



## A Guide to Your Post 16 Options and How to Prepare for Them



### What are my options after Year 11?

You have two options when you leave Soham Village College:

- Remain in full-time **education**, going to Sixth Form or college – free of charge for anyone under 19. This can be anywhere in the UK.
- Find an **apprenticeship** or other job with approved training, which could lead to a part-time qualification whilst working – with these options you are paid a wage and treated as a regular employee

### **College application deadline**

**11<sup>th</sup> December 2026** – Student application deadline. Students to submit applications in MyChoice, or to have applied direct to colleges outside of Cambridgeshire

## Why can't I just get a job?

**Getting a job is competitive**; the more educated you are = the more options you have = the greater chance you have of finding a job you enjoy and your earning potential could be increased.

Technology is changing all the time and many jobs that will exist in 10 years' time are yet to be created. If you have a **good level of education** by the age of 18 and you are prepared to keep gaining new skills and understanding throughout life, then you will be in a better position to cope with changes in work options in the future.

**.....to be employed is to be at risk;  
...to be employable is to be secure....”**

## Qualification Levels

- All qualifications that you take at school, college, university, or in the workplace (including apprenticeships) have a particular level, starting from **Entry level up to Level 8**
- Gaining grade 4s or higher in 4-5 GCSEs will mean you have already achieved Level 2; if you gain some grade 1-3s in your GCSEs then you have Level 1
- If you want to train for a specific job (e.g. hairdresser, carpenter) you **might need to do Level 1 before Level 2** in order to learn all the skills necessary to do that job
- If you want to go to **university**, you will need to get a Level 3 first e.g. A levels, Level 3 Diploma, T Level, V level, International Baccalaureate or Advanced Apprenticeship
- Other options at 18 include a Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4), or a Degree Apprenticeship (Level 6/7). These allow you to have a paid job and get a university level qualification at the same time. **You can also just get a job at 18.**

## Examples of qualifications available at the different levels

Qualification Level	Academic qualifications	Vocational qualifications (general & specific)	Apprenticeships (work combined with training & a qualification)
<b>Level 8</b>	PhD	Diploma	-
<b>Level 7</b>	Masters Degree	Diploma	Master's Degree Apprenticeship
<b>Level 6</b>	Bachelors Degree	Diploma	Degree Apprenticeship
<b>Level 5</b>	Degree – yr 2	-HND (Higher National Diploma) -Foundation Degree -Level 5 Diploma	Higher Apprenticeship
<b>Level 4</b>	Degree – yr 1	HNC (Higher National Certificate)	Higher Apprenticeship
<b>Level 3</b>	-A levels -IB (International Baccalaureate) -T Levels	-Extended Certificate -Diploma -Extended Diploma -V Levels (new from 2027)	Advanced Apprenticeship
<b>Level 2</b>	GCSEs (4-5 subjects at grades 4-9 inc. English & Maths)	Level 2 Diploma (eg BTEC, City & Guilds)	Intermediate Apprenticeship
<b>Level 1</b>	GCSE (some grades 1-3)	Level 1 Diploma (eg BTEC, City & Guilds)	Traineeship (preparation for apprenticeship)
<b>Entry level</b>	Working towards GCSE Entry Level Certificate	-	-

NB After GCSEs it is only possible to start courses and training up to Level 3. In order to take any qualifications at Level 4 or higher you will normally need to be at least 18 and have a Level 3 qualification.

## What do you need to know about qualifications?

- It is a good idea to aim to hold at least a Level 2 or 3 qualification before considering getting a job
- You can gain qualifications at any age and in lots of different ways – e.g. full-time, part-time, online learning, in the workplace

## Apprenticeship

- Generally 4 days working, 1 day at college per week
- Earn a wage and also gain a qualification at the same time
- Treated as a regular employee
- Real job with real responsibilities
- Not the easier option vs college! – you need to find and apply for your own job which can be tough

## Full-time Academic Courses

- Usually have a lot of knowledge-based content
- Rely mostly on final exams and require a lot of reading and research
- Normally choose more than one subject
- They are offered in traditional subjects that you might already have taken in school, e.g. Geography, French, English Literature

