

Qualifications

In this handout you will find information on the various different qualifications available to young people. As you will see there are qualifications for all abilities at different levels so look carefully at your options and what it is that you want to get out of doing your chosen qualification:

GCSE's

Most young people will be studying at least some GCSE's during their time at school. If you do not manage to get a grade 9 – 4 (equivalent to the old A* - C) in Maths and English Language, you will have to retake them at a post 16 educational provider e.g college. GCSE's are often used to meet entry requirements for further courses or to decide what level of course to do next. Sometimes specific subjects and grades are required for jobs or courses. Many employers will be looking for good grades in Maths and English no matter what job is on offer. They are often the first results employers look for.

Foundation Learning

Foundation Learning is an individual education or training programme at Entry Level and Level 1 that you would do at school, college or with a training provider.

If you are not yet ready to move on up to Level 2 (Level 2 is the same level as GCSEs at grades A* - C) then Foundation Learning is a good next step for you.

Your next step college or training provider – or your school if you are staying on at sixth form, will help you to pick a mixture of qualifications and activities, such as work experience, to help you move forward.

As part of foundation learning you will learn:

- Practical skills in English, maths and information and communication technology (ICT) - also called functional skills
- The skills you need to live more independently, organise yourself and to work with other people
- About subjects that will help you in your future. You can do new subjects as well as carrying on studying some of those they do now

A Levels

A Levels are Level 3 courses and can be achieved in two parts; year one comprises the AS Level and this can be a freestanding qualification in its own right. However, to achieve a full A Level, students need to complete a further year of study at A2. Completing A Levels usually allows you to progress on to a higher education course, such as a degree. Many employers also value A Level qualifications.

Studying A-levels is one of the better options if you are thinking of progressing into Higher Education. However A Levels are demanding subjects and are mainly assessed through exams so you have to think carefully before choosing them. As with all qualifications it is important to check out the content of these subjects, even if you have taken them at GCSE level, as they can be very different subjects from what you may be expecting.

You can pick three or four subjects that really interest you. There are hundreds of A-level subjects to choose from, encompassing the arts, science, health and social care as well as others, so you can mix and match your choices to discover what you really want to do.

BTEC

BTEC Certificates and Diplomas are work-related qualifications suitable for a wide range of students, built to accommodate the needs of employers and allow progression to university. They provide a practical, real-world approach to learning without sacrificing any of the essential subject theory. It is important to note that BTECs are not apprenticeships and the majority of them do not train you for a specific job but can act as a preparation course for employment or enable you to progress onto university.

BTECs are recognised by schools, colleges, universities, employers and professional bodies across the United Kingdom and in over 100 countries worldwide.

BTECs have been around for 25 years and their reputation is second to none. They continue to be developed and updated with and for industry and in response to the needs of learners.

First Diplomas are broadly equivalent to four/five GCSEs, at grades A to C. National Certificates and Diplomas are broadly equivalent to two or three A Levels and will enable students wishing to progress on to higher education.

International Baccalaureate Diploma

This is an internationally recognised qualification that is highly valued by both higher education and employers. The aim is to develop a broad range of skills and knowledge. It consists of 6 subject areas plus theory of knowledge and a creative action service and lasts for 2 years. It is assessed by coursework and exams at the end of year 2.

NVQs (National Vocational Qualification)

These are qualifications that are based on the skills and knowledge needed for specific jobs. They usually have a level after the course such as NVQ Level 2 in Administration. A variety of subject matters are covered in NVQ courses from Hairdressing to Health and Social Care. When you have completed your chosen NVQ course, you have proven your ability in your chosen field. Completing your NVQ may enhance your job prospects.

Access Course

Access courses are entry routes into higher education (HE) typically designed for mature students (those aged 19+). These courses lead to a nationally recognised Access Certificate award, and are designed to help people develop the necessary confidence and knowledge for getting onto a degree or diploma course.

HNC (Higher National Certificate)

A HNC is a Level 4 course which allows you to progress onto a HND course. This is equivalent to the first year of a degree. Higher National Certificates/Diplomas (HNC/HND) have a strong work-based element - giving you practical experience and typically taking two years to complete.

They are available full-time (as a Diploma) and part-time (as a Certificate). Like degrees, they are made up of a series of units called modules.

HND (Higher National Diploma)

A HND is a Level 5 course which allows you to progress onto a degree top-up course. This is equivalent to the second year of a degree. You can study for a Higher National Certificate (HNC) and a Higher National Diploma (HND) in work-related subjects.

Higher National Diplomas are higher education diplomas given for successfully completing practical, vocational training that prepares the student for a career in a particular area. These are practical qualifications offered by universities and many colleges.

You can often go on from an HND to study a degree, if you decide that is what you want to do. To find out what full time HNC/HND subjects are available go to www.ucas.com

Foundation Degrees

A Foundation Degree allows you to be in employment and work for a Level 5 qualification. The Foundation Degree allows progression on to a full degree through a top-up course. Foundation Degrees are designed to equip you for a particular area of work – as well as giving you the general skills that are useful in any type of job.

They are university-level qualifications, like other degrees but Foundation Degree courses are designed with the help of employers from that particular sector.

Typically, you will get the chance to learn in the workplace as well as the classroom and it's often possible to study flexibly, in a way that suits you. So whether you are looking to change job, return to work or boost your career prospects, Foundation Degrees offer an effective progression route.

Degree or Undergraduate Courses (BA, BSc etc)

A degree usually takes 3 to 4 years to complete. Courses in careers such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and architecture can take 5 to 6 years. When you complete a degree you are called a graduate.

A first degree is usually a bachelors degree e.g. B.A. (Bachelor of Arts), B.Sc (Bachelor of Science). Some degrees maybe reflected in the title of the award e.g. B.Mus. (Bachelor of Music). A teaching degree takes 3 to 4 years and leads to a B.A./B.Sc. with QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) or B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education). Some subjects with 4 year degrees can lead to a master's degree e.g M.Eng. (Masters in Engineering).

Within degrees there are lots of different options available, these include:

- Single Honours – where 1 subject is studied
- Joint Honours – where 2 subjects are studied
- Combined Honours – where 3 or more subjects are studied
- Modular Courses – here students build their degree by studying individual units, which could lead to a degree that is wide ranging or very limited.
- Sandwich Course – Usually at least 4 years and includes a period of practical experience, this could be a year abroad on a language course or a period in industry on an engineering course.

If you have any questions about these qualifications, such as you are undecided which one to choose then please use the 'Live Chat' facility through the main Connexions Dudley website to contact an Adviser.