

# EXPLORING FUTURE CHOICES

## BEYOND YOUR GCSEs

AFTER GCSEs – WHAT'S NEXT?

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SIXTH FORM AND COLLEGE

HOW TO MAKE THE BEST DECISIONS FOR YOU

TAKE YOUR NEXT STEPS FOR 18+



**GROWS** Gloucestershire network



**GROWS**  
encouraging higher aspirations

# MAKING CHOICES

**YOU'RE PROBABLY STUDYING FOR YOUR GCSES, OR MAYBE STILL MAKING YOUR GCSE CHOICES.**

YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING HOW TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR NEXT STEPS. THE NEXT STAGE IN YOUR EDUCATION MIGHT FEEL DAUNTING; IT CAN BE DIFFICULT TO KNOW WHICH CHOICES TO MAKE AND HOW TO MAKE THEM.



**THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU WITH THOSE CHOICES, IT WILL...**

- + GIVE YOU MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR OPTIONS AFTER YOU'VE FINISHED GCSEs (POST-16 CHOICES)**
- + SHOW YOU HOW YOU CAN MAKE THE BEST CHOICES FOR YOU**
- + HELP YOU EXPLORE YOUR POTENTIAL OPTIONS AFTER SIXTH FORM OR COLLEGE**

You might be thinking: 'Hold on, all this stuff is a long way away,' but it's useful to start thinking about your options now. Knowing what's possible and what to aim for means you can make the right decisions for you. Having a career in mind is great but keeping your options open is equally important. No matter what your future goal is, it's helpful to understand all your options.

## HOW TO GET THE BEST FROM THIS GUIDE...

- + THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN APPLY THE ADVICE TO YOUR OWN SITUATION**
- + VISIT THE WEBSITES PROVIDED FOR EXTRA INFORMATION**
- + MAKE A NOTE OF ANY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE AND FOLLOW THEM UP WITH A SCHOOL CAREERS ADVISOR, TEACHER, OR PARENT.**



# WHAT DO GCSEs HAVE TO DO WITH LADDERS?

YOU'VE PROBABLY BEEN TOLD HOW IMPORTANT GCSEs ARE, AND THAT YOU SHOULD BE WORKING HARD TO ACHIEVE THEM.

SO, WHY ARE GCSEs SUCH A BIG DEAL?



THINK OF GCSEs AS A STEP ON A LADDER OR THE KEY TO A LOCKED DOOR. YOU CAN'T CLIMB THE LADDER OR OPEN THE DOOR TO YOUR FUTURE UNTIL YOU HAVE THE NEXT STEP OR KEY.

By gaining Level 2 qualifications (that means five GCSEs grades 9-4), you can move on to study at sixth form or college. Gaining Level 2 qualifications will allow you to study at Level 3 and beyond; they will also help you progress to interesting and rewarding jobs.

GCSEs CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT THINGS INCLUDING...

- + YOUR SIXTH FORM OR COLLEGE CHOICE
- + THE SUBJECTS OR QUALIFICATIONS YOU CAN STUDY AT LEVEL 3
- + APPLYING FOR A UNIVERSITY PLACE
- + FUTURE CAREER PROSPECTS

## WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T GET THE GCSE GRADES I WANT?



GCSEs are important so you need to work hard in Years 10 and 11. If you don't achieve the GCSE grades you were hoping for, you should have the opportunity to re-sit your exams.

Usually you will be required to continue studying English and maths until you achieve your level 2 qualification or you reach 18 – whichever comes first. If you don't get the grades on your first try, all is not lost, but it is definitely easier to get them first time around.

