

NVQs

NVQs (National Vocational Qualifications) are work-based qualifications that are usually undertaken in the workplace, or a setting that replicates a work environment. This qualification helps students to develop skills and knowledge necessary for a particular job. These work placements can be paid or voluntary, and can take place whilst completing an apprenticeship, traineeship, or while attending a Further Education College or School. There is no fixed learning programme attached to NVQ's, so they are a very flexible qualification that can be arranged to meet an individual's academic or professional needs. NVQs come in a range of equivalent qualifications, from GCSEs to post-graduate degrees, and are available for nearly all occupational areas and business sectors. NVQs tend to focus on one specific subject, and are therefore less flexible than a degree. They are most suitable for students who have a clear idea of what they want to study, or which career they would like to go into. Because they equate to such a broad range of levels, they are suitable for both young people as well as adults.

Further Information

- **UK Government (Department for Education):** www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education
- **The Education Website:** www.theeducationwebsite.co.uk
- **UCAS (Higher education information):** www.ucas.com
- **IntoUniversity Supplementary Schools:** www.intouniversityssp.org

Questions?

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SCHOOLS PROJECT



Qualifications

In the UK Education System



Qualifications in the UK

This leaflet provides an overview of some of the key qualifications on offer in schools and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; covering GCSEs, A-Levels, BTECs and NVQs.

GCSE GCSEs ('General Certificate of Secondary Education') are the most common qualifications to take in secondary school. Students, age 14-16 years-old, study at least five subjects over the course of two years in secondary school. After they have passed a series of exams at the end of the two years, students are awarded a certificate for each subject.

Students have, until recently, been graded on a letter-based scale, from 'A*' to 'G'. If a student doesn't perform well enough to receive a qualification, they are given a 'U' (unclassified/ungraded) and do not pass their subject. However, starting in summer 2017, subjects will slowly start moving to a number-based scale, where 9 is the highest qualification a student can achieve, and 1 is the lowest. A 'good pass' or average score, will be considered a 5. By 2019, all subjects will be graded on this new scale.

Taking GCSEs is often seen as an important stepping stone in a young person's academic and professional development. In general, if a student wishes to progress onto Further Education in a Sixth Form or College, or attend University, they are required to have studied GCSEs.

A-Levels & AS-Levels

Many students between the ages of 16 and 18 take AS and A Levels during their remaining two years of secondary school (years 12 and 13). These qualifications can be taken either at the same school they've been attending for their secondary education (this is called 'Sixth Form') or in a separate college that specialises in Further Education qualifications. They are available in a range of academic (and some vocational) subjects. Most students take four subjects during year 12, dropping one subject before beginning year 13.

AS-Levels can either be taken as the first part of a full A-Level qualification, or as a standalone qualification (separate from an A-Level). It is most common for students to complete their AS-Levels during year 12 as a part of their overall A-Level, finishing the full A-Level during Year 13. Starting in 2017, if a student wishes to take only an AS-Level qualification, they must take the final exam at the end of Year 12. The two qualifications are considered to be totally separate when it comes to marking, so a student's results in their AS-Levels will not be counted towards their A-Level marks.

AS/A-Levels are the most common qualification accepted by Higher Education Institutions in the UK. Some universities may not accept any other qualifications apart from these, so it may be important for a student to take this into consideration when making decisions about their final years of secondary school.

BTEC

BTECs (Business and Technology Education Council) are career or vocational qualifications offered across a number of levels in secondary schools as well as Higher Education Institutions. Throughout secondary school, students can take BTECs alongside other courses (at GCSE and A-Level). Because the nature of BTECs is less academically focused, they are often pursued as an alternative to studying A-Levels, though they can also be studied alongside A-Levels as well as GCSEs. Most BTEC courses are designed and developed in consultation with employers, universities and other professional bodies. BTEC courses combine classroom learning with practical, work-related activities, and therefore develop a number of transferable skills, such as teamwork, creative thinking, or presentation skills. As a result, they are an excellent way to combine academic learning in a school or college with hands-on skill and knowledge development in order to progress into the next academic or professional stage in life.

BTECs are a good option for students who are interested in a certain sector or industry, but feel less sure about what specific job they'd like to pursue. BTECs give students the skills they need to move on to Further or Higher Education, an internship, or go straight into employment. 95% of universities in the UK accept students with BTEC qualifications alongside A-Levels. If a student is interested in a particular university that does not accept BTECs, it is important to be aware of this when deciding on which qualifications to pursue in year 12 & 13.