

Two very quick years....

Whether you have embarked on an academic programme at college or sixth form, or have taken a vocational qualification as part of an apprenticeship or specialist training course at college, there is still plenty **to explore, think about and do to prepare for your career and next steps after you are 18 years old.**

Starting your qualification

If in sixth form or college:

Your first term is an important period of time for settling in to your school sixth form or new college. Getting used to the freedom usually allowed to year 12/ 1st year students, meeting new friends, yet also getting used to the new demands placed on you as you embark on further qualifications, is a balancing act. You will want to make sure these two years of your life are happy but also successful and productive, ultimately helping you on your onward journey.

This is the time to **get into good habits with studying.** You will be asked to study independently, often completing college work and researching topics in your own time. Make sure you take time every day to do this and **create a study timetable around your lessons** to help you keep up with what will be an increasing workload.

If taking an apprenticeship:

If you have started working for a company, organisation or even a sole trader, you will have a period of induction where you are eased into how the company works, what will be expected of you and what your role will initially involve. It may well be that you attend a day or block release to a college or training provider and if this is the case you may well have an induction there. If you will be mainly undertaking your qualification in the workplace, an assessor or training company may visit you in the workplace.

Now is a good time to get into good habits with the balance of work and study towards your qualification. Your company may allow you time within your working week to complete your qualification or you may be expected to do this in your own time in the evenings or on weekends. **Make sure you give yourself time to complete any study work you have to do.** Often the quicker you complete work towards your qualification, the quicker you complete the whole qualification.

Six months in

By now you will have had time to get used to your surroundings, workload, and if in sixth form or college, teachers and subjects. It is important at this stage to **start thinking about your development and attainment in your chosen courses/ apprenticeship:** how is it going? How well are you doing? What are you enjoying? What are you struggling with? Have you got a good balance with studying and personal time?

At this time it is also helpful to **start thinking about any emerging interests**. It may be that you feel connected to one of your subjects or particular topics. You may have started to think about careers that interest you.

What if it's not right?

You will be progressing towards your qualification and may have even completed certain units and elements. You will have a good understanding of the demands of your qualification as well as your job role, if taking an apprenticeship.

If taking an apprenticeship: You should have had lots of opportunity through observation, tasks set and feedback, what is involved in this role, career, organization and industry. Has it met your expectations? Do you feel that this is the right role for you and will be happy to move into such a position when the apprenticeship completes? If you are not completely happy, take the time to think about what aspect is unsettling you, the qualification, role, company, career and industry. Speak with your assessor and any mentor/ supervisor you may have if you have concerns. Satisfaction with work life can go up and down, often small changes or reassurances can make a big difference to your happiness and sense of whether this is the right match for you.

If you cannot reconcile any dissatisfied feelings, you have the choice to either leave, or continue with the apprenticeship until you have completed your qualification, so you are able to transfer your knowledge, skills and qualification to another role or organization or even different industry.

If you are at sixth form or college, you will also have had regular feedback regarding how you are doing on your course. It may be that you are struggling to keep up with work or are finding you are not engaging with your subjects. For such issues it is not too late to get support. However, it may be that you are increasingly feeling like college/ sixth form is not for you. Before you start to miss lessons or days and while you consider such feelings, do speak to sixth form/ college staff as they may be able to help you understand if you should stay or go.

Whether you are taking an apprenticeship or at college/ sixth form, the most common reason for dropping out is a sense of a lack of direction or purpose to the course(s) or apprenticeship. It is vital at such a time to speak to a career adviser, preferably one who is impartial and will not try to persuade you to stay or go. At such a time you need support to figure out what it is you want to do next, in the future, where everything is leading to, and if this course or apprenticeship is key to helping you get there, or whether there are alternatives you could consider.

Nine months in

Now is the time to think about how you are developing your experience of work or experience of work-related opportunities. To help with your career exploration as well as the development of you as a person, you should be undertaking activities, tasks, roles and responsibilities that develop the skills and personal qualities you will need for work and further study. These may include a part-time job, volunteering, arranging work experience in a career role you may be interested in, taking on responsibilities at home or

at college such as course rep or school council, perhaps taking part in programmes such as Duke of Edinburgh and NCS.