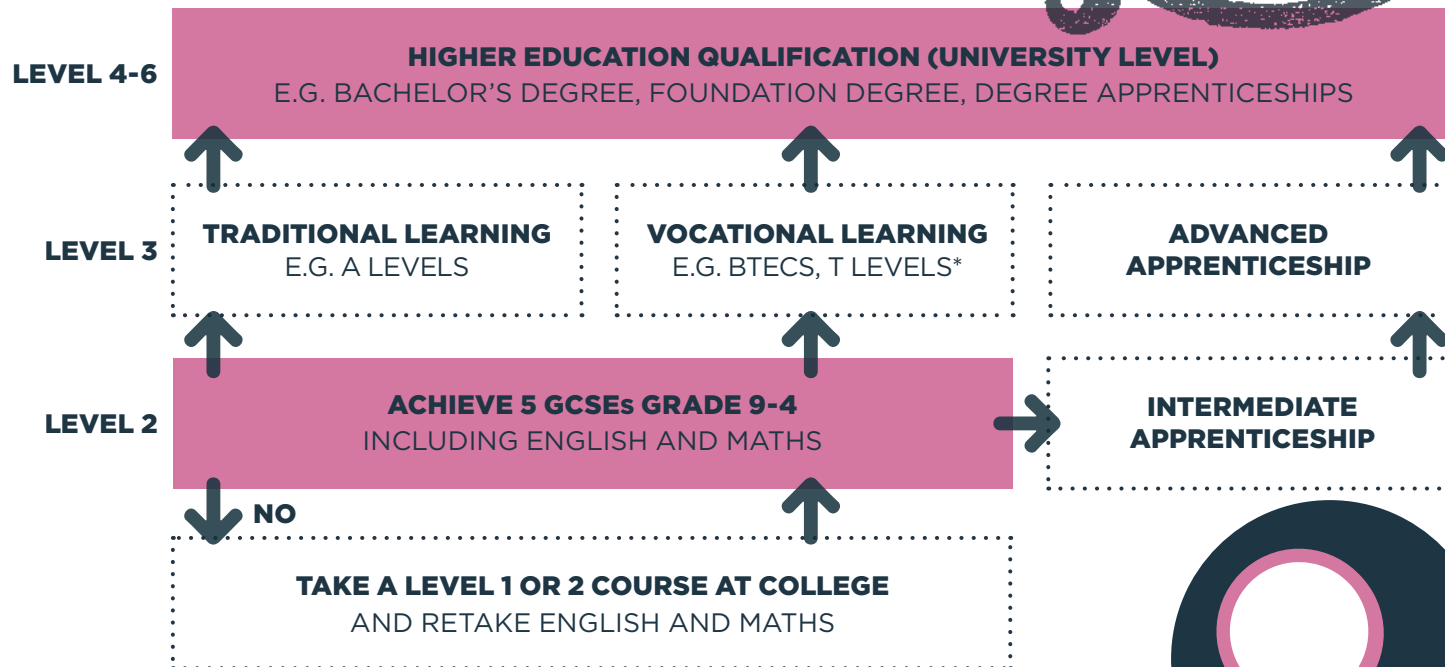




# WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

**IN ORDER TO MAKE THE RIGHT POST-16 CHOICES, YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND YOUR OPTIONS. THE NEXT TWO PAGES EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENT CHOICES AND PROVIDE THE FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW.**

The chart to the right sets out the different education levels and what they mean. Right now, you are working towards getting your GCSEs – this is a Level 2 qualification. From here you can move up the levels. After the age of 16, the next options are known as Level 3 qualifications.



*\*Not all vocational L3 qualifications are accepted at all universities. Check directly to be sure.*



# DIFFERENT PATHWAYS

AFTER GCSEs THERE ARE SEVERAL PATHWAYS YOU CAN TAKE...

- + **STAY IN FULL TIME EDUCATION AT SIXTH FORM OR COLLEGE TO STUDY LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATIONS**
- + **DO AN APPRENTICESHIP OR TRAINEESHIP**
- + **WORK OR VOLUNTEER WHILE IN PART-TIME EDUCATION OR TRAINING**

**Remember:** you are required by law to stay in some form of education or training until you reach 18.

## LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATIONS

### A LEVELS

- + Studied at sixth form or college
- + Wide range of subjects
- + Mainly assessed through exams
- + Usually study 3 different subjects
- + Develops key skills for university

### VOCATIONAL COURSES (E.G. BTECS / T LEVELS)

- + Specialist work-related qualifications e.g. T Levels, BTECs & NVQs
- + Available at Level 1 and 2 and 3
- + Combines practical and theory work
- + Assessed mainly through coursework
- + Gain key skills to work in a specific industry
- + Can include work placements

### APPRENTICESHIPS

- + Paid employment with training
- + You find the employer
- + Usually start on Intermediate and progress to an Advanced Apprenticeship
- + Assessed through practical evidence, assignments and exams
- + Progression into employment or higher education



## FIND OUT MORE

[careerpilot.org.uk](https://careerpilot.org.uk) has more detailed information about all Level 3 qualifications



## USE THE GROWS FINDING MY FUTURE WORKBOOK

...for advice, useful links and fun quizzes all linked to your post 16 options. **Request a copy at** [www.grows.ac.uk/FMF](https://www.grows.ac.uk/FMF)

# WHERE CAN I STUDY?

AS WELL AS CHOOSING WHAT TO STUDY, YOU NEED TO DECIDE WHERE YOU WANT TO CONTINUE YOUR LEARNING. SOMETIMES THE SUBJECT OR QUALIFICATION YOU WANT TO STUDY WILL DETERMINE WHERE YOU STUDY.

