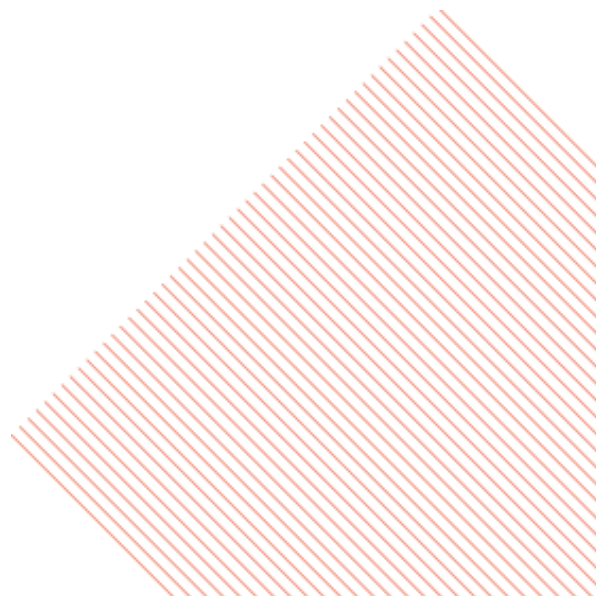
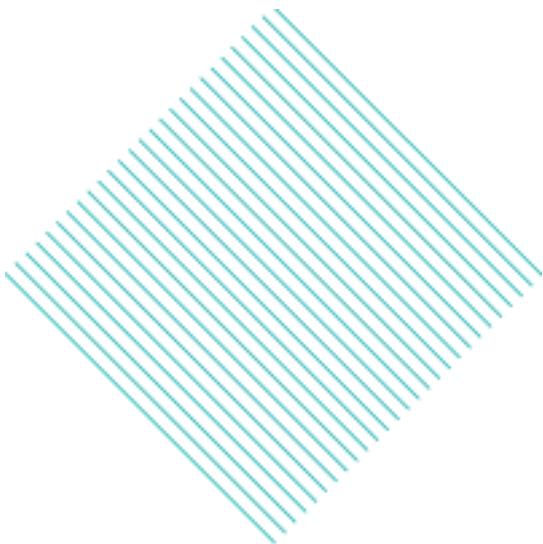
Developed by the  
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Careers Hub

# Parents are influential people

Being a parent is a juggling act and knowing everything about careers on top of everything else? Don't panic, there are some great ways in which you can help. This guide has been designed to help you support your child to find their best next step in education, employment or training.

“ **90% of young people said they accessed careers advice from their friends or parents** ”

DfE report: Young people's experiences of careers information, advice and guidance  
September 2021



# Introduction

Start with the end in mind.

There are key decision points for your child at age 14, 16 and 18 and it makes sense to consider these options through the lens of careers.

## Things to consider:

- What motivates your child?
- Which hobbies do they enjoy?
- What is their favourite subject?
- Who influences them?
- Will they enjoy working indoors or outdoors or a mixture of the two?
- Would they like to work in one place or from different locations?
- Are they interested in running their own business?
- Do they want to work with people?
- Are they motivated by money? Are they creative?
- Do they design things?
- Have they thought about a workplace experience or doing some voluntary work?

The list is not exhaustive, but it's a great place to start.

**Keep reading to find out how you can help.**



TALKING

FUTURES



## A parents' toolkit for career conversations

Have more informed and constructive conversations with your child about training and education using the Talking Futures resource.

