

September 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

As your child enters this pivotal academic year, we are writing to outline the key steps, pathways, and timelines involved in applying for Post-16 education.

Under current guidelines, all young people in England must remain in education or recognized training until their 18th birthday. However, this does not have to be full-time classroom schooling. There are several distinct pathways available:

- **A-Levels (Academic Route):** Typically 3 subjects, classroom-based, with assessment primarily through end-of-course exams.
- **T-Levels & BTECs (Vocational & Technical Route):** Specialized study combining theory with practical application and workplace industry placements.
- **Apprenticeships (Work-Based Route):** Paid employment combined with off-the-job training, resulting in a nationally recognized qualification.

To help you support your child through this process, here is the recommended step-by-step roadmap:

Step 1: Initial Research & Exploring Pathways (Early Autumn)

Before submitting applications, students should explore available courses, entry requirements, and career directions.

- **Research Online:** Browse prospective sixth form, college, and training provider websites. Review course syllabi, entry criteria (e.g., minimum GCSE grades in English and Maths), and transport options. We have attached a guide to all the local providers.
https://www.henlowacademy.co.uk/web/post_16_education_providers/656694
- **Use Career Tools:** Check online platforms like National Careers Service or Careerpivot to align subject choices with future career goals.
- **Check Apprenticeship Hubs:** If considering a work-based route, explore the government's *Find an Apprenticeship* portal
<https://www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship> to understand the types of Level 3 roles offered locally.

Step 2: Open Days & Taster Events (Autumn Term)

Attending open events allows students to experience campus environments, speak with tutors, and ask specific questions about subjects.

- **Attend In-Person Events:** Check local college and sixth form websites for Open Evening dates (typically hosted between October and December).
- **Prepare Questions:** Encourage your child to ask about class sizes, pastoral support, pass rates, and progression routes to university or employment.

Step 3: Drafting Personal Statements & Preparing Details (Autumn)

Most application systems—whether using local online portals (e.g., *UCAS Progress* or regional application hubs) or direct provider forms—require basic background details.

- **Gather Target Grades:** Ensure your child knows their predicted GCSE grades.
- **Draft a Personal Statement:** Write a brief summary highlighting hobbies, achievements, work experience, and why they want to study their chosen courses.

Step 4: Submitting Applications (Late Autumn / Winter)

We strongly recommend that students submit applications early to secure their preferred choices.

- **Apply to Multiple Options:** Students are encouraged to apply to more than one institution (e.g., a primary sixth form/college and a backup option).
- **Mind the Deadlines:** While college application deadlines vary, many competitive sixth forms close applications between **December and January**.
- **Note for Apprenticeship Applicants:** Because apprenticeship positions are live job vacancies, students applying for this route should also apply for a sixth form or college place as a secure fallback option.

Step 5: Interviews & Conditional Offers (Spring Term)

After reviewing applications, providers will invite students for informal discussions or interviews.

- **Interview Process:** These meetings check that selected courses match the student's abilities and ambitions.
- **Conditional Offers:** Following the interview, students usually receive a conditional offer based on achieving specific GCSE grades in August.

Step 6: GCSE Results Day & Enrolment (August)

- **Receiving Results:** On GCSE Results Day, students collect their official grades.
- **Confirming Places:** Students take their results to their chosen provider to complete official enrolment. If grades are higher or lower than expected, advice staff will be on hand at all colleges and sixth forms to adjust course options as needed.

How You Can Help at Home

1. **Talk about choices:** Discuss preferred learning styles (exams vs. coursework vs. practical hands-on work).
2. **Help keep track of dates:** Maintain a calendar of open days, application deadlines, and interview appointments.
3. **Encourage early completion:** Completing applications before winter mock exams ensures students can focus fully on revision.

If you or your child have any questions or require careers guidance, please do not hesitate to contact our school Careers Team.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Gareth Baxter

Assistant Head Teacher | Attendance Champion | Careers Leader |