



Further education qualifications

Types of courses

- Courses and qualifications exist in practically every subject and at many different levels. Most will be new to you, even if the title seems familiar, the way a particular course is put together can be very different from what you are used to.
- The availability of courses varies. To get an idea of the variety on offer throughout London, take a look at www.mychoicelondon.co.uk. This website has prospectuses (from Schools/Colleges) which can provide information on what the courses involve.
- If you are hoping to take a mix of courses – for instance, combining a work-related qualification with an A level – you need to think about timetable clashes and how realistic your ideas are. On the Choice website you can see different possible progression routes which include a variety of qualifications.

Diplomas

- The Diploma combines academic study and practical elements, including work experience, and is available at 3 levels, Foundation, Higher and Advanced. More information on the Diplomas and the various levels is on www.direct.gov.uk/diplomas.
- Choose from one of a wide range of broad subject areas, Business, Administration and Finance; Construction and the Built Environment; Creative and Media; Engineering; Environmental and Land-based; Hair and Beauty Studies; Hospitality; Information Technology; Manufacturing and Product Design; Public Services; Retail Business; Society, Health and Development; Sport and Active Leisure; Travel and Tourism.
- Courses usually take 2 years and are assessed through a mix of exams and course work. All Diplomas include work-related Functional Skills (Maths, English and Science). To find out what is available in your particular borough speak to your school or Personal Adviser, or look at www.mychoicelondon.co.uk. If you want to see what jobs relate to the Diploma subjects go to www.connexions-direct.co.uk/jobs4u.

Vocational (work-related) courses

- Some vocational courses, such as NVQs, are designed to give you the specialist skills needed to do a particular job, such as motor mechanic. If you want to take an NVQ, you may need to already be in a relevant job/training position.
- Other vocational courses are broader. A BTEC National in business, for instance, could be useful for many occupations which require business skills and knowledge.
- Compared with GCSEs and A levels, vocational courses often have more projects and coursework which will count towards the final mark.

GCSEs/A levels

- The range of subjects covered by GCSEs and A levels has increased from the familiar traditional academic subjects such as History, Geography and Maths to applied subjects such as Engineering or Leisure and Tourism.
- GCSE re-take courses in English and Maths are sometimes available (depending on the timetable). For other subjects, check on www.mychoicelondon.co.uk.

GCSEs/A levels continued

- A levels are 2-year courses made up of AS level in the first year followed by A2 in the second. Each is worth 50% of the overall grade. Most students take 4 subjects in the first year and 3 in the second. Although they cover all the traditional academic subjects there are also applied subjects that relate more closely to areas of work. An optional extended project helps develop some of the wider skills demanded by higher education.

International Baccalaureate

- The International Baccalaureate (IB) is an alternative to A levels, and is accepted by universities worldwide. It is a full time, 2-year course in which you study 6 subjects (at 2 different levels) plus 3 further compulsory elements including an extended essay.

Course levels and entry requirements

- Most courses are allocated a level. The availability of levels depends on the course and the school or college.
- The typical minimum GCSE entry requirements for the various course levels are noted in the chart below. Equivalent entry qualifications may be acceptable.
- Some places, especially if they are popular, will ask for more than the minimum. You will often need specific subjects as well as grades.

Entry level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4 & above
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entry level certificates e.g. in traditional subjects (English, Maths, Science) and work related subjects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BTEC Introductory Diploma • NVQ level 1 • Foundation Diploma • GCSEs (D or below) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BTEC First Diploma • NVQ level 2 • Higher Diploma • GCSEs (A to C grades) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BTEC National Diploma • NVQ level 3 • Advanced Diploma • GCE AS and A levels • International Baccalaureate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundation Degree • HND (Higher National Diploma) • Degree
No minimum entry requirements	Usually GCSE study required for entry	Usually a minimum of 2 GCSEs at D	4 to 6 GCSEs A-Cs at GCSE	Level 3 qualifications

Does it matter what you study?

- You might need to take particular courses or subjects because of future plans. For instance, science-related higher education courses such as medicine often have strict entry requirements. Many other courses (such as psychology, law, media) do not.
- For work, employers are often more interested in your personal and social skills, IT ability and general aptitude rather than the exact courses you studied.
- You can find out which qualifications may be necessary or useful for the work areas you have in mind at www.connexions-direct.com/jobs4u.

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This information is available in alternative formats, call 020 7938 8080.

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