## Effective careers conversations

### Talking Futures.

The Talking Futures website has been designed to help you to navigate the world of career choices. It includes a Top Tip Framework to make it easier to have good conversations with your child covering the following aspects:

- **Timings:** Don't force the issue
- **Obstacles (and observations):** Consider what obstacles might be getting in the way
- **Passions:** Focus on their passions rather than practicality
- **Two-way communication:** Learn to listen more than talk
- **Ideas and positivity:** Continue to be interested

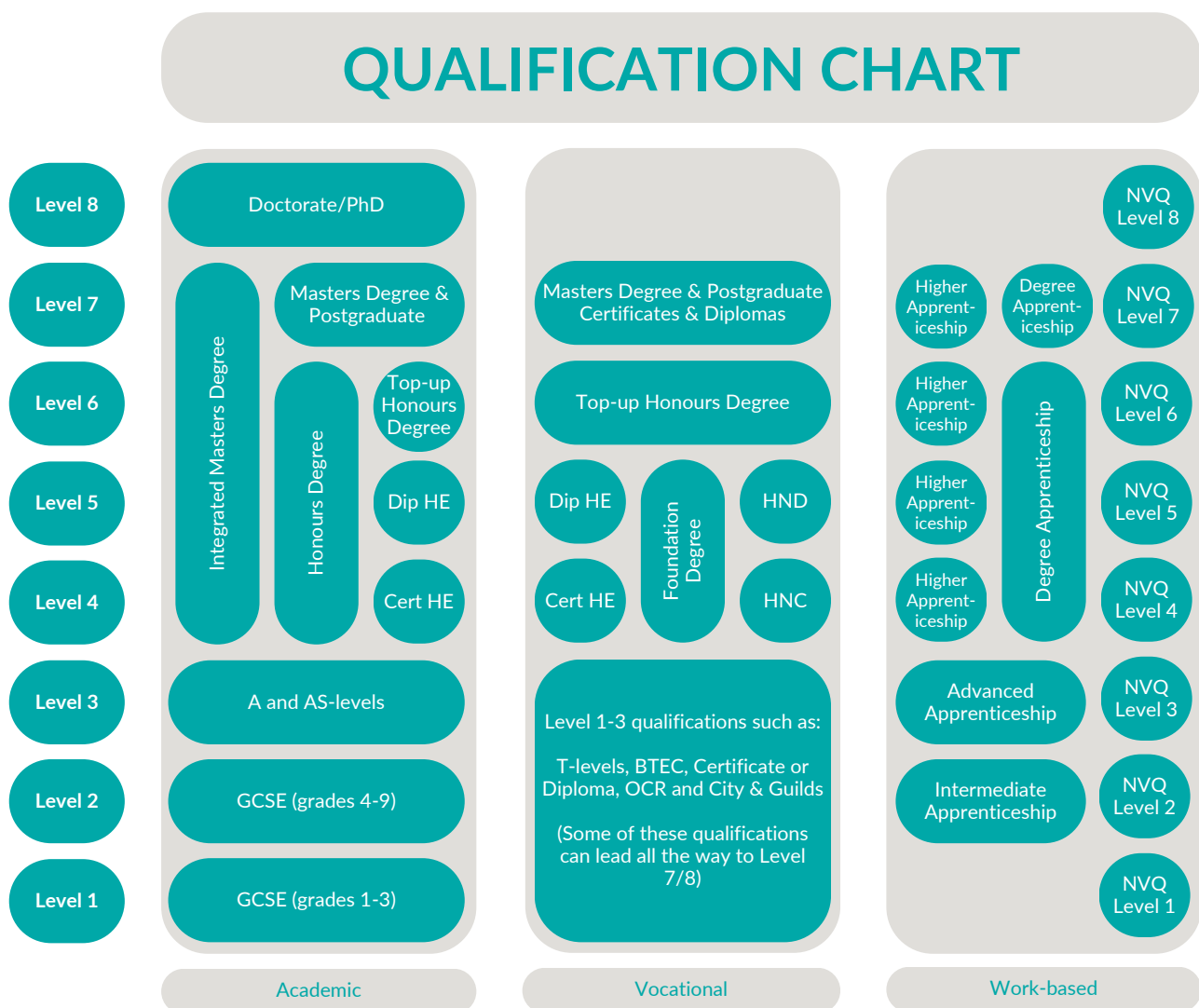
The website has comprehensive information and resources for all stages in your child's education.