Often you will have to make some decisions about where to go. Having all the information about where you can study will definitely help you choose the right place for you.

Here is a rough guide to what you can study in each type of place. This might not always be the case so do check individual school and college websites to find out exactly what each one offers.

## FURTHER EDUCATION (FE) COLLEGE

A RANGE OF QUALIFICATIONS, INCLUDING A LEVELS, T LEVELS, VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND APPRENTICESHIPS

## TRAINING PROVIDER

VOCATIONAL COURSES AND TRAINING

## WORKPLACE

APPRENTICESHIPS AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

## SCHOOL SIXTH FORM

A LEVELS AND SOME VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS  
E.G. BTECs

find your future

# WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

## BETWEEN SIXTH FORM AND A FE COLLEGE?

### SIXTH FORM

- + BASED IN A LOCAL SCHOOL
- + SMALLER THAN FE COLLEGES
- + MAINLY OFFER A LEVELS AND SOME VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS
- + OFFER A WIDER RANGE OF SUBJECTS THAN AVAILABLE AT GCSE

### FE COLLEGE

- + OFTEN HAVE MULTIPLE CAMPUSES BASED NEAR TOWN CENTRES
- + VARY IN SIZE AND FACILITIES
- + OFFER A RANGE OF QUALIFICATIONS, INCLUDING A LEVELS, VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS & APPRENTICESHIPS
- + OFFER A RANGE OF ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS
- + TEND TO HAVE SPECIALIST SPACES FOR VOCATIONAL COURSES

## HOW DOES STUDYING AT SIXTH FORM OR FE COLLEGE COMPARE TO STUDYING GCSEs?

Studying at Level 3 feels a bit different to how you learn now.

- + You will study fewer subjects in much more depth
- + There will be time each week for independent study, when you do your own research and revision.
- + You are more responsible for your learning and have chosen the subjects you are studying
- + The place where you study may be further away from home and require you to travel



## DID YOU KNOW...

If you do an apprenticeship at Level 3, it's likely you will be in a workplace for most of your week, with some time in a FE College or other training provider.

## FIND OUT MORE

[studential.com/further-education/sixth-form-or-college](https://www.studential.com/further-education/sixth-form-or-college)

## DON'T FORGET DEADLINES!

Get your application in on time to stand the best chance of securing a place on your chosen course. Most applications open in October and close sometime between January and April when you are in Year 11. Make sure you check the sixth form or college website.

## ATTEND OPEN DAYS AND EVENINGS TO GET A FEEL FOR THE PLACE

They are a chance to meet current students and teachers and decide if you can see yourself studying there for the next two years. Check each school or college website and put dates in your diary.



# YOUR CAREER YOUR WAY

**WITH LOTS OF OPTIONS AVAILABLE,  
IT CAN BE HARD TO KNOW WHERE  
TO START.**

ANSWERING THESE QUESTIONS WILL  
HELP YOU MAKE POST-16 DECISIONS  
THAT ARE RIGHT FOR YOU.

## **+ AM I MAKING THIS DECISION FOR MYSELF?**

This might be the first time you've had a chance to break away from the people around you. It's tempting to do exactly what your friends are doing so you study at the same place or follow the same subjects however that might not be the right path for you. Remember, this is YOUR decision and it will impact on YOUR future. Now is your

opportunity to do what YOU want to do. Whichever choice you make, you can hold onto old friends and make new ones too!

## **+ WHICH GCSE GRADES AM I LIKELY TO ACHIEVE?**

The GCSE grades you are likely to achieve will influence the qualification or subjects you apply to study next. It's important to be aware of this before filling in your applications. Ask your teachers about the grades they think you are likely to achieve, not just based on your current situation but also if you dedicate yourself and work hard through Year 11.

## **+ WHICH SUBJECTS DO I ENJOY?**

You are likely to be more engaged with a subject that you enjoy and this can lead to greater success. Think about which subjects you like learning at school or consider other subject areas that might be of interest to you. Need some inspiration? At [grows.ac.uk/sacu](https://grows.ac.uk/sacu) you'll find a link to the Careers Cloud Quiz. It's a great starting point for finding out which subjects might suit you.

