

## General qualifications

These are often one- or two-year academic study courses, with final exams at the end such as GCSEs or A Levels.

GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is an exam-based course, and covers a wide range of subjects. Your child is likely to take 'core' subjects, such as English, Maths and Science and their own choice of optional subjects – for example Geography, History or Art – in Years 10 and 11.

## Vocational and work-related qualifications

These include BTEC, OCR Nationals and Diplomas, where learners are assessed on the work they produce throughout the course. These qualifications offer a practical, hands-on approach to learning. They are available at different levels and are alternatives to GCSEs and A Levels for those who prefer a different approach to learning and assessment.

These vocational qualifications are becoming increasingly popular with schools and colleges, and suit a range of learning styles.

**NVQs** (National Vocational Qualifications) are designed to recognise your child's knowledge and skills in relation to a specific job. They cover different occupational areas, each one reflecting the abilities your child will need to get started in a specific career.

These are more likely to be offered by colleges than schools because they need to be assessed in the workplace by teachers or trainers who themselves have work experience in the right occupational area.

**OCR Nationals** are exam-free alternatives to GCSEs and A Levels that have an engaging and practical approach to learning and assessment. Students will be interested and engaged by OCR Nationals, particularly by the 'real work' style and the optional units available to study which will help them to develop skills used in the workplace.

Your son or daughter may choose to progress from Level 1 all the way through to Level 3, or simply use one or two levels as part of a planned career or education 'pathway'. And if they're looking for a place at college or university, OCR Nationals are recognised as broadly equivalent to GCSEs and A Levels.

**BTEC** (Business & Technician Education Council) is a work-related qualification, available in a wide range of subjects. The qualification offers a mix of theory and practical work, and can also include an element of work experience.

**BTEC Introductory** – This qualification is available at Level 1 and offers an entry into the industry sector and encourages the development of personal and work-related skills. The BTEC Introductory qualifications are suitable for any student aged 14 plus.

**BTEC Firsts** – Available at Level 2, there are currently over 60 BTEC First qualifications available, linked to industry sectors. The BTEC First is suitable for students aged pre-16, and can be taken alongside core GCSE subjects such as English, Maths and Science.

Here's how BTEC at Levels 1 and 2 compares with GCSE grades:

Level 1	BTEC Introductory Certificate = 2 GCSEs at D–E grades BTEC Introductory Diploma = 4 GCSEs at D–E grades
Level 2	BTEC First Certificate = 2 GCSEs at A*–C grades BTEC First Diploma = 4 GCSEs at A*–C grades

## Diplomas

These are new qualifications, introduced to recognise achievements at ages 14–19. They have been developed with employers, each one covering a broad vocational area. Diplomas give your child an opportunity to gain qualifications that are equivalent to GCSEs or A Levels, with a more practical approach to developing the skills they'll need for careers or advanced studies. They allow learners to show their knowledge, skills and understanding of a work-related environment.

We currently have students starting Diplomas in:

- Creative and Media
- Engineering
- Travel and Tourism

Diplomas, like Nationals, are recognised equivalents to GCSEs and A Levels.

Foundation Diploma = 5 GCSEs at Level 1 (D – G grade)

Higher Diploma = 7 GCSEs at Level 2 (A\* – C grade)

As part of a Diploma, your son or daughter will have to achieve functional skills qualifications (see below) – at Level 1 for a Level 1 Diploma, and at Level 2 for a Level 2 Diploma.

## Functional Skills

These new qualifications are being introduced to address employers' concerns about young people not knowing the essentials in English, Maths and ICT. Schools will start teaching functional skills from 2010. Functional skills qualifications offer your child the practical skills they'll need to get the most out of their education, future employment and everyday life. For example, they can learn how to give presentations using computer software, express ideas to work colleagues or potential employers, or use online banking.

## Entry Level

Entry Level qualifications offer the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and confidence in a wide range of subjects. Entry Level qualifications are available at three levels – Entry 1, 2 and 3. Subjects include ICT, Business, and Skills for Life. Learner's progress from one level to the next and Entry 3 is designed to prepare your child for related qualifications, such as GCSEs, NVQs and Diplomas. Entry Level qualifications are also widely recognised by employers, and can help your child find apprenticeships or jobs.