[www.talkingfutures.org.uk](http://www.talkingfutures.org.uk)

# Understanding qualifications

There are three main educational pathways: academic, vocational or work-based. Educational levels go from entry level (before level 1) all the way up to level 8.

Use the qualification chart below to get a better understanding.



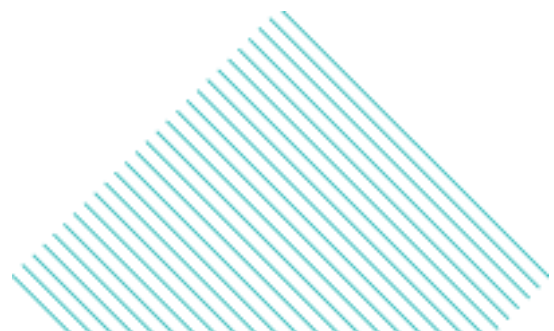
# College, job and university application process

Applying to college courses, universities, and jobs (including apprenticeships) requires going through an application process.

- **Local colleges** expect applications to be submitted early in Year 11, and it is the responsibility of both the student and their parent/carer to apply.
- **Job opportunities** and apprenticeships provide application deadlines and submission instructions in their adverts.
- **Universities** also have specific deadlines throughout the year, and your child will receive guidance and support from their school or college careers team.

Here are some recommendations to prepare for the application process:

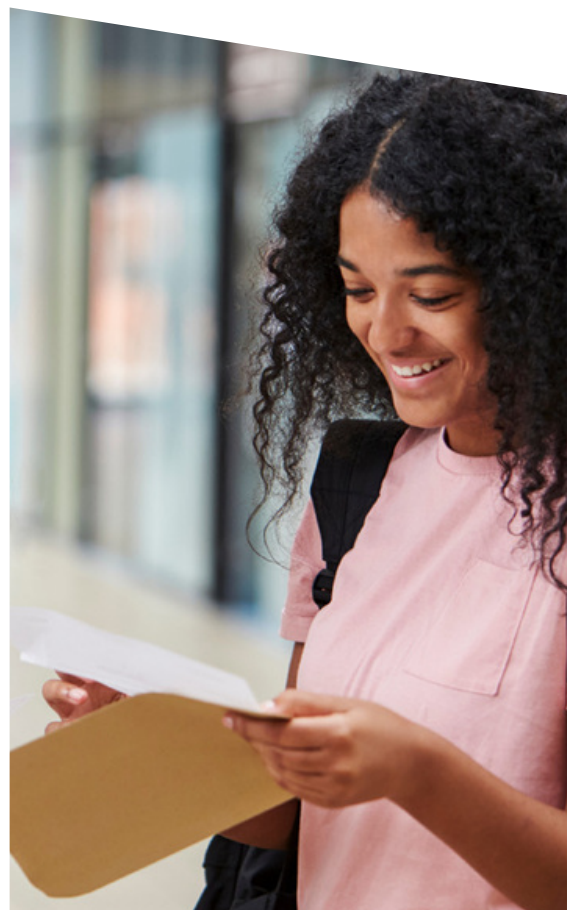
- Speak to your school or college Careers Leader or Work Experience Coordinator.
- Encourage your child to write a skills-based CV, which will include most of the necessary details for an application form.
- Ensure your child has an appropriate email address.
- Have them practice sending and receiving emails with a CV attached.
- Help them become familiar with application forms and understand the language used in them.
- Ensure their social media profiles contain good information—prospective employers will view their online presence, so make sure they know how to set privacy settings and avoid inappropriate content.
- Encourage them to leave plenty of time to review an application after writing it, and ask a friend or colleague to proofread it for spelling or grammar errors.



## Results day

Sometimes, results don't turn out as expected. So, what should your child do if their results are better or worse than anticipated?

**First of all, don't panic.** There is usually a solution to most situations. If they did better than expected, that's fantastic! If they did worse, their sixth form, college, or training provider will typically offer an alternative. The best step is for them to seek a one-on-one guidance interview with a trained Careers Guidance Counsellor. Contact your local school or college to arrange this, or visit the [National Careers Service](#).