## **+ WHAT'S MY LEARNING STYLE?**

By now you probably have a good idea of how you like to study and which types of tests and assessment suit you best. Maybe you enjoy revising and sitting exams at the

end of the year to test your knowledge. If that fills you with dread, are you more comfortable doing practical coursework throughout the year and being assessed as you go along? Level 3 courses and qualifications are taught and tested in different ways so it's good to be aware of this when making a choice to suit your style.

## **+ DO I HAVE A SPECIFIC JOB OR CAREER IN MIND?**

You don't yet need to have an idea of which job you might do in the future and it's good to keep your options open. If you have set your sights on a specific career, it's worth checking which subjects or qualifications you will need to follow this pathway so you don't rule yourself out.





# HOW CAN I STAND OUT?



WHICHEVER CHOICES YOU  
MAKE FOR YOUR POST-16  
OPTIONS, YOU WILL BE  
APPLYING FOR A COURSE OR  
QUALIFICATION ALONGSIDE  
LOTS OF OTHER STUDENTS.

**BEING ABLE TO SHOWCASE  
ALL THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT  
YOU, BESIDES YOUR GRADES,  
WILL HELP THOSE READING  
YOUR APPLICATION BETTER  
UNDERSTAND YOUR POTENTIAL.**

**How will you make yourself stand out from  
the other applicants to make sure you get  
your place?**

Even if you think you're going to achieve great GCSE grades, sixth forms, colleges and universities want to know that you have other interests and qualities. These include the extra-curricular activities you take part in and the skills you have gained from these. The earlier you can start building these experiences, the more you will have to talk about in your application.



## FREE...

### **FREE SUBJECT TASTER AND UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE EVENTS**

GROWS OFFERS A NUMBER OF FREE SUBJECT TASTER AND UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE EVENTS AROUND GLOUCESTERSHIRE WHICH GIVE YOU AN INSIGHT INTO CERTAIN SUBJECTS AND HELP YOU TO DEVELOP A NUMBER OF KEY SKILLS.

**CHECK OUT WHAT WE HAVE TO OFFER  
AT [GROWS.AC.UK](https://grows.ac.uk)**

### **HOW CAN YOU MAKE YOURSELF STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD?**



TAKE ON A VOLUNTEERING ROLE



GET SOME WORK EXPERIENCE WITH  
SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY OR A FRIEND



FIND A FREE AND AFFORDABLE  
EXPERIENCE CLOSE TO HOME



JOIN A SPORTS TEAM



TAKE PART IN PROGRAMMES SUCH AS  
YOUNG ENTERPRISE, NCS OR DofE

# GOING FURTHER HIGHER EDUCATION

**AFTER YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATION YOU MIGHT DECIDE TO STUDY AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL.**

This is also known as higher education or HE. This might be something you need to consider when you choose your Level 3 options. It's also useful to bear in mind so you can explore different subject areas.

## **+ WHAT IS HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)?**

**Remember the chart at the start of the guide showing the different education levels?**

Higher education (HE) is the study of qualifications at Level 4 or above. It's the step after doing sixth form or college qualifications.

The best known HE qualification is a university degree, but there are plenty of other types of HE level qualification.

## **+ WHERE CAN I STUDY HE?**

**HE level qualifications are usually studied at a university but some further education (FE) colleges also offer HE qualifications.**

Universities come in all shapes and sizes. Some universities have all the teaching, accommodation and facilities all in one place, but there are other universities that can be spread out across a city, or towns. There are older, traditional universities, modern ones, and specialist universities which focus on specific subject areas.

## **FIND OUT MORE...**

VISIT [PROSPECTS.AC.UK/APPLYING-FOR-UNIVERSITY/CHOOSING-A-COURSE/GUIDE-TO-QUALIFICATIONS](https://prospect.ac.uk/apply-for-university/choosing-a-course/guide-to-qualifications) TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HE LEVELS

## **TAKE A TOUR...**

VISIT [WWW.GROWS.AC.UK/TOUR](https://www.grows.ac.uk/tour) TO WATCH OUR CAMPUS TOUR VIDEO AND FIND OUT MORE ABOUT WHAT A UNIVERSITY LOOKS LIKE AND THE FACILITIES THEY HAVE

# WHAT CAN I STUDY AT HE?



## FIND YOUR PASSION!

SEARCH FOR SUBJECTS YOU  
MIGHT WANT TO STUDY:

[DIGITAL.UCAS.COM/SEARCH](https://digital.ucas.com/search)

MORE THAN 50,000 COURSES ARE  
AVAILABLE WHICH MEANS THERE  
IS SOMETHING TO SUIT EVERYONE.

