Year 11 Parent Guide: Navigating Post-16 Pathways

Careers & Sixth Form - Supporting Your Child's Next Step

As your child prepares for their GCSEs, choosing what comes next is one of the most important conversations you will have together. In England, young people must remain in education or training until they turn 18, choosing between full-time study, an apprenticeship, or working/volunteering alongside part-time training. Understanding the different qualifications available will help your child match their strengths and career ambitions to the right environment.

Understanding the Qualifications

- A Levels (Advanced Levels): Traditional, two-year academic qualifications focused on individual subjects. Students typically choose three subjects and are assessed mainly through final exams at the end of Year 13, making them a common route to university, higher apprenticeships, or employment.
    - *Example subjects:* Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, English Literature, Business Studies, Computer Science, and Fine Art.

- T Levels (Technical Levels): Two-year, Level 3 technical courses equivalent to three A Levels, designed alongside employers to prepare students for skilled careers, university, or higher apprenticeships. T Levels combine 80% classroom learning with a mandatory 45-day (minimum 315-hour) industry work placement.
    - *Example subjects:* Digital, Health and Science, Construction, Engineering and Manufacturing, Education and Early Years, and Business and Administration.

- BTECs: Practical, career-focused vocational qualifications designed with the workplace in mind. Assessed through a blend of ongoing coursework, practical tasks, and some exams, Level 3 BTECs can be taken as the equivalent of one, two, or three A Levels—allowing students to study them full-time or mix them with A Levels—and are widely accepted by universities.
    - *Example subjects:* Performing Arts, Applied Science, Sport, Travel and Tourism, and Health and Social Care.

- Cambridge Technicals: Employer-endorsed Level 2 and Level 3 vocational qualifications that develop applied workplace skills alongside academic knowledge. Assessment relies primarily on practical, scenario-based coursework supported by externally assessed exam units, offering clear progression to university, apprenticeships, or employment.
    - *Example subjects:* Business, Digital Media, Engineering, Health and Social Care, Information Technology, and Sport and Physical Activity.

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- **Apprenticeships:** Real, paid jobs for school leavers (starting at Level 2 or Level 3 after Year 11) that combine hands-on workplace experience with dedicated study towards a nationally recognised qualification. Apprentices earn a wage while building industry skills, though places are competitive and require applying directly for live job vacancies.
    - *Example sectors:* Engineering, Healthcare (NHS), Rail and Highways, Business Administration, and Digital/IT.

Local Post-16 Providers & Useful Links

Provider & Location	Courses Offered	Website for More Information
Samuel Whitbread Academy (Shefford)	A Levels and BTEC courses in a sixth form environment	Samuel Whitbread Post-16 Options
Etonbury Academy (Stotfold)	A Levels and BTEC courses in a sixth form environment	Etonbury Academy Post 16 options
The Knights Templar School (Baldock)	A Levels, BTECs, and Cambridge Technicals (e.g., Business, Sport)	Knights Templar Sixth Form
Fearnhill School (Letchworth)	A Levels, BTECs, and Level 2/3 Diplomas	Fearnhill Sixth Form
Hitchin Sixth Form Consortium (Hitchin Boys', Hitchin Girls' & The Priory School)	Joint sixth form offering wide-ranging A Level and vocational subjects	Hitchin Boys' Sixth Form / The Priory Sixth Form
North Hertfordshire College (Hitchin, Stevenage & Letchworth)	T Levels, BTECs, vocational courses, and Apprenticeships	North Hertfordshire College
Bedford College & Shuttleworth College (Bedford & Biggleswade)	T Levels, BTECs, land-based/equine courses, and Apprenticeships	Bedford College Group / Shuttleworth College
AS2Educate (Stotfold)	Small-group post-16 alternative provision (English, Maths, digital & occupational skills)	AS2Educate

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National Careers Service (National Guidance)	Official post-16 careers advice and links to find an apprenticeship	National Careers Service
Apprenticeships	Advice, support and search engines for apprenticeships at post 16 and post 18	Government Apprenticeship advice and search Amazing Apprenticeships advise and search Solveway - Apprenticeship provider
Miss Nicola McGuigan Miss Emma Fuller (all students in Year 11 are scheduled to a 1to1 meeting with Emma during the academic year)	PBA Careers Leader Independent careers advisor	Nicola McGuigan (PBA) Emma Fuller (PBA)

How You Can Support Your Child Now

- **Book Open Events Early:** Visiting sixth forms and colleges in person helps students get a feel for class sizes, facilities, and travel routes.
- **Match the Assessment Style:** Discuss whether your child thrives under end-of-course exams (A Levels) or prefers continuous coursework and hands-on placements (T Levels, BTECs, Cambridge Technicals, or Apprenticeships).
- **Have a Plan A and Plan B:** Encourage your child to apply for more than one option—especially if they are applying for competitive apprenticeships—so they have a guaranteed place ready for GCSE Results Day.

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