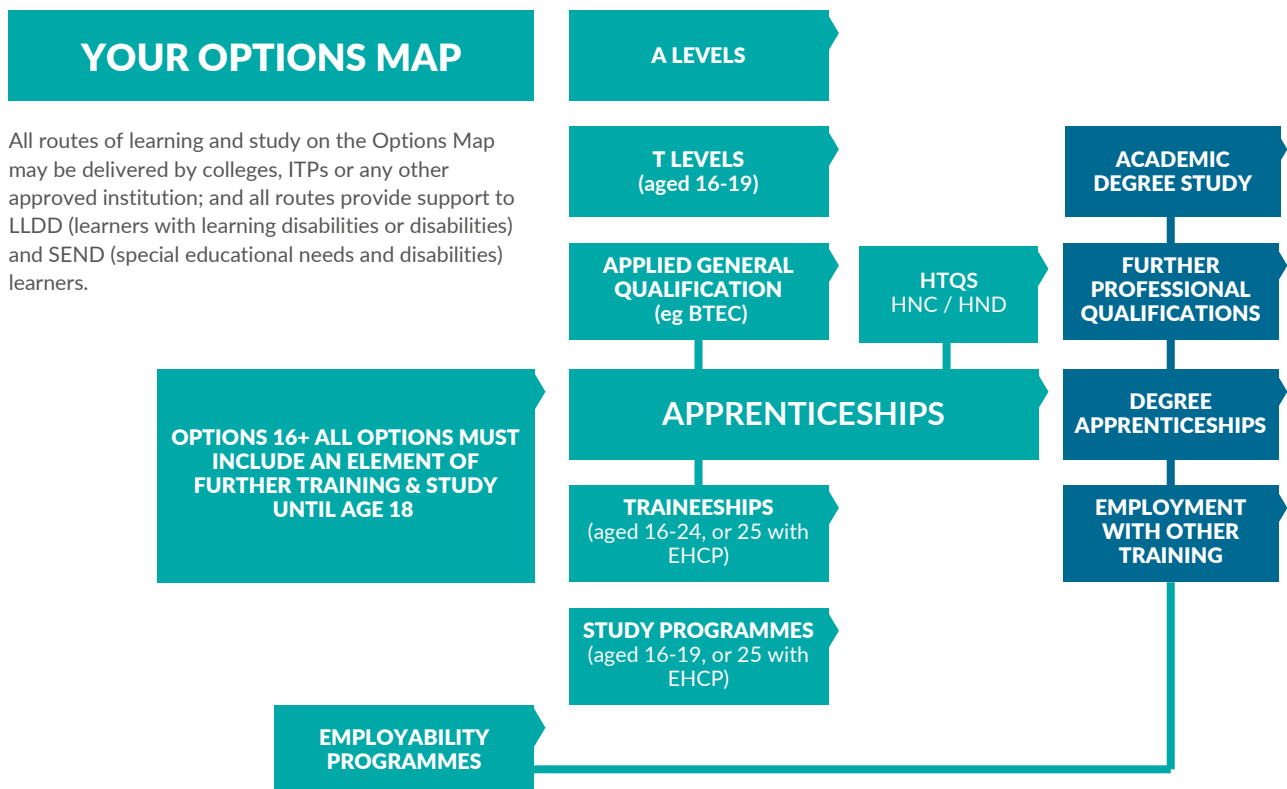
# Apprenticeships, technical and vocational pathways

Work-based and apprenticeship qualifications often start at levels 1 or 2, even if your child has completed a full level 2 (equivalent to five GCSEs at grade 4 and above).

This is because these qualifications require practical experience and the ability to perform hands-on tasks. For instance, aspiring plumbers cannot start at level 3 without any practical plumbing experience, as this pathway is vocational rather than academic.

