



Find Your Path

Information Booklet

2025

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Overview

There have been many changes to the FE (Further Education) system of education for young people aged 16-18 in the last few years, which can make navigating the options seem daunting and difficult.

Legally, **all** young people must continue in education or training until they turn 18. This means that students will need to attend College or do some form of work-based learning for two years after leaving Downlands Community School.

All young people also have the option of studying for a third year without being charged for their study.

There is a wealth of information contained in this pack, aimed at giving you the help you need to support your child to choose the most appropriate path for them, and answer the majority of the questions you may have about the qualifications on offer and the process of applying to college.

Ms Hollingdale is always happy to answer any other questions or concerns you have regarding the next steps after Downlands and can be contacted on careers@downlands.org

Understanding Qualifications

Which level is right for me?

The level of the course gives an idea of how demanding the course is going to be – the higher the level the more difficult the qualification. There are nine levels ranging from Entry Level to Level 8. Every level contains different types of qualifications. Some are subject based, e.g. A levels and some are vocational (work based) e.g. BTECs, T Levels and Apprenticeships. Students work at a level that suits their abilities and experience in a particular subject. Once you have gained a qualification at one level you can move up to the next.



When you are considering what level to study after Year 11 you should consider:

- **Your starting point** – what level are you working at now?
- **The end point** – can you move onto higher level qualifications?
- **Job entry requirements** – most jobs require level 2 qualifications, many expect level 3
- **Higher education requirements** – most courses require level 3 qualifications (+ English/Maths Grade 4)

General Entry Requirements to Further Education / Training

To study Level 3 courses

Generally, students will need a minimum of 5 grade 9-4 GCSE's **INCLUDING** English and Maths. **Some** subjects at A Level will require student to gain at least a 6 at GCSE in that subject

To study Level 2 courses

Generally, students will need 3-5 grade 3 GCSE's.

To study Level 1 courses and Entry level programmes

Students are not required to have formal qualifications but an aptitude and interest in the subject is essential.

Students should remember that they are entitled to up to three years free further education

This means students can start at the level that is right for them and progress on to the next level. There is also the option of the EPQ discussed earlier under the types of courses available.

When deciding which subjects to take, students must give careful thought as to what they want to do afterwards: some higher-level courses or employment opportunities require certain subjects at required levels, e.g., to become a doctor you will need to study Chemistry at A level.

It is useful to research possible University courses on www.ucas.com and on www.unifrog.org to check specific entry requirements

Types of Courses

Level 3 Courses (Advanced Levels)

If undertaking a level 3 programme of study you will usually be expected to study the equivalent of 3 level 3 subjects in order to be considered in full time education. You can choose to mix A levels and Vocational Qualifications if you wish.

A (Advanced) Levels

A Levels are studied for two years with exams at the end of the two years of study. They will contain little or no coursework.

A Levels are graded A* - E and score points (UCAS points) which count towards university entrance

It is important to check entry requirements via individual college websites.

Some subjects require specific entry requirements.

Generally, to study 3 A Levels you will need to gain a minimum 6 x 9-4 grades at GCSE, including English Language / Maths.

Universities generally require 3 A levels or equivalent as entry to most Degree courses.

T (Technical) Levels

T Levels were introduced in 2020 and every year a wider range of subjects are being made available. They are technical qualifications that allow students to combine studying with a substantial industry placement and are open to students who have completed their GCSEs. They are a standalone qualification that is equivalent to three A Levels.

T Levels have been designed in collaboration with employers, so the content prepares students for entry into skilled employment or a higher-level Apprenticeship. T Levels carry UCAS points in line with A levels so will also allow progression to university. These are the T Levels offered locally at present. There will be more on offer in due course.

• Adult Nursing	MET
• Agriculture, Land Management and Livestock Production	Brinsbury / Plumpton / Sparsholt
• Animal Management & Behaviour	Brinsbury / Sparsholt
• Animal Management & Science	Brinsbury / Plumpton / Sparsholt
• Building Services Engineering for Construction	BACA / MET
• Content Creation and Production	Lewes (ESCG)
• Design, Surveying and Planning for Construction	MET
• Digital Production, Design and Development	Crawley / Collyers / MET
• Digital Support Services	MET
• Education and Early Years	Crawley / Collyers / Haywards Heath / MET
	Shoreham / Varndean / Worthing
• Health	Crawley
• Health and Science	Crawley
• Media Broadcast & Production	MET
• Ornamental Horticulture	Sparsholt
• Trees and Woodland	Sparsholt

You can find out more information at: <https://www.tlevels.gov.uk/students> and college websites

