



POST-18 PATHWAYS GUIDANCE 2026/27

**BUZZWORD:
c00mbew00d27**

Post-18 Pathways Available:

- **Under-graduate degree at university**

- **Degree Apprenticeship**
- **Higher Education Study**
- **Higher Apprenticeship**
- **Employment (not linked to apprenticeship)**
- **Gap year travel / volunteering**

The range of opportunities can be quite daunting but we hope you will find this booklet helpful in making an informed decision.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to answer all questions within one booklet, so please speak to your tutor or myself. (jbrack@cws.foliotrust.uk) if you have any questions or concerns, or simply want to talk to someone about the different pathways, and what might be the most appropriate choice for yourself.

Finally, remember, once you have secured good Level 3 qualifications, you will always be able to access these opportunities, even if currently you chose not to do so.

If you are unsure, a good starting point would be talk to myself or your tutor, and / or access the link below:

[What can I do next? | UCAS](#)

UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE- UNIVERSITY

Having a degree is a requirement for an increasing number of professions and graduates can expect to earn considerably more than non-graduates

Securing your degree through studying at university provides an opportunity to leave home and live independently whilst learning, and will provide you with access to a wide range of job roles and opportunities on graduation.

There is an initial cost to studying at university (see below), but over time this is off-set by increased earning potential, as well as the life experience of studying and living away from home.

Undergraduate Degree: Choosing a Course

This is something that you need to be researching **NOW**. It is important that you consider both location, and course content.

Whilst all post-graduate degrees will add value to future employability and earnings, some top employers and professions will also take into account the university where you achieved your degree.

The most prestigious degrees are obtained from Russell Group Universities ([Our universities | Russell Group](#)).

As you would expect, this is reflected in their entry requirements, which generally will range from A*, A*, A* to a mixture of A*-B, and you will need a strong personal statement to set you aside from other applicants.

Non Russell-Group university courses are accessible with lower entry grades, although the higher the grade requirement (tariff) the better the course.

For some the course will be straight forward as you have chosen a career path that requires a certain degree so you know what you need to achieve. However, for many professions entry is post-graduate regardless of the degree so you may simply want to take a degree in a subject that you are interested in, rather than specific to a career choice.

There are thousands of different courses, and this can be quite overwhelming. I would suggest looking at a list of courses at Universities you are interested in attending. These tend to be listed under subject areas, so for example if you are studying Business, look at management and business courses and explore the range of degree courses available.

Be inspired....!!!

That said, this is a big decision, and I would very strongly recommend that you spend some time thinking about this. Choosing the wrong course can result in students dropping out of courses, so if you are at all unsure please talk to a friend, parents and teachers before making a decision.

If you are applying to Oxbridge, or hoping to study medical or creative performance courses please see below:

Medical / Veterinary

Deadline: 15th October 2026

You **MUST** let me know ASAP if you are intending to apply for these courses. You have an earlier deadline and we need to support you to achieve this.

Usually you would be expected to provide evidence of work experience in a related environment. Universities will consider candidates without this, but you can demonstrate other work experience, volunteering etc. This will be evidenced in your personal statement.

You will have to complete a UCAT (University Clinical Aptitude Test) **before submitting**. Tests take place at a local test centre (details on the link below), and you need to apply now to secure a slot. Bookings open on **23rd June 2026**. UCAS are advising booking earlier slots.

[Register | UCAT Consortium](#)

Oxbridge

Deadline: 15th October 2026

You **MUST** let me know ASAP if you are intending to apply to these Universities. You have an earlier deadline and we need to support you to achieve this.

We can also direct you to on-line courses, and locally run programmes that will provide guidance and advice to support you to be successful in a highly competitive environment.

After submission, you will be required to complete an admissions test, which is held at a local test centre (although likely to also be made available on-line this year). Once you receive a request, you need to notify us as we can then book this for you.