Many careers can be pursued through various pathways, and it is possible to switch between them. However, it is common to progress through the levels within a specific subject or sector. Having a plan can be very helpful in navigating this progression.

Being informed can help you to decide the best next step.



# Provider types

There are different providers of qualifications, and all offer different levels and pathways.

Each type of provider offers a different style of teaching, learning and environment so there is something to suit all needs. The choice of provider will likely be influenced by where you live.

Type of provider	Governance	Quality Regulation
<b>Independent Training Providers (ITPs)</b>	Government funded but privately managed, so training is flexibly and diversely delivered.	Government regulated for financial accountability and quality of training delivery, learning and assessment. Non-compliance and poor outcomes lead directly to contract withdrawal.
<b>Colleges</b>	Public-funded and accountable institutions with a variety of independent powers depending on where they are located.	Government regulated for financial accountability and quality of training delivery, learning and assessment. Non-compliance and poor outcomes triggers process of remediation interventions.
<b>Commercial Training Providers</b>	Privately-owned, privately managed.	Unregulated by government. Quality standards can vary and are communicated via public relations.
<b>Voluntary and charitable sectors</b>	According to donor organisation codes, policy and practice.	Financial accountability and quality delivery assurance stipulated in contract between donor and training delivery organisation.
<b>Higher Education Institutions</b>	Independent, self-governing bodies, but most are part-funded by the government.	Self-governing bodies – subject to Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) / Office for Students (OfS) oversight for degrees and Ofsted on all their apprenticeship provision.
<b>University Technical Colleges (UTCs)</b>	Government funded schools with a STEM focus. They are established by companies and universities in areas of high demand for talent.	Over 50 local universities govern UTCs.



## Work Experience

In secondary school or college, students have the opportunity to gain work experience.

Just like with anything in life, you won't know if it's right for you until you try it. The same goes for work. Considering how much time we spend at work over a lifetime, it's beneficial for young people to start thinking early about what interests and motivates them in a job. Work experience allows students to:

- Meet employers and employees within an organisation
- Complete a project or piece of work
- Present their work to employers and receive valuable feedback
- Gain essential life skills
- Understand what it's like to work in the real world
- Determine if a particular profession is right for them
- Connect their education to real-world contexts

Your school will provide guidance on this, but it's important to discuss it with your child and start reaching out to local employers. Think outside of the box and try to go beyond asking family or friends for placements as this might limit the opportunities to experience something new. Encourage your child to be proactive in their search for a placement.

[Click here to try the Talking Futures conversation starter](#)

# Advice for children seeking an apprenticeship employer

If your child can't find any suitable vacancies, they can take the initiative to find their own apprenticeship with an employer. Here are some steps they can take:

- **Gain work Experience**

Before applying for an apprenticeship, it's beneficial for your child to gain experience in their desired industry. Encourage them to ask their work experience employer if they would consider taking on an apprentice once the experience is complete. This will set them apart from other applicants when employers are looking to hire.

- **Hand out CV's**

Though traditional, handing out CVs can still be effective. Once your child has a polished CV and has chosen an apprenticeship they're interested in, they should visit businesses in that industry. Encourage them to introduce themselves, inquire about apprenticeship opportunities, and leave their CV with contact details.

- **Make contact with local employers**

If your child is still exploring options, encourage them to reach out to local employers. They can call, visit, or email businesses to express their interest. Having a CV ready to hand over is helpful. Leaving contact details with employers ensures they have a way to follow up.

- **Speak to an apprentice recruitment team**

If an employer expresses interest in taking your child on as an apprentice, that's great news! In this case, your child will need to provide the employer's contact details to a training provider, such as a local college or an independent training facility. Alternatively, they can direct the employer to [www.apprenticeships.gov.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk) to choose an apprenticeship program and find a suitable training provider.

# Skills: What are they and why are they important?

Did you know, research shows that having four or more essential or transferable skills, can reduce the likelihood of being unemployed, increase earnings and lead to happier and healthy lives?