International Baccalaureate (IB)

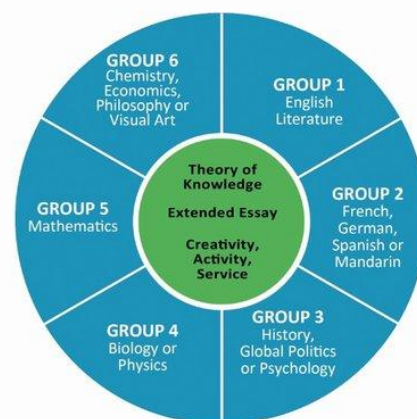
The IB is taught worldwide and is internationally recognised and understood by universities and employers as an excellent preparation for further study or employment.

Students study 6 subjects plus the core programme which includes:

- Extended essay (research project and 4000-word essay on a topic of your choice)
- Theory of Knowledge (a study of the foundations of knowledge)
- Creativity, Action, Service (a programme of extra-curricular activities).

Students will study 3 subjects at Higher Level and 3 at Standard Level. Subjects are scored out of 7 with a maximum score over all areas of 45. All exams take place in May of Year 13.

A mixture of at least 7 GCSEs at Grade 6 or above, including English, Maths and Science are required. In addition, certain subjects at both Standard and Higher Level have particular subject requirements. Check prospectus.



IB Open Evening – Tuesday 7th October 6 - 7.45PM at Varndean College

Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) – offered in Year 13

The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) gives you the opportunity to independently research and write a 5-6,000-word dissertation on a topic of your choice in Year 2. It is excellent preparation for university as it mirrors the style of research and assessment you will encounter in higher education. For those not planning on university, it showcases deep knowledge of a topic of your choice which can feed into any future career choices

- You can pursue a particular area of academic interest in depth, perhaps in a topic related to your higher education direction.
- Some universities will give a lower offer to students who are taking the EPQ
- Some universities will give additional funding to students who have taken the EPQ
- Employers see the EPQ as evidence of maturity and the ability to self-manage

Vocational Advanced Qualifications

These courses are specialist vocational qualifications valued by industry and higher education alike. All colleges offer some of these courses at level 3

There are three 'sizes' of Vocational Advanced Qualifications: Certificate, Extended Certificate and Diploma (Subsidiary Diploma and Extended Diploma) equivalent to one, two or three A levels.

These courses might now be named as AAQ (Alternative Academic Qualification) or have BTEC, NVQ, UAL etc in their title.

Courses are split into modules which are tested as you go along, so you build your final mark over the two years of study and from a mixture of exams, coursework, portfolio and other means of assessment. All units and overall qualification will be awarded a mark of Pass, Merit or Distinction / Distinction*

You will need to have an interest in a specific area of work e.g., plumbing / childcare and the course often involves a period of work experience.

You can use these qualifications to gain entry to university as they are awarded UCAS points in the same way as A levels. Check www.ucas.ac.uk for entry requirements.

Level 2 Courses

It is now a statutory requirement that all students are required to retake GCSE Maths and English Language if they do not attain a grade 4 (or above) in their education to date.

These retakes can be taken alongside level 3 courses, if other entry requirements are met, or alongside a level 2 programme of study.

If you are concerned that you may not achieve your grade 4 in Maths and English you are encouraged to look at the colleges which have a good range of level 2 subjects to choose from. Typically, 6th form colleges don't offer as broad range of level 2 options as FE colleges.

Some subjects will insist on you taking a level 2 initially as you will not have learnt the basics in that field during your time at school, for example, if you wish to study plumbing, or hairdressing.

At college, level 2 courses only last for 1 year.

Students can then progress to Level 3 courses the following year.

Foundation Learning

This is an Entry Level / Level 1 programme. This course includes three distinct components:

- Vocational knowledge, skills and understanding
- Functional Skills (Maths, English, ICT)
- Personal and Social development

Foundation learning programmes are designed for students who have had limited achievement at school, for any reason. They are designed to promote progressions as well as helping students to achieve nationally recognised qualifications at Entry Level and Level 1.

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are available across a growing number of fields, and are no longer limited to traditional hands-on sectors such as construction or beauty. These days you can become a solicitor or teacher via an apprenticeship and they are available from level 2 through to level 6.

School leavers are able to apply for either a level 2 or level 3 apprenticeship, depending on their qualifications and previous experience in the field.

Apprenticeships are full time paid employment with the benefits and responsibilities which come with that, with the addition of specific training to gain a recognised qualification. They are sought after and are not an easy option, but may appeal to students keen to get out into the work force rather than go to college.