Such experiences of the working world or even related experiences to work tasks, can help with your careers research. Here are some questions to ask:

- Considering my experience of work, what do I enjoy doing? E.g working as a team, helping customers
- What do I not enjoy doing?
- How do I cope with responsibility? Do I use my own initiative or am I better when I have precise instructions?
- When researching particular job ask yourself this: considering my observations about work, roles I may have undertaken and what I know about myself, would this role suit me?
- What are the entry requirements? What post-18 pathways will I need?
- Other questions from other guides

If taking an apprenticeship:

Your apprenticeship may already mean you are on the path to your chosen career. It may be that you have taken an apprenticeship within an industry or related career, but see yourself moving into something different. It is important at this stage in the apprenticeship to also start thinking about your options once finishing the apprenticeship. It may be that your apprenticeship qualification does not run to the same timelines as those at college or school sixth form, being either shorter or longer in length. However, you will still have access to the same post-18 options

A year in

Towards the end of your first year your college or sixth form will start to discuss with you the options available after year 13/ 2nd year.

Post-18 Options: Higher Education & Training:

University: studying towards a degree or foundation degree at an university in a particular subject or field

Higher Apprenticeship: studying a vocational qualification (equivalent to a foundation degree) in the workplace, with some day or block-release to a local higher education training provider

Degree Apprenticeship: studying a vocational qualification (equivalent to a degree) in the workplace, with some day or block-release to a local higher education training provider or university

School leaver programme: studying a vocational qualification which could include a degree or foundation degree as part of a structured programme usually delivered by the company with which you have an apprenticeship, in the workplace. Very similar to higher/ degree apprenticeships, however, tend to be with large companies who have similar graduate schemes and a progressive programme leading to a professional qualification and career such as accountancy, engineering etc

Sponsored degrees: a business will sponsor you to study a particular degree full-time and in return you will work for them during placements as part of your degree and possibly be committed to working for them once you graduate

Post-18 Options: Non-Higher Education & Training

Intermediate and Advanced apprenticeships: studying vocational qualifications equivalent to level 2 qualifications (GCSEs) or level 3 qualifications (A levels). Some industries and career paths only offer intermediate and advanced apprenticeships to begin with and it is a case of starting at a lower level and working up. E.g. Hairdressing, Catering, some Business roles.

Work: a job with or without training but not working towards any further or higher apprenticeships

Further specialised training: studying a specialist vocational course at a specialist or further education college. E.g tree surgery or floristry

Gap year: can be longer than a year! Time out to develop life and work experience and interests. You could travel, work, volunteer, undertake placements in industries that interest you.

Eighteen months in

If in sixth form or college:

By now you will need to decide if you are going to apply to any university degree or foundation degree courses, any school leaver programmes or sponsored degrees. If so, you will need to have completed your UCAS application. The deadline for UCAS to receive your application is the 15th January, but your school or college will need to have received this beforehand to process the application and write your reference. Usually school's and college's set an early deadline of October. If you are interested in Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry and/or you are planning to apply to Oxford or Cambridge, the UCAS deadline is 15th October.

If you are planning to find work or take an apprenticeship, you need to start researching your ideas to see how you will find opportunities. If you are unsure what you are interested in or need some support researching what is available, check out our useful websites PDF

If taking an apprenticeship:

If you are keen to continue with your apprenticeship and looking to stay with your company, make sure you check your progress and their thoughts as to your future. If you are considering higher qualifications, you may want to ask if this is something you can do with them. If not, you may have to complete a certain amount of time working for the company before moving on. However, start to research all your options. If you are planning to apply for university, you will need to have researched courses and complete your UCAS application.

How to start figuring out what is the right option for you:

- Is your learning style and learning interests academic or vocational?

- Do your career interests require higher qualifications? Can these be taken as part of a higher apprenticeship/ school leaver programme or a degree at university?
- If taking an apprenticeship: Does your apprenticeship lead to a job? Do you want to undertake further training or take higher qualifications? If so, what is available at your current workplace? Do you need to think about moving on or applying to university?