POST 16 OPTIONS

Choices for after your GCSE's

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Why Post 16 Choices Matter

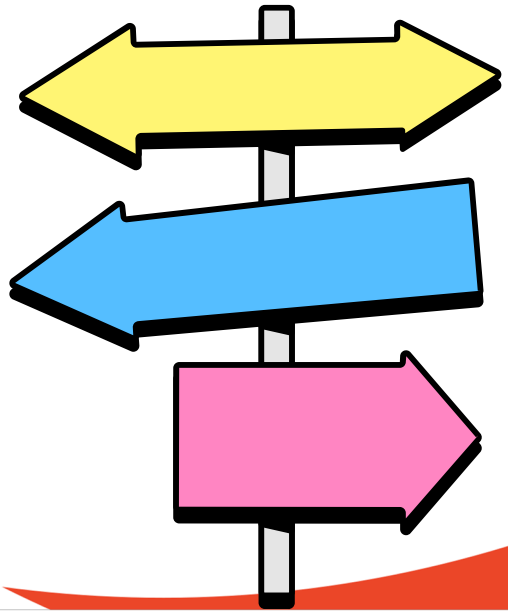
At St Bede's, we care that all of our students have the right information about their post-16 options. These choices matter because you must stay in education or training until age 18 and it might impact your future choices. Knowing what your options are can set you up for your best possible future, and one that is right for you.

This guide book will help you begin thinking about different options, and help you choose something that will interest you.

In short:

- There are many different routes to success.
- University is not the only option.
- The best pathway depends on your interests, strengths and future goals.

There is no "best" option, only the option that is best for you!



Understanding Your Options

After completing your GCSEs at age 16, there are different pathways you can choose from:

1. Attending Sixth Form
2. Going to College
3. Starting an Apprenticeship
4. Entering Employment with Training.

Choosing one pathway does not mean that you are limited to that option forever. Your education and career journey can change over time, and there are many opportunities to return to education, gain further qualifications, complete a higher apprenticeship, attend university, or undertake additional training later in life.

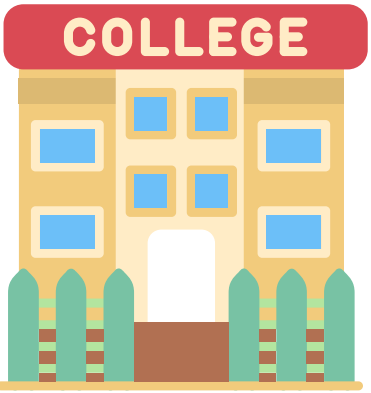
GCSEs

CAN LEAD TO:

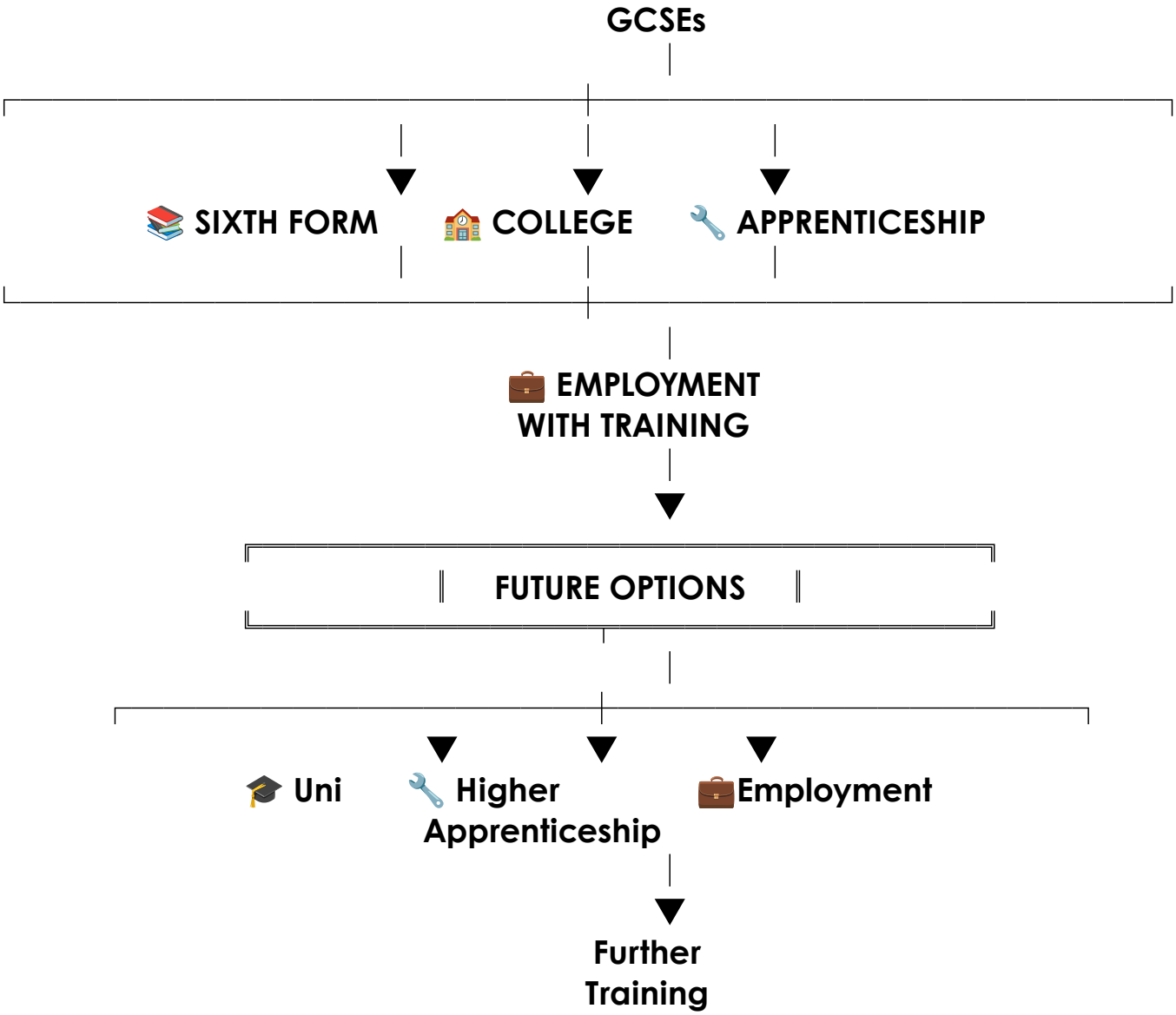
Apprenticeship

Sixth Form

Job with Training



Understanding Your Options



Sixth Form

A sixth form is usually part of a secondary school, allowing students to continue their education in a familiar setting. Areté Sixth Form, part of St. Bede's Catholic College, offers a range of Post-16 courses alongside opportunities to take part in co-curricular activities. It is a good option for students who want to continue studying after their GCSEs while preparing for their next steps.

You will study:

- **A Levels**
- **Some possible vocational qualifications**

Good for students who:

- Enjoy classroom-based learning
- Want to continue academic subjects
- Are considering university

Advantages

✓ Familiar environment
✓ Smaller sixth form setting
✓ Continued focus on academic study

Things to consider

- Fewer subjects and courses than some colleges
- More structured timetable
- May offer fewer practical or vocational options

Sixth Form

Areté Entry Requirements

To apply to Areté Sixth Form, students are expected to meet the following requirements:

- **5 GCSEs at grades 9–5**, including English and Maths at grade 5 or above.
- **Grade 6** or above in the subjects students would like to study, or in related subjects.
- **Grade 7** or above in Maths to study A-Level Maths.
- **Grade 7** or above in Chemistry to study A-Level Chemistry.
- **Grade 8** or above in Maths to study A-Level Further Maths.
- Students wishing to study four subjects need to have achieved grades 9, 8 or 7 across all their GCSE subjects.

College

What is a College?

College is another popular route after GCSEs, offering a wide range of courses and subjects that may not be available at a traditional sixth form. Alongside A Levels, colleges can offer practical and career-focused courses, including T Levels, BTECs and vocational qualifications. Some colleges also specialise in areas such as sport, music, performing arts, media and creative subjects.

You might study:

- **A Levels**
- **T Levels**
- **BTECs**
- **Vocational** and technical qualifications
- Specialist courses in areas such as sport, music, drama and media

🎓 *A Levels* | 🛠️ *T Levels* | 📋 *BTECs* | 🔧 *Vocational*

College

College can give you more freedom and independence than school, with greater responsibility for managing your time, work and deadlines. With a variety of colleges and specialist providers across Bristol, it is worth exploring different options to find a course and environment that suits you.