Level 2 (Intermediate) Apprenticeship

Entry requirements vary. Some require specific qualifications; some require an initial assessment. Apprentices will be paid a training wage (minimum £7.55 per hour) and work towards qualifications in NVQs, and Technical Certificates.

Training can take place solely in the workplace or day or block release at college

It usually takes one year to complete a Level 2 and it should then be possible to move up to a Level 3

Level 3 (Advanced) Apprenticeship

This is an A level equivalent qualification

Entry requirements are usually 5 GCSEs grades 9-4, or completion of a Level 2 Intermediate Apprenticeship.

Apprentices will be paid a training wage (minimum £7.55 per hour) and work towards qualifications in NVQs, and Technical Certificates

It usually takes two years to complete a Level 3 Advanced Apprenticeship and it should then be possible to move up to a Higher Apprenticeship or progress to a Foundation Degree at University or full-time employment.

Training can take place solely in the workplace or day or block release at college.

Open Evening Dates for your diary

Try to attend as many as possible to help make informed decisions about subjects and colleges.
Book to attend the open evenings via the college's website.

College name	No. on roll	Type of college	Open Events Autumn Term	A L E V E L	V O C A T I O N A L	T L E V E L	A C A D A M I E S
BACA	150	Attached 6 th form	16/10	X	X	X	X
BHASVIC	3700	Separate 6th form	12/11 13/11	X	X		X
BN1 Arts	200	Specialist Performing Arts	27/9 18/10 29/11		X		
Brinsbury	1000	Specialist Land-based FE	11/10		X	X	
BRIT school	1300	Specialist Performing Arts	23/9		X		
Collyers	2400	Separate 6th form	12/11 13/11	X	X	X	X
Crawley	3000	FE College	9/10 8/11		X		
DV8	<100	Specialist FE College	8/10 11/10		X		
Haywards Heath	1500	Separate 6th form	20/10 21/10	X	X	X	X
IBAC (Varndean)	100	Alternative Qualification	7/10				
King's School Hove	<100	Attached 6 th Form	11/11	X	X		
Lewes (ESCG)	1400	FE College	14/10 20/11	X	X	X	X
MET	3500	FE College	15/10 22/11		X	X	X
Newhaven (ESCG)	<100	Specialist Marine FE	20/11		X		
Newman	750	Attached 6 th form	20/11	X	X		X
Northbrook	3500	FE College	8/10 18/10		X		
Plumpton	2200	Specialist Land-based FE	11/10 22/11		X	X	
Shoreham Academy	300	Attached 6 th form	6/11	X	X	X	X
St. Pauls	300	Attached 6 th form	9/10	X	X		
Sparsholt	3000	Specialist Land-based FE	4/10 8/11		X	X	
Steyping Grammar	240	Attached 6 th form	4/11	X	X		
Uckfield	350	Attached 6 th Form	12/11	X	X		
Varndean	2000	Separate 6th form	27/9 6/11	X	X	X	X
Worthing	1500	FE College	16/10 21/10	X	X	X	

Vocational refers to all other Advanced level offers such as BTEC, UAL, Diploma, Certificate, NVQ, AAQ

Academies – this is where the provider offers particular organised activities (sporting, creative etc) that students can study alongside their academic curriculum.

You cannot apply to both BHASVIC **and** Varndean colleges. Beyond this, you can apply to as many as you wish.

At Advanced level (level 3 Qualifications) you are expected to study the equivalent of 3 Advanced levels, but you can do this through 3 A levels, a combination of A levels and any Vocational qualification, or just from Vocational Qualifications. T levels are the equivalent of 3 Advanced levels and Vocational qualifications can be offered as single, double or triple subjects.

How to Apply

College Applications

- **All** college applications must be made by Friday 19th December.
- Applications for Varndean or BHASVIC must be made by Friday 5th December
- Colleges have online application forms. Check their individual website to fill out their application form. If you need any assistance with this, come and see Ms Hollingdale
- You cannot apply to both Varndean and BHASVIC
- Students are reminded that they should apply for more than one college to keep their options open. If you are offered more than one place you can accept multiple offers and then reject the others later in the year.
- Be realistic about your options – are you going to get the entry requirements for the courses that you want to study? Some colleges are VERY strict about this. If you are borderline for achieving the grades needed, apply for a plan B option (eg a level 2 course in a subject of interest)

Apprenticeships

- Students considering an Apprenticeship should also apply to college as a 'back-up'. It is easier to withdraw from a place than to apply late if an Apprenticeship is not possible.
- Students should register on-line at <https://www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch> to be alerted of vacancies locally in their chosen occupational area. Students who wish to get an apprenticeship should approach employers in their chosen sector to gain employment.
- Some local providers of apprenticeships will also be attending the Find Your Path evening so this is a good opportunity to talk to them directly about what they are looking for in an apprentice.
- Most of the apprenticeships suitable for school leavers will not be advertised until after Easter.