The **Skillsbuilder Framework** website gives an overview of the essential skills employers are seeking. The beauty of essential skills is that we all have them; sometimes we just need a little extra help to identify them in ourselves and be able write or talk about them confidently. They are achievable by everyone.



Essential skills  
are achievable  
by everyone!

Employers and educators are aware of the importance of these skills, and when your child comes to apply for their next course or job, they will be expected to show evidence of their essential skills.

Research shows that building essential skills can support:

- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Learning and academic outcomes
- Careers and opportunities

[Visit the Skillsbuilder website to find out more](#)



# Additional information and support for parents and carers

## [Parent's Guidebook](#)

The decisions young people make from an early stage at school can have a big impact on their future career choices and happiness. As parents you have a vital role to play in this career journey.

## [A parent's guide to university](#)

Written for parents by parents. Offering an insight into how parents can best support their child's transition from school to university.

## [Decision making, how to support your child at key transition points](#)

Guides to key decision points outline the options open at each stage and feature written and video information to help inform your child's decision-making.

## [Tools and tips to help your child reach their full potential](#)

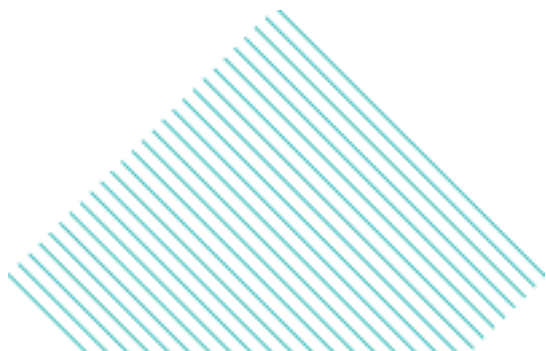
Help your son or daughter to develop the key skills they need for the future and help them unlock their potential.

## [Apprenticeship information and support for parents](#)

A full range of resources to help support parents. Access current and past editions of the specialist Parents' Pack, filled with the latest advice and guidance, supported by the National Apprenticeship Service.

## [Feed your child's curiosity](#)

TED-Ed provides everything you need to spark and celebrate your child's ideas and share them with the world.



# Additional information and support for parents and carers

## [Parents' Toolkit – SEND](#)

SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) resources, activities and support to help you and your family.

## [Further education, university or an apprenticeship?](#)

Information to help parents and carers support young people in making the right decision about study and work.

## [My world of work – help your child explore and discover different careers](#)

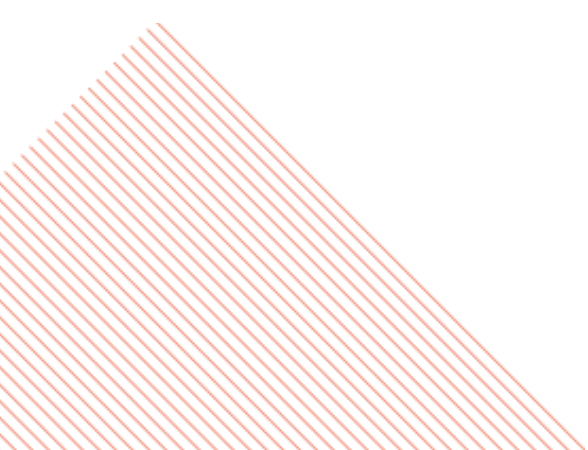
Tools for you to use with your son/daughter to spark ideas about career exploration and routes they could take to get the jobs they want. Help them build career management skills to help them make decisions that are right for them.

## [What is higher education \(HE\) and what are the benefits?](#)

The earlier your child starts thinking about their post 16 and post 18 options the better but your support will be beneficial wherever they are on their journey.

## [T levels – A Guide for Parents](#)

T levels are post-16 technical qualifications introduced by the government, designed to provide students with practical skills and knowledge for their chosen career paths. But what exactly are T levels? Which 16-year-olds should take them? Are there any pros and cons?





**Devon, Plymouth  
& Torbay**  
CAREERS HUB

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