## Level 3 - A levels

- Study 3 subjects (sometimes 4 – e.g. if you take Maths and Further Maths) over two years
- Most subjects are assessed by exams at the end of two years
- At some colleges you can combine A levels with certain Level 3 Diplomas
- A levels can prepare you for the type of academic study you can expect at university if this is your preferred pathway
- You can start employment or apply for an Apprenticeship after A Levels

### **Level 3 - International Baccalaureate (IB)**

- You choose 6 subjects - 3 at "Standard" level and 3 at "Higher" level
- You also study Theory of Knowledge, write an Extended Essay and carry out a Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) project
- Subjects are examined by a **mixture of coursework and exams**
- The IB is a **challenging 2-year course** that is widely welcomed by universities and employers

### **Level 3 - T (Technical) Levels**

- Equivalent to 3 A levels, a T Level **focuses on vocational skills** and can help students into skilled employment, higher study or apprenticeships.
- T Level students spend 80% of the course in the classroom, learning the skills that employers need.
- Students spend the other 20% getting valuable work experience in the work place.
- T Levels are more suited to those who know what occupation they want to pursue.

### **Level 3 - V (Vocational) Levels**

- **New qualifications** from Sept 2027
- 1 V level = 1 A level
- Learning designed around **real jobs** and **practical skills** employers need
- **Able to mix** academic and vocational subjects (ie 1 x A level, 2 x V levels)
- Initial subjects available – education, finance, digital



## Vocational/technical/applied courses

- Typically more **practical and skills-based** than academic courses but can vary in the amount of written work required
- Designed to have a lot more coursework and **continual assessment** than academic courses so they are well suited to students who maybe find exams challenging
- Throughout the course you will have to hand work in on time as your regular assignment grades will count towards your final grades
- There may be some exams or tests as well
- Some of these courses will train you for a **specific career** e.g. chef, car mechanic, therefore a lot of your time will be spent learning practical skills
- Other courses are broad enough to prepare you for a number of careers e.g. a Diploma in Health and Social Care

## Levels 1, 2 and 3 Diplomas, certificates and awards

- “Vocational” = related to jobs. Vocational diplomas, certificates and awards available at **Levels 1, 2 & 3**
- All levels **welcomed by employers**. Level 3 diplomas are welcomed by universities

## Combination of Academic and Vocational qualifications

- At Level 3 Diplomas are equal in size to 1 A level (known as an Extended Certificate), 2 A levels (a Diploma) and 3 A levels (an Extended Diploma)
- It is possible to **combine more than one vocational course** or to combine some academic with vocational courses – e.g. A levels with Level 3 Diplomas or some IB courses with a Diploma
- Check with individual colleges for details

## What sixth forms and colleges can I choose from?

These are the local colleges that most SVC students apply to:

- Abbeygate Sixth Form, Bury St Edmunds
- Bishop Laney (linked to Ely College)
- Cambridge Academy of Science and Technology (CAST)
- Cambridge Maths School
- Cambridge Regional College (CRC)
- Chesterton College Sixth Form
- College of West Anglia at Milton
- College of West Anglia at Kings Lynn
- College of West Anglia at Wisbech
- Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge
- Impington International Sixth Form
- Long Road Sixth Form, Cambridge
- Oakes College, Cambridge (linked to Netherhall school)
- West Suffolk College, Bury St Edmunds



Students have also studied at specialist colleges ie Emil Dale Academy (drama), London Fashion Academy, British Racing School (equestrian). Study fees may apply at these types of colleges.

## What to consider when choosing a course and college

- Do you already know what first career you are interested in? If so, then find out routes into that career by visiting the **National Careers Service** website. In many cases there will be more than one way of entering a particular career <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/>
- What subjects do you **enjoy** at the moment and **are good at**, and do you want to continue with any of these?
- Do you know what **new subjects** are available?
- What are the **entry requirements** for the course(s) you are interested in? Will you get the grades needed?
- Do you think you will do better in coursework or exams? If you don't do well in exams then consider taking a diploma, certificate or award, instead of A levels or the IB
- Do you want a large or small college? Class sizes are bigger in larger colleges, so you might get **more individual help** in class in a smaller college
- **Transport** – how you will travel to different colleges? Is there any public transport or a college bus that goes from where you live? How long will it take to travel there?
- Will you get any financial help to travel to college? If you search for **Post-16 Education Transport, Cambridgeshire** or visit: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-learning/school-transport/post-16-education-transport> you will find a website to help you
- **Taster Days** – Some colleges offer taster days in the Yr10 summer term and Yr11 Autumn term. These allow you to go to specific subject lessons to see what it's like
- **Open Days and Evenings** – these are mostly in June/July and October/November. Your parents can accompany you. They allow you to have a good look round a college, find the courses you're interested in and ask all the questions you need to.