I would strongly recommend completing practise tests on-line: [Oxbridge Admissions Mock Tests](#)

Conservatoires

These are for performance-based courses including music, drama and screen production courses. Conservatoire courses are based around individual tuition, as well as practical training and frequent opportunities to perform. All teaching staff at conservatoires are working professionals. There is a strong emphasis on one-to-one tuition, alongside group work and performances

Universities offer similar under-graduate courses so please do research all options before making a decision.

The application process is similar, but you will have to attend an interview

For more information, please see UCAS link below: [Conservatoires | UCAS](#)

Deadline: Application deadlines vary, so please use the link to check for your particular course - [Search - UCAS](#)

Undergraduate Degree: Choosing a University

Think carefully about where you want to spend the next 3 or 4 years. Do you want to look at Universities in London or reasonably local ones like Surrey or Sussex which may provide the option to live at home, or do you want to look further away and live independently.

This is a big decision, and I would very strongly recommend that you spend some time thinking about this. Choosing the wrong university can result in students dropping out of courses, or just being very homesick and unhappy. So, if you are at all unsure please talk to a friend, parents and teachers before making a decision.

Open Days:

Universities offer open days and provide lots of information. There are tours of campuses, subject specific talks, and seminars on students finance and accommodation. Most universities will require you to register in advance if you wish to attend these, so please check university home pages.

Many are coming up soon so it is never too early to look and get booked onto a visit. Please speak to me if you require time off school to attend Friday Open days

I would strongly recommend that you do visit university campuses and towns before accepting a place at a university as you need to get a good feel for a place before deciding to spend 3 or 4 years there.

Undergraduate Degree: Application

You should start your application as soon as possible, as these take time to complete, and rushed applications tend to lead to hasty and poorly informed decisions on Universities and / or courses.

You cannot submit your application until 1st September 2026, however you can register and start the process from 12th May 2026.

The very last day for applications is 13th January 2027

There is excellent step-by-step guidance on the UCAS website: [Applying to University - learn about everything involved](#)

You can apply to five Universities. I would strongly recommend that you do use all five available choices (but choose universities and courses carefully – see above), although you can submit an application with fewer choices.

University admissions teams will start looking at your application as soon as it's received. Some will respond within a day or two, others will wait until their own internally set deadline, so response times do vary – but remember to check emails regularly as they will often require quick responses to information sent.

If you are applying for a course where an interview is required as part of the application process (this will be clear on the course details), you are permitted to request absence from school to attend – likewise to visit any campuses before making decisions.

Once you have started your application process you will have to create login details and a password. Do not lose this information as you will need to use this to check status, and accept offers.

Applying Deadlines

Medical, veterinary and Oxbridge: 15th October 2026 (**internal deadline Friday 3rd October**)

Conservatoires, see above.

All other applications: 13th January 2027 (**internal deadline Friday 24th November**)

Applying - Buzzword

As part of our application process, you will be required to provide a 'Buzzword'.

2026/27 BUZZWORD: c00mbew00d27

This links you to CWS and it is essential that you correctly enter this otherwise we will not have access to process your application.

Applying – Payment

The application fee (2026-27) is £34.50 for **five courses** .This is requested before your application can be submitted.

Applying - Personal Statement

All applications require you to provide a Personal Statement.

This is your opportunity to stand out from all the other applicants; to tell the university why they should choose you for their course, many of which will be over-subscribed.

The UCAS Personal Statement is your opportunity to tell universities about your suitability for the course/s that you have decided to study.

You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment, and above all ensure that you stand out from the crowd.

UCAS website provides some brilliant tips and advice on writing effective personal statements, and I would strongly recommend that you access these before starting, and once you have completed your first draft. **WE WILL BE WORKING ON THESE IN SUMMER TERM 2**

[The new personal statement for 2026 entry | UCAS](#)

Applying - School Reference

This is completed by me using information supplied by your subject teachers who also write references, and their knowledge of your academic and non-academic achievements. I would strongly suggest that you talk to your tutor to ensure that they are aware of any extra-curricular achievements (volunteering, sports, part time work, leadership roles etc).