Good for students who:

- Want more independence
- Prefer practical or hands-on learning
- Want a wider choice of subjects
- Have a particular career or subject area in mind

Advantages

✓ Wide range of courses and subjects
✓ More independent learning environment
✓ Strong links with employers and industries
✓ Opportunities to specialise in areas you enjoy

Things to consider

- Campuses can be larger and busier
- You will be expected to manage your own time
- The environment may feel different from school

Apprenticeships

An apprenticeship is a paid training job where you learn and gain qualifications. There are apprenticeships at many different skill levels, including after GCSE's, after A levels, and Degree Apprenticeships where you can gain a degree and earn a wage at the same time.

Apprenticeships could be the right choice for you if you prefer a practical skills environment and want to gain industry experience whilst gaining your qualifications.

You will:

- Work with an employer
- Earn a wage
- Spend time training

Advantages

✓ Earn while you learn
✓ Real work experience
✓ No tuition fees

Considerations

- Competitive applications
- Less classroom learning

Apprenticeships

Popular apprenticeship study areas include, but are not limited to:

- Engineering
- Business Administration
- IT
- Health
- Construction
- Finance

Apprenticeship Level	Equivalent To
Intermediate (Level 2)	GCSE
Advanced (Level 3)	A Level
Higher (Levels 4–5)	Foundation Degree
Degree (Levels 6–7)	Bachelor's / Master's Degree

Work with Part-time Study

This option allows you to work or volunteer while continuing your education or training part-time. You could gain valuable work experience, earn money and develop skills, all while working towards a recognised qualification or completing training.

If you are 16 or 17, you are still expected to stay in education or training until you turn 18. This does not always mean being in a classroom full-time, you could combine a job with part-time study or a training programme.

Examples include:

- **Part-time employment**: working while studying towards a qualification or completing training.
- **Supported internships**: gaining work experience with extra support, particularly for young people who may need additional help moving into employment.
- **Training programmes**: developing skills and gaining experience to help you move into work or further education.
- **Part-time college courses**: studying for a qualification alongside work or other commitments.

This could be a good option if you:

- Want to gain work experience early.
- Prefer learning through doing rather than being in a classroom full-time.
- Want to earn money while continuing your education.
- Are interested in a particular career and want to gain experience in that area.

A Levels

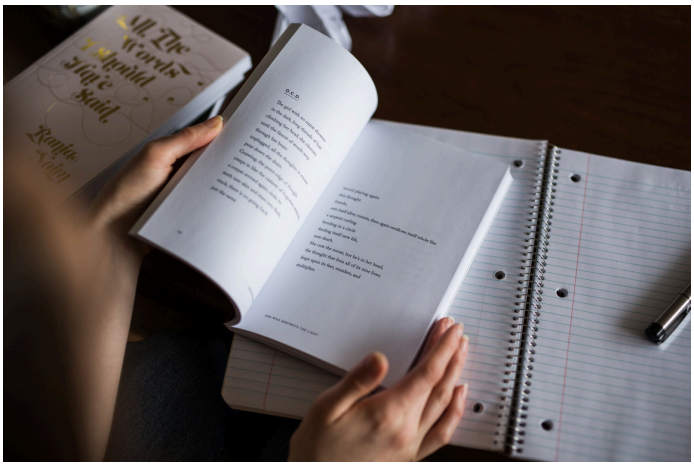
A Levels are academic qualifications that you study over two years, after completing your GCSEs. They allow you to focus on subjects you enjoy and develop your knowledge in greater depth.

Most students choose three A Levels, although some schools and sixth forms may allow students to take four. You'll normally choose subjects that interest you and that fit with your future plans.

You could study subjects such as:

- Biology
- Psychology
- History
- Maths
- English Literature
- Chemistry
- Geography
- Modern Languages

A Levels are mainly assessed through exams at the end of the course, although some subjects may include coursework or practical assessments.



A Levels

A Levels could be a good choice if you:

- Enjoy academic and classroom-based learning
- Like writing essays, solving problems or revising for exams
- Want to study a subject in more depth
- Are thinking about going to university or taking a degree apprenticeship.

Where could A Levels take you?

A Levels can open up lots of different options after Post-16. You could go on to university, a degree apprenticeship, further training or employment.