STUDENTS REMEMBER:

All colleges and apprenticeship providers will be dealing with you directly, **NOT** your parents.

This means it is vital that you do the following:

- Make sure you include YOUR mobile number and a personal email address
- Do not give your school email as this will be closed after your leave Downlands
- Remember to check your emails regularly, including your junk folder!

Colleges and providers will be trying to contact you to organise for you to attend interviews, or to discuss other issues, so keep a look out for messages from them.

Careers Advice and Guidance

Ms Hollingdale is available in her office every afternoon until 4pm, and in the Library Hub at breaktime Monday -Thursday. Please feel free to pop along if you want to discuss course choices, need assistance completing application forms or anything college / career related. If you want to discuss anything in more depth, please request a careers interview.

How do I choose?

- **If a student has a career in mind** – research to ensure that they study the required subjects and levels for that career. Use your Unifrog account for this
- **If they have no career in mind** - they should do what they are **good at / enjoy** and try to choose a range of subjects in order to keep their options open.
- Some courses have specific entry requirements, e.g., to study French / German A level you will need Grade 6 in that language at GCSE
- **Look at how the course is assessed**, % coursework / exams. Most A Levels will be 100% exam. Applied A Levels and BTECs will have practical and coursework elements as well as final exams. Ask yourself what works best for you.
- **Students are more likely to achieve good results if their choices suit their interests and abilities**
- Consider **transport** and how they will get to college.
- Does the college **‘feel right’**?
- How will the college support any **extra learning needs** you might have?
- **Results** – look at their results on their website for the subjects that you want to study. Research specific subject areas, not just the overall results for the whole college.
- Courses vary from college to college; make sure the college you choose offers the **modules** you want to study.
- What support and guidance do they offer for university applications or your chosen next step?

Interviews

Students will be invited to attend interviews at their chosen colleges **following application**. Some colleges interview as the applications come in, some wait and have weeks blocked out for all interviews to take place.

Colleges will send details of the interviews by either email or text, **it is very important that you check your emails regularly and give them an email address that you use and check – not your school email.**

Students will be required to take their **latest report** to their interviews, therefore please keep this safe!

If studying an **Art / Photography/ DT** subject, students may be required to take a portfolio of evidence with them.

If students have chosen **Dance / Performing Arts/ Music** they may be expected to attend an audition

Travel

College Transport for Students aged 16+

The County Council's policy is that it is normally the responsibility of parents to meet all transport costs for full-time students aged 16+ unless you have an ECHP. See www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/schools-and-colleges/school-and-college-travel/help-with-transport/post-16-and-college-transport/ for more information, or <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/education-learning/schools/transport/travel-assistance-send>

Students travelling by rail can purchase the 16-17 Saver (rail card)

www.16-17saver.co.uk

This will give 50% discount on most tickets including Anytime, Off-Peak and Advance as well as season tickets. The rail card costs £35 and is valid for one year. It will automatically expire the day before on the student's 18th birthday, or 1 year after purchase, whichever is sooner.

Buy the card on line via the website and it can be downloaded as a phone APP, or the rail card will be posted to you on the day of purchase. Cards should be purchased on-line via the website.

Travel by bus –

Compass Travel buses - Young people aged 16 to 20 travelling in West Sussex can get a bus saver card - <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travel-and-public-transport/bus-and-coach-travel/bus-passes-and-discounts/bus-it/16-to-20-bus-saver/>

Brighton & Hove buses – student discounts are available, see www.buses.co.uk for full details.

Plumpton College buses - <https://www.plumpton.ac.uk/info-hub-for-students-parents-and-guardians/travel/>

Collyers Bus information - <https://www.collyers.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Bus-Travel-Info-2025-2026.pdf>

Financial Help

16-19 Bursary Fund

The Government has set aside some money for schools, colleges, training providers and local authorities to allocate to young people who need financial support to stay on in full and part-time further education or training. It can help with any education-related costs that may arise during the school year such as the cost of travel, uniforms, educational visits, books and equipment.

