**

Qualifications After Year 11 Explained

**Why Bother to Understand Qualifications?**It often surprises me how many students are not clear what qualifications they are studying. Understanding what you are working towards and what this means is very important to help you plan your next steps after college, help you feel in charge of your future and also to make sure you are on track to achieve your ambitions.

Studying the wrong combination can mean you don't have the right UCAS points to get to university, that you have not chosen the best studies for your career aspirations and also there might have been course combinations that better suit your study style - for example if you prefer to work practically then vocational subjects might suit you better. Read on to get the low down on what qualifications are all about and to feel confident about your choices!

**Qualifications After Year 11**Up till year 11 most of you will have studied GCSEs (which are level 2 qualifications) and some may also have studied BTECs (which at GCSE age are also level 2 qualifications). A few of you may also have studied some work related qualifications which may be certificates or awards which will likely be at level 1 or 2.

**Level Up!**One way of thinking about qualifications is the idea of 'level up' like in a computer game**!** If you have managed to get a range of level 2 qualifications by the end of year 11 (including maths and English GCSE) then you will be moving on to level 3 qualifications at college. If you have not, then it is likely you will either be studying level 2 qualifications for another year alongside maths and English if you have not passed them yet, or a combination of level 2 and level 3 qualifications.

**Apprenticeships and Vocational Subjects**If you are going on to do an apprenticeship or a vocational qualification at college (e.g. hairdressing, plumbing, catering) then you may still be working at level 2 even if you have achieved well in your GCSEs. This is because it is likely you haven't studied this subject before or at least not to a high enough level to go straight in at level 3. Don't worry about this, almost everyone will be in the same situation if they have come straight from year 11.

**The Qualifications**

**A Level and AS Levels** - A Levels usually take two years and AS Levels one year. They are academic qualifications that always include exams and sometimes coursework. They are always at level 3 standard. You will need to have gained 5 GCSEs grades A - C (some   
  
colleges want more) at school to move on to A Levels and if you have taken the subject at GCSE most colleges want you to have achieved a B to go on to study the same subject at A Level.

**BTECs** - As already mentioned BTECs can be studied at level 2 and 3 depending on your ability. They are slightly more vocational than A Levels as they are often more connected to work. They are often more coursework than exam based as well. At level 3 you can study the subsidiary diploma which is equivalent to one A Level, the diploma which is equivalent to two A Levels or the extended diploma which is equivalent to three A Levels.

**NVQs and other Vocational Subjects** - If you are studying a vocational subject or apprenticeship as mentioned above you may be studying a number of industry specific qualifications that will allow you to go on to work in that particular area.

**International Baccalaureate (IB)** - The IB is only offered at Varndean College locally. It is an internationally recognised qualification that is suitable for very academic students who don't want to limit themselves to three or four A Levels. Subjects are grouped into 6 and you choose three to study at a higher level and three at a lower level. You can find out more here [www.varndean.ac.uk/?q=i\_bacc](https://www.varndean.ac.uk/?q=i_bacc)

**How Many Subjects?**

Depending on the qualification. Normally you will study three A Levels (four if you are very able), or a BTEC diploma plus a subsidiary diploma or the extended diploma on it's own or a vocational course on its own.

**Mix and Match**

Some students may want to mix and match their qualifications. This is possible with A Levels and BTECs (although check with the college as some may not be able to offer the combination you want). If you are studying a vocational subject such as hairdressing - you can not also study A Levels or BTECs.  
Be aware some subjects can be studied at A Level and as a BTECs. e.g. health and social care, travel and tourism. How they are taught and examined will differ so check with the college to see which might work best for you.

**Remember**

- You can catch up! If you are only on a level 2 course and your friends are on level 3 if you work hard you will join them the following year.   
- Not all colleges offer the same subjects or qualifications.  
- If you have a university degree or job in mind check requirements at [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com) and <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/planning/jobfamily/Pages/default.aspx>  
- When you are completing your college application try and keep in mind what you have read here but most importantly put down the courses you are keen on. The college will advise you based on your predicted grades if they need to change anything.   
- If you are confused, want to talk through options and just want some help come and speak to your school Careers Advisor.