Some careers or degrees also require particular A Level subjects, so it is worth checking the entry requirements for careers or university courses you are interested in on the UCAS website.

A level Psychology → **Higher Apprenticeship** → **Career in Psychology**

A level Psychology → **Degree in Psychology** → **Career in Psychology**

T Levels

T Levels are two-year technical qualifications, designed with employers to give you the knowledge and skills needed for a particular career. They combine classroom learning with a substantial industry placement, giving you the chance to see what working in your chosen industry is really like.

One T-Level is the equivaient of three A Levels, so it's important to be sure about the direction you are taking.

As part of a T Level, you will complete an **industry placement of at least 315 hours** alongside your classroom studies.

You could study areas such as:

- Health
- Education and Childcare
- Digital
- Construction
- Creative and Design

T Levels

T Levels could be a good choice if you:

- Prefer practical, hands-on learning
- Want to gain experience in a real workplace
- Already have an idea of the industry you would like to work in
- Want a qualification that combines study with practical experience

Where could a T Level take you?

Once you have completed your T Level, you can choose what comes next. You could move into employment, an apprenticeship, university or further training, depending on your goals and the requirements of your chosen pathway.

Health (and Science) T Level

→ **Degree in Nursing** →

→ **Apprenticeship in Nursing** →

Career in Nursing

BTECs

If you prefer **learning by doing** rather than relying mainly on exams, a **BTEC** could be a great option for you. BTECs are career-focused qualifications that combine practical projects, coursework and assessments, allowing you to develop knowledge and skills in a subject while working on tasks that relate to real-life situations and the workplace.

BTECs are available in lots of different subjects, so there are plenty of options to explore depending on what interests you and what you might want to do in the future.

You could study subjects such as:

- Business
- Sport
- Health and Social Care
- Creative Media
- IT and Computing
- Childcare and Education

BTECs

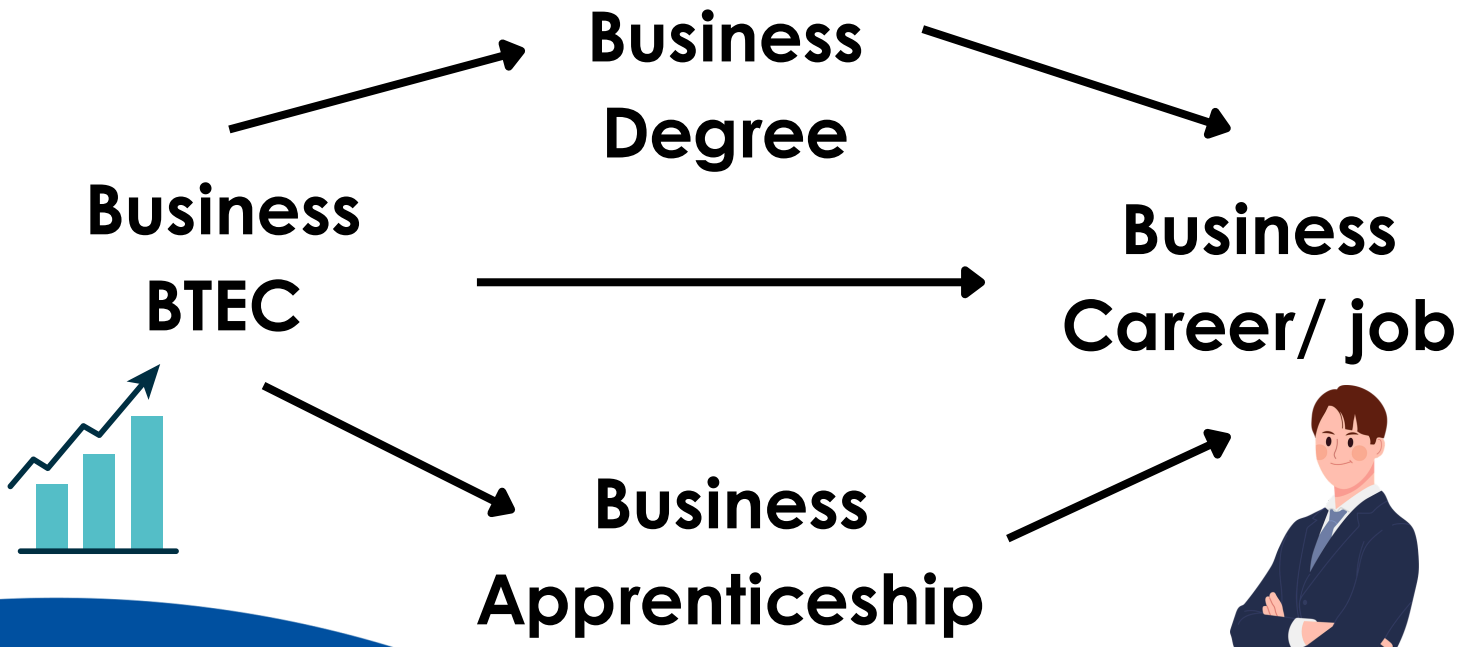
BTECs could be a good choice if you:

- Enjoy practical, hands-on projects
- Prefer coursework and regular assessment to big exams
- Like working independently or as part of a team
- Have a particular career or subject area you would like to explore

Where could a BTEC take you?

Completing a BTEC can give you a range of options for your next step. Depending on the qualification and grades you achieve, you could progress to university, an apprenticeship, further training or employment.

Some BTECs can also give you valuable experience and skills that are useful when applying for jobs.



Other Qualifications

Vocational qualifications are designed to help you build practical skills and knowledge for a particular subject or career. They can be a great choice if you enjoy learning through hands-on activities and real-world tasks.

You could study areas such as:

- Hair and Beauty
- Construction
- Engineering
- Animal Care

Examples include:

- NCFE qualifications
- City & Guilds
- UAL Creative Diplomas

V Levels (Vocational Levels)

V Levels are scheduled to be rolled out from September 2027. They will bridge the gap between traditional academic subjects and more vocational routes. By September 2027, they will launch:

- Digital Systems and Data
- Education and Early Years
- Accounting and Finance

Choosing your Pathway

Choosing what to do after your GCSEs can feel a little overwhelming. There are lots of different pathways, courses and providers to choose from, so it is completely normal if you are not sure where to start.

A good first step is to think about what you enjoy, what you're good at and what careers might interest you. Once you have an idea of where you might want to go, you can work backwards to see which Post-16 options could help you get there.

There are lots of useful websites that can help:

- **UCAS** can show you which A Levels or other qualifications are needed for different university courses.
- **Prospects** is useful for exploring different careers, including what the job involves and possible routes into it.
- **GOV.UK** "Find an Apprenticeship" allows you to search for current apprenticeship vacancies by career area and location.

Not Sure What You Want To Do?

Do not worry! You are not expected to have your whole career planned out at 16. If you are unsure, it can be helpful to choose subjects or qualifications that keep your options open.

For example, choosing a combination of A Levels may allow you to apply for a wider range of university courses later. Equally, a T Level can give you valuable technical skills and experience while still allowing you to progress to university, an apprenticeship or employment.

Choosing your Pathway

Option	Academic Study	Practical Learning	Paid?	Main Focus
Sixth Form	⭐⭐⭐ High	⭐ Low	❌ No	Academic study
College	⭐⭐ Medium–High	⭐⭐ Medium–High	❌ No	Academic & vocational
Apprenticeship	⭐⭐ Low–Medium	⭐⭐⭐ Very High	✅ Yes	Work & training
Employment + Training	⭐ Variable	⭐⭐⭐ High	✅ Yes	Work experience & training

Which option might suit you?

- Enjoy subjects, exams and academic study? → **Sixth Form**
- Lots of course choices and more independence? → **College**
- Earn a salary while gaining a qualification? → **Apprenticeship**
- Start working while continuing your training? → **Employment + Training**

Remember: There is not one "best" option. The right choice depends on how you like to learn, what interests you and what you want to do next.

Key Questions to Ask

Before choosing your Post-16 pathway, take some time to think about what you enjoy, how you learn best and what you might want from your next two years.

Interests

- Which GCSE subjects do I enjoy?
- What topics could I see myself studying in more depth?
- Are there any subjects or career areas I would like to explore?

Learning Style

- Do I enjoy classroom learning, reading and writing?
- Do I prefer practical, hands-on activities?
- Do I learn best by doing and gaining real experience?

Future Goals

- Am I thinking about going to university?
- Would I like to start an apprenticeship?
- Is there a particular career or industry I'm interested in?
- Do I want to keep my options open while I decide?