There are two types of bursaries:

Vulnerable student bursary – You could get up to £1,200 if at least one of the following applies:

- you're in or recently left local authority care
- you get Income Support or Universal Credit because you're financially supporting yourself
- you get Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in your name and either Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit
- you get Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in your name and either ESA or Universal Credit

Discretionary bursary – You can apply for a discretionary bursary if you are not eligible for a vulnerable bursary but you need financial help to stay on in further education or training. Your school, college or training provider will have its own eligibility criteria as their funds are limited and they need to make sure it gets to the students who most need financial help to stay on in further education or training. The eligibility criteria might be based on your family's income, whether your parents receive benefits, or whether you have previously been entitled to free school meals. Payment of bursaries will depend on attendance, behaviour and standard of work.

You should make an application as soon as you have decided where you are going to study. The sooner you apply, the sooner you will start to receive support. **Students should contact the student support services of the college they are going to.**

For further information visit <https://www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund>

Emergencies and hardship

You might be able to get more support if your circumstances change or you have an emergency. Your provider might also have a separate hardship fund. Speak to student services if you need extra help.

Care to Learn

If you are under 20 and have a child of your own and are the main carer, you may be able to claim Care to Learn. This provides help with childcare and travel costs for young parents who are in education. For further details visit www.gov.uk/care-to-learn

West Sussex County Council

May be able to assist with certain costs for post 16 education (especially transport) where eligibility criteria are satisfied. 01243 526175 – pupil support office at WSCC.

Useful websites for further research

Unifrog

www.unifrog.org

All our students have access to this website which provides information on all aspects of finding educational and vocational providers, researching university placements here and abroad, gap year activities and everything else career related

UCAS

<https://www.ucas.com/>

University website to search degree courses, Universities and check entry requirements for **all** degree courses

Not Going to University

<https://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk/>

Online apprenticeships guide that offers you advice on how to become an apprentice

All About School Leavers

<https://www.allaboutschooleavers.co.uk/>

Search for school leaver programmes, degree apprenticeships.

Informed Choices

<https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>

Use to help you understand which subjects open up different degrees, particularly at Russell Group universities.

Volunteering overseas

<http://www.projects-abroad.co.uk>

Fancy volunteering overseas? Have a look at this website for ideas on gap year projects.

Gap year options – travelling

www.yearoutgroup.org

Gap Year travel inspiration and advice

CareerMap

<https://careemap.co.uk/>

Information about apprenticeship vacancies as well as useful magazine about all career sectors

Your Space

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/your-space/>

A really useful West Sussex sponsored website for young people with information about careers and life choices.

Apprenticeships

<https://www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch>

National Apprenticeship website has lists of current vacancies and more information on employers.

www.apprenticeships-in-sussex.com

A list of local training providers who support apprenticeships

National Careers Service

<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers>

Is a government funded website offering careers information and job profiles.

Careers Box

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSYwOsyeCuWJDb8ak7HVGCG>

A free online library of careers related films, news and information. Match your skills to work and training opportunities.

STEM Careers

<https://www.careergirls.org/>

Although aimed at girls – useful information about careers in STEM – specifically Science based.

Careers in the NHS

<https://www.stepintothenhhs.nhs.uk/> and <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/>

Did you know that there are over 350 careers available in the NHS?

Creative Skillset

www.screenskills.com

For entertainment, media, fashion, textiles, publishing, advertising, marketing & communications. Job profiles and case studies in the creative industries.

Careers in Social Care

<http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/>

To discover the career opportunities in this sector

Lantra

<http://www.lantra.co.uk/>

Check out careers in the land-based sector

icould.com

<http://icould.com/>

More than 1000 videos of real life people talking about their career journeys.

Prospects

<https://www.prospects.ac.uk>

Research job profiles, take a careers quiz

Future Morph

<https://www.stem.org.uk/resources/collection/3338/future-morph>

This site provides information for young people about careers from science, maths and technology.

Tomorrows Engineers

<http://www.tomorrowsengineers.org.uk/>

Find out about careers and degree courses in engineering

Ted Talks

<https://www.ted.com/>

TED Talks are influential videos from expert speakers on a huge range of subjects.

MOOC's

<https://www.futurelearn.com/> or <https://www.mooc-list.com/> Expand your learning by study a MOOC -

Massive Open Online Courses (free online courses) offered by the top universities and colleges

Success at School

<https://successatschool.org/>

Lots of helpful information about CV writing, different career pathways, Gap years and much, much more

Make the Future Yours

www.makethefutureyours.uk/issue-5

Free online magazine for parents and young people with information about careers and education options

Career Confident

<https://www.getcareerconfident.co.uk/>

Provides information, guidance and inspiration to young people aged 14 to 19.

Eric App

<https://www.meet-eric.com/>

Networking and information about careers across the creative industries