THERE IS A MUCH WIDER RANGE OF  
SUBJECTS AVAILABLE THAN YOU  
WILL FIND AT LEVEL 3. THERE ARE  
PROBABLY SUBJECTS THAT YOU  
HAVE NEVER EVEN HEARD OF!



### SOME OF THE COURSES YOU COULD STUDY AT HE INCLUDE...



COMPUTER GAMES  
DESIGN



FILM AND TV  
PRODUCTION



FORENSIC SCIENCE



NURSING AND  
MIDWIFERY



POLICING



ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR  
AND PSYCHOLOGY



SPORTS THERAPY



MOTOR TECHNOLOGY



FOOTBALL STUDIES



FIRE AND RESCUE



FASHION DESIGN



ANIMATION



DANCE



CRIMINOLOGY

# BUSTING THE MYTHS AROUND HIGHER EDUCATION



## HEARD SOMETHING ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION THAT MAKES YOU BELIEVE IT'S NOT FOR YOU?

STUDYING AT HE  
LEVEL OFFERS SO  
MANY POSSIBILITIES,  
THERE ARE OPTIONS  
FOR EVERYONE.  
WE TAKE YOU  
THROUGH SOME  
OF THE NEGATIVE  
THINGS YOU MAY  
HAVE HEARD AND  
LOOK AT THE TRUTH  
BEHIND THE MYTHS.



### MYTH

#### I WON'T BE ABLE TO AFFORD TO GO TO UNIVERSITY

You will have to pay to go to university however you don't have to pay the money up front.

All students have to factor in the cost of the course (tuition fees) and the cost of living but everyone\* is able to access a student loan. Tuition fees are paid directly to the university; you receive a maintenance loan to cover your living costs. Student loans are means assessed. This means the less your parents earn, the more money you may be able to borrow. You may also be eligible for scholarships and bursaries. You will only start paying back what you have borrowed once you are earning over 25,000 a year.\* The amount you pay back is a small percentage, taken straight from your salary.

Here's a rough idea of how much you might expect to re-pay according to your earnings.

#### REPAYMENTS EXAMPLE...

Income per year from your job	Monthly repayments
£26,000	£7.50
£28,500	£26.25
£30,000	£37.50

\*All figures are subject to Parliamentary review, for up to date figures please visit [www.gov.uk/student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/student-finance)



### MYTH

#### YOU HAVE TO DO A LEVELS TO GO TO UNIVERSITY

A Levels are a popular entry route into higher education but they are not the only way in. Universities are increasingly accepting other Level 3 qualifications, in particular BTECs and T levels.

Nearly all universities accept BTECs in relevant subject areas in the same way as they do with A Levels. BTEC students can often be better prepared for the independent studying required at degree level, due to the way BTEC courses are structured.\*

\*Source: [HELOA.ac.uk](http://HELOA.ac.uk)

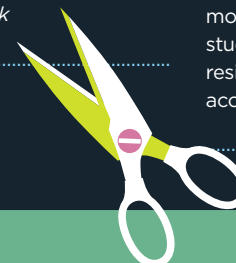


### MYTH

#### YOU HAVE TO MOVE AWAY FROM HOME WHEN YOU GO TO UNIVERSITY

Many students do choose to move away from home when they go to university but it is not compulsory. Lots of students who choose to study close to home also live at home while commuting for study and social reasons.

According to The Uni Guide, 23% of all UK students chose to live at home during university. Some universities report that at least half of their students live at home. If you do choose to move away, you would either live in student accommodation called halls of residence or in privately rented student accommodation close to the university.





# BUSTING THE MYTHS AROUND HIGHER EDUCATION



## MYTH

**I HAVE TO GO TO UNIVERSITY TO STUDY A HE LEVEL QUALIFICATION**

Most HE level qualifications are taught at universities but they aren't the only place you can do these.

More and more FE colleges are offering a selection of HE level courses, and as an alternative, there are also Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, which are Level 4-6 qualifications.



## MYTH

**GOING TO UNIVERSITY DOESN'T HELP YOU TO GET A JOB**

It is often reported that going to university doesn't lead to employment but this isn't the case.

In 2023, 87% of graduates (someone with a university degree) were employed compared to 70% of non-graduates, which means you are more likely to be in employment if you have a higher level qualification. On average, graduates earn around £10,000 more each year than non-graduates\*.