Environment

- Would I prefer the familiarity of a school sixth form?
- Would I enjoy the independence and wider choices of a large college?
- How important is the journey to and from where I study?
- Would I feel comfortable managing more of my own time?

There are no right or wrong answers! The aim is simply to work out what matters most to you.

Bristol Post-16 Providers

Colleges with a wide range of courses

- City of Bristol College
- South Gloucestershire and Stroud College (SGS)
- St Brendan's Sixth Form College
- Weston College

Creative, Media, Music & Performing Arts

- Boomsatsuma
- BIMM Bristol
- Bristol School of Art
- Bristol School of Acting
- Access Creative College

Sport & Football

- Bristol Rovers Community College
- Bristol City Robins Foundation

Sixth Forms

- Areté Sixth Form
- Bristol Cathedral Choir School
- Bristol Free School
- Ashton Park School
- North Bristol Post-16 Centre
- St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School
- Trinity Academy
- V6 Sixth Form
- Cabot Learning Federation Post-16

Bristol Post-16 Providers

General Further Education Colleges

- **City of Bristol College**: A large college offering a wide range of A Levels, vocational courses, T Levels, apprenticeships and technical qualifications across several Bristol campuses.
- **South Gloucestershire and Stroud College (SGS)**: Offers academic, vocational and technical courses, including subjects such as sport, engineering, health and social care, and creative subjects.
- **St Brendan's Sixth Form College**: A specialist sixth form college offering a broad range of A Levels and vocational courses.
- **Weston College**: Based outside Bristol but has a wide range of vocational courses and may be useful for those who live further.

Bristol Post-16 Providers

Creative, Media, Music & Performing Arts

- **Boomsatsuma:** A particularly good option for students interested in film, TV, photography, games, art, digital media and sports media.

- **BIMM Bristol:** Specialist music education, with courses and training for students interested in music performance, production, songwriting and the wider music industry.

- **Bristol School of Art:** Art-focused education for students interested in developing their creative and artistic skills.

- **Bristol School of Acting**: A specialist provider for students interested in acting and the performing arts.

- **Access Creative College**: Offers creative courses, particularly around music, media, gaming and creative industries.

Bristol Post-16 Providers

Sport & Football

- Bristol Rovers Community College: Post-16 education linked to Bristol Rovers, with opportunities focused on football and sport.
- Bristol City Robins Foundation: Offers Post-16 opportunities combining education, sport and football through Bristol City FC's community foundation.
- SGS Sports Academies: Offers Post-16 competition and holistic development with access to facilities such as 3G pitches, stadiums and strength conditioning gyms at SGS WISE Campus.

Finding Apprenticeships

Thinking about applying for an apprenticeship? There are opportunities across Bristol and the South West, from healthcare and engineering to business, construction, sport and creative industries.

1. Start with www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship to search for vacancies by location, job type and apprenticeship level.

2. www.amazingapprenticeships.com is also a great place to find advice, information and tips to help you understand apprenticeships and the application process.

3. You can also explore www.ucas.com/explore/search/apprenticeships to discover different apprenticeship routes and career options.

Do not forget to check local employers and company websites, as some vacancies are advertised directly.

Top tips:

- 🔎 Apply early: good opportunities can be competitive.
- ✍️ Tailor your application: show why you are interested in the role.
- 🏢 Research the employer: find out what they do before applying.
- 🎤 Prepare for interviews: think about your skills, strengths and experiences.

Useful Websites and Support

Choosing what to do after your GCSEs can feel like a big decision, but you do not have to work it out on your own.

Who Can Help?

If you would like further support or information, speak to:

- Your Careers Adviser – Mrs Bartlett-Cosway
- Your Tutors and Teachers
- Parents and Carers
- Current College and Sixth Form Students (ask what their experience has been like and what they wish they had known).
- College and Sixth Form Open Days (visiting providers can help you get a feel for the environment and ask questions in person).

Useful Websites

- **UCAS** – Explore university courses, degree apprenticeships and entry requirements at www.ucas.com
- **Prospects** – Explore different careers, find out what jobs involve and discover possible routes into them at www.prospects.ac.uk
- **GOV.UK** – Find an Apprenticeship – Search for live apprenticeship vacancies across Bristol, the South West and the rest of the UK www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship
- **Unifrog** – Explore careers, courses and Post-16 options, compare providers and keep track of your applications.
- **National Careers Service** – nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

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