Applying - Predicted Grade

Predicted grades are based on all the work you have completed to date, and your teachers professional judgement of the progress you are likely to make during Year 13. Any mock exams completed at the point of writing will also form part of your overall grade.

Teachers will be as positive as possible with these grades as we want you to be successful in securing a place at your preferred university, but grades do need to be evidence based. If you need a particular grade, talk to your teacher so they are aware of what you need to achieve to secure a place.

Undergraduate Degree: Finance

Course fees are typically £9,790 per year, paid via student loan that you repay following graduation. You can choose to pay fees upfront rather than taking out a student loan.

Undergraduate courses are generally 3 years, but an increasing number of courses have a 4-year option, which includes a work placement year, often with the opportunity to complete this abroad.

You also need to factor in your cost of living, including accommodation if you are attending a university away from home. This varies depending on your choice of university and standard of accommodation. You are also able to apply for maintenance grants to cover some of these costs, which are assessed based on your parent's income.

There is lots of information on finance on the UCAS website: [Money and student life | UCAS](#) and individual universities will also provide their own information via their home pages.

Undergraduate Degree- Next Steps

Once you have submitted your application, you will start to receive emails from universities so you need to check our emails regularly.

Some courses may require you to complete admissions tests, attend interviews and / or applicant days so you need to make sure you don't overlook any requests. Offers will be made following interviews etc.

For other courses, you will receive an immediate conditional or unconditional offer.

A conditional offer is subject to achieving certain grades in your exams.

An unconditional offer is just that, an offer based on your application and predicted grades only. Whilst this sounds great, as there is less pressure on exam grades and you have the security of knowing where you are going to be studying and can even book your accommodation (and your Ikea trip), you need to think about the quality of a course where they are less concerned about your actual grades.

Our advice would always be to have a discussion with teachers before accepting an unconditional offer.

If you accept an unconditional offer, you must remember that whilst the university may not require a certain grade, employers will most definitely be looking at A Level / BTEC grades. Do you really want to leave school without achieving qualifications that will enable you to be successful in your future career – and which you can be proud of?

The process of accepting courses is relatively straightforward, although be aware that you cannot accept a place until you have had a response from all universities.

If your firm choice is conditional, you can also accept an insurance (back-up) choice. If your place is conditional, the university will ask you to reject all other offers in order to accept this place.

There is no pressure to make early decisions if you don't want to, as you have until May make your final decision. Any offers are valid until this date, although with some unconditional offers, Universities will ask you to immediately accept to secure your place. Again, do not do so without discussing it with me.

There is lot of information to help you with tracking your application, and next steps, on the UCAS link below:

[Tracking your UCAS application](#)

DEGREE APPRENTICESHIP

Having a degree is a requirement for an increasing number of professions and graduates can expect to earn considerably more than non-graduates.

Securing your degree through an employer means that you will be working whilst studying. This is hard work, and is certainly not the easy option, but is a very good decision if you are confident about your future career path and you don't mind missing out on the university experience.

Salaries are at entry-level, but employers are also paying the cost of your degree course. Some will also offer subsidised accommodation or travel if you need to relocate for your work.

As your employer has invested in your degree, you will be expected to remain with your employer for the duration of your studies, and a number of years following this. If you leave, they would be entitled to ask you to pay the cost of your degree.

As you are working at the same time, it will take typically 4-5 years to secure your degree rather than 3 years.

You will spend approximately 80% of your time working, with 20% set aside for study – this may be on a university campus.

Degree apprenticeships are advertised through employers, and you will have to complete a rigorous selection process to be successful. They are highly sought after, and very competitive. You will need top grades, as well as be able to demonstrate personal experience and qualities that make you stand out from other applicants.