*\*Source: gov.uk*



## MYTH

**MY STUDIES WILL TAKE OVER MY LIFE**

Most university students have a fair amount of spare time. Contact or teaching time for students varies from 8-30 hours per week depending on the subject.

On average, students have around 14 hours of teaching time a week and are expected to do independent reading and research in addition to this. Practical courses such as Medicine or Nursing tend to have the upper limit of hours.

For most students, socialising, playing sport and being part of teams or clubs is a big part of the university experience. Many students also have part-time jobs, fitting their hours around their study. A part-time job is a great way to earn extra money and gain key skills to help you to get a full-time job when you graduate.



# WHY CONSIDER UNIVERSITY?

## + WHY GO TO UNIVERSITY?

### STILL WONDERING WHETHER UNIVERSITY IS FOR YOU?

READ ON TO DISCOVER SOME OF THE MANY REASONS WHY GOING TO UNIVERSITY CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE TO YOUR FUTURE.

## + STUDY SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU HAPPY

With such a wide range of subjects available, university is your opportunity to study a subject you love in more depth for three (or more) years.

You'll meet people who care about the things you care about and discover new passions too.

## + GAIN THE SKILLS EMPLOYERS WANT

The university experience will help you develop important skills for the future.

You'll grow your confidence in important areas such as teamwork, communication, time management,

budgeting, self-motivation and decision making. These are known as 'soft skills' and are highly valued by employers. In many job roles, the subject you have studied is not important, what really counts is the skills you gained through independent study.

## + BE READY FOR THE FUTURE

It is estimated that by 2027, 50% of jobs will require HE level qualifications.

This means having a university degree or other HE qualification will make you more employable in the future. Having a degree opens up more job opportunities. In Gloucestershire, 98% of jobs are available to someone with

a university degree. Those with a Level 3 qualification can only access 51% of those jobs while those with a Level 2 qualification can only apply for 32% of the same advertised roles.

## + DON'T MISS OUT ON YOUR DREAM CAREER

Many job roles, including doctor, nurse, dentist, vet, lawyer and teacher, require a university degree.

If the job you want to do has strict requirements for a degree, you'll need to make sure you gain the right qualification at university.



# WHY CONSIDER UNIVERSITY?



## + EARN MORE MONEY

Studies show that graduates are likely to earn around 20% more over their working life than those who did not go to university.

Over a lifetime, that's around £100,000.\*

*\*Source: gov.uk*

## + ACCESS MORE OPPORTUNITIES

University life provides opportunities to grow your confidence and make connections that will help you in your career.

You might have the chance to study abroad for a term or even a year, do a work placement or secure a volunteering role.

You'll listen to visiting speakers in your subject area, and network with people who might employ you in the future.

## + BOOST YOUR SOCIAL LIFE

At university you will meet people from all walks of life. Some will have the same passions as you, others will inspire you and introduce you to new experiences.

You'll make friends inside the classroom and around campus. University societies are a great way to meet likeminded people – these clubs cover everything from dance, drama and gaming to Lego and Harry Potter.

Joining a sports team is another common way to make friends at university.

## + BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT

Whether or not you move away from home, university life is a chance to become more independent.

For starters, you'll have to manage your own finances and time. If you move out of home, you'll learn how to cook for yourself and have to do your own laundry.

University is often thought of as the first step to becoming an independent adult with the benefit of a good support system around you.

## FIND OUT MORE...

THE GROWS WEBSITE HAS USEFUL LINKS TO LOTS OF USEFUL RESOURCES ALL ABOUT HE. VISIT [GROWS.AC.UK/ALLABOUTHE](https://grows.ac.uk/allabouthe)



# POST-16 STUDY IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE



	A LEVEL	T LEVEL	L3 CERTIFICATE	L3 DIPLOMA	HNC	HND	FOUNDATION DEGREE	DEGREE	HIGHER APPRENTICESHIP	DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP
	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6	LEVEL 4,5,6,7	LEVEL 6-7
<b>CIRENCESTER COLLEGE</b> www.cirencester.ac.uk	✓	✓	✓				✓		✓ L4	✓
<b>GLOUCESTERSHIRE COLLEGE</b> www.gloscol.ac.uk		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ TOP-UP	✓	✓
<b>HARTPURY COLLEGE &amp; HARTPURY UNIVERSITY</b> www.hartpury.ac.uk	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		
<b>ROYAL AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY</b> www.rau.ac.uk							✓	✓		
<b>SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE AND STROUD COLLEGE</b> www.sgscol.ac.uk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ L5	
<b>UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE</b> www.glos.ac.uk							✓	✓	✓	✓