## How do I apply for courses and apprenticeships?

- We use an **online application system** known as **MyChoice16** to apply to colleges and sixth forms in Cambridgeshire. You will learn how to use this on a PSHE day in Year 11. This application will include a **Personal Statement** which gives information about yourself and why you are applying for a particular course. Most students apply for at least 2 colleges and you must list them in order of preference
- If you apply to colleges in other counties (e.g. West Suffolk College) then you will need to **apply direct** via their college website
- You can include your interest in **apprenticeships** on the online form as well. CRC, West Suffolk College and the College of West Anglia all advertise vacancies from employers on their websites:  
<https://www.camre.ac.uk/apprenticeships/apprenticeship-vacancies/>  
<https://www.wsc.ac.uk/find-a-course/apprenticeship-vacancies>  
<https://cwa.ac.uk/apprenticeships-vacancies>
- Use Gov website <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/> to find out more about apprenticeships and vacancies. Some of the bigger companies have closing dates as early as December of Year 11 but most relevant vacancies will start to appear around March/April of Year 11
- For apprenticeships, you can also look on Company websites to find details on their apprenticeships or school leaver training.

## What are employers looking for?

Whether you are looking to get an apprenticeship at 16 or you plan to start work at 18 or 21, you can be sure that all **employers are looking for certain skills**. Here are 10 of the most desirable employability skills:

1. Initiative and self-motivation
2. Organisation
3. Working under pressure and to deadlines
4. Adaptability
5. Communication and interpersonal
6. Teamwork
7. Negotiation
8. Valuing diversity and difference
9. Problem solving
10. Numeracy and IT

Awareness and familiarity of AI is becoming an essential skill in some industries.

There are plenty of clubs and societies you can join at Soham VC which can help you to **develop some of these skills**. Also think about joining teams and clubs outside of school and try to get some **work experience** in the school holidays or sign up for <https://www.springpod.com/virtual-work-experience>.



## Websites you might want to check out

- **Careers section** on the SVC website-  
<https://www.sohamvc.org/page/?title=Post+16+Careers&pid=1020>
- **Career ideas** - If you are looking for future career ideas you can take the Buzz Quiz <https://careerswales.gov.wales/buzzquiz> and find some suggestions that might suit you or get some guidance here: <https://www.ucas.com/further-education/find-career-ideas>
- **Job and career information** – National Careers Service  
<https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/explore-careers/>
- **Gain online work experience** in a wide variety of industries at Springpod <https://www.springpod.com/virtual-work-experience>
- **Local courses at age 16** - Look at the Post 16 options locally.  
[www.mychoice16.co.uk](http://www.mychoice16.co.uk)
- **Apprenticeship vacancies** - To look at current available apprenticeship opportunities  
<https://www.findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk/apprenticeshipsearch>
- **University courses at age 18+** – Research university courses and find out what the entry requirements are, to help you choose the right subjects now [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)
- **Choice of A levels** - To help you decide which A level subjects to choose if you want to get into a top UK university:  
<https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>
- **eClips** offers a wealth of impartial advice on education and employment choices <https://www.eclips-online.co.uk/index.php>  
Email [nhowe@sohamvc.org](mailto:nhowe@sohamvc.org) for password log in details
- **Labour market information** – We encourage you to understand more about local and national labour markets to help make informed decisions <https://icould.com/>

## What help and support is available?



More than you'll ever need!

- Online information about apprenticeships, colleges & courses, and careers
- Employer presentations in school
- 1-2-1 Careers advice
- Labour market information
- PSHE Days – college talks, personal statement support, mock interviews
- College taster days in June/July
- College open events
- Post 16 Evening in school (Autumn term)

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