All employers who offer Degree Apprenticeships are government approved, and subject to stringent checks to monitor the quality of the training.

There is also more information on Degree Apprenticeships on both UCAS and Government Apprenticeship websites:

[Degree apprenticeships - Learn more here](#)

[Find an apprenticeship - GOV.UK](#)

HIGHER APPRENTICESHIP

These are full-time jobs with a study element – typically a 30-hour working week, plus a day of study toward professional qualifications through an approved awarding body.

Tuition fees are paid by your employer but, as with degree apprenticeships, you must commit to remaining with your employer, so you need to be 100% sure about the sector you are entering before you apply.

Degree apprenticeships are advertised through employers, and you will have to complete a rigorous selection process to be successful. They are highly sought after, and very competitive. You will need good grades, as well as be able to demonstrate personal experience and qualities that make you stand out from other applicants.

All employers who offer Higher Apprenticeships are government approved, and subject to stringent checks to monitor the quality of the training.

TRAVEL / GAP YEAR

Assuming that parents are supportive, this can be a really sensible choice if you are unsure about what you want to do post-18, or just don't feel ready for the next step, particularly if it involves leaving home.

If you have applied to university but subsequently decide you would like to take a gap year, for most courses it is possible to defer for a year. You will need to contact your university admissions team to discuss.

Equally, if you are hoping to secure an apprenticeship but have found this difficult due to the challenges of a post Covid-19 job market, you may want to take a year out to gain some experience ahead of applying again as opportunities arise – remember, apprenticeships become available throughout the year, not just in September.

If you are feeling adventurous, there are lots of organisations that will help you to undertake volunteering abroad. Some will have a small cost which is often covered by fundraising, others may be free on the basis you are completing projects on arrival.

EMPLOYMENT: PUBLIC SERVICES

POLICE FORCE

There are lots of different routes to access a career within the Police.

You can either join their 3-year degree apprenticeship at post-18 (Professional Policing Degree) or continue to university and join at postgraduate level having already obtained this degree.

As a police officer, you will be expected to take responsibility for developing your own skills, and ensuring that your fitness levels are maintained as the work can be demanding, both physically and mentally.

There is further information on joining the Police on the website below: [Ways in to policing | Explore entry routes](#)

FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

The process of joining the Fire Service varies according to where you live, and is quite complicated (see link to website below). It is a very rewarding career with a continuous training programme by attending lectures, exercises, practical training sessions and other forms of training to maintain competence levels.

As a fire officer, you will be expected to take responsibility for developing your own skills, and ensuring that your fitness levels are maintained as the work can be demanding, both physically and mentally.

There is further information on joining the Fire and Rescue service on the website below: [The Recruitment Process – UK Fire Service Resources](#)

ARMED FORCES

There are a wide variety of post-18 apprenticeships routes into the armed forces.

You can apply post-18 with your Level 3 qualification and receive further training once enrolled, however to progress to the higher ranks you will require a degree, so you may need to go to university depending on your career goals.

For all of the Force options, as part of the application process you will need to pass a fitness test. This is rigorous, and is a stumbling block for many applicants so ensure you get fit before you apply – and then stay fit as you will be continually assessed

If you are interested in joining any of the armed forces, I would strongly recommend researching different apprenticeship pathways using the links below.

ARMY: [The British Army](#)

RAF: [RAF Recruitment | Find Your Role | Royal Air Force](#)

Royal Navy: [Royal Navy | Joining options](#)

FINALLY, to reiterate that you are not expected to know exactly what you want to do, so do not panic if you are unsure. There is no pressure to make decisions (although if you are even vaguely thinking about university, you should apply and then withdraw if you change your mind) – and there is always the option of taking a year out before committing to university or apprenticeships.

Just focus on securing the best possible outcomes for your qualifications, so you have as many options as possible in the future.

TALK to tutors, Ms Kaye and Mr. Brack if you are still worried. We can only help if you ask.

Good Luck!