

## Where next after GCSEs - how do I decide?

You need to consider a number of factors and see what they are like in each school or college. This will need some research but it is worth putting in the effort. Your Connexions adviser/careers teacher and the schools and colleges should be able to provide the information needed. The prospectus and leaflets for the options post-16 should be in the careers section of your school library and the colleges will provide them on request.

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### Will I pass the course I have chosen?

At AS and A level grades A – E are all pass grades. Vocational courses such as BTEC are graded as passes with the chance to gain merits and distinctions. You can compare pass rates for individual subjects and courses in schools or colleges with the national averages.

### Will I get a high grade?

The number of high grades achieved, A/B at AS level and A level or distinctions in BTEC courses can be expressed as a percentage. Schools and colleges should be able to tell you how their percentages compare with the national averages.

### How good is the school or college at helping students who might find the course hard?

The pass rates and A/B percentages a school or college achieves obviously depend on how well students have done at GCSE. If you get all A\*s at GCSE you would be expected to do very well at A level, if all Cs not quite so well. 'Value-added' measures whether students with particular GCSE results do as well or better or worse than expected. High value-added scores for a course mean students of all abilities generally do better than expected. There are a variety of measures. The government's performance tables now include a post-16 value added score (CVA). A CVA score of above 1010 is good, 990 to 1010 average and below 990 not so good. Some schools and colleges use other systems. In the A level Performance system (Alps) a score of 1 or 2 is outstanding, 3 excellent, 4 very good, 5 good, 6 OK and 7 not so good. In the A level Information System (Alis) a score of +0.1 or above is good, -0.1 or more negative, not so good. The school or college should be able to tell you at least one of these.

### Will I complete the course?

Whether students complete the course is measured by 'retention rate'. A retention rate of 90% means 9 out of 10 students finish the course.

### How many qualifications will I get?

This is reflected in the 'points score per candidate' and is used by many universities to set offers. Each qualification (depending on the grade) is worth points. Compare the school or college score with the national average.

### How many courses can I choose from and can I do any combination?

A wide range of courses enables you to be flexible and choose a programme suited to your interests. The number of A level courses, GCSEs and vocational courses should be in the school/college's prospectus.

### Will I fit in and enjoy my course?

This is a matter of personal choice. You can best find out by visiting the school or college during an open day or similar events and by talking to students and teachers. **This may well be the deciding factor!**

### How easy is it to get to?

Again this will be a personal choice. You need to know how far away the school or college is, how long it takes to get there and what transport is available.

**To compare the schools and colleges offering the courses you are considering, try answering all the above questions. When you have done this you should have a fairly comprehensive summary of the key factors for each school and college in which you are interested.**