

nextsteps inlondon

Wellbeing & Exams Special



Next Steps in London
Careers Guide
Wellbeing and
Exams Special

Spring 2026



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Planning your future just got easier!



Feeling overwhelmed about your next steps? We've got you covered! The London Careers Hubs have created the Next Steps in London guide to help you navigate your career journey with confidence.

This easy-to-use guide offers everything you need to learn more about all the options open to you post-16.

There are a variety of progression pathways you can take to build your career. Different pathways suit different people and you can choose the best route to achieve your goals.

Foreword



The reason why London is the greatest city on Earth is simple: we never stop reinventing ourselves. Time and again, our diverse, dynamic capital has been built and rebuilt by talented, motivated young people with the courage and the confidence to change the world – people just like you.

As we enter exam season, I know that the future will be weighing heavily on your minds. This is a genuinely exciting moment: for all of you, and for London. But I know that alongside that sense of possibility and potential, this time of year can also bring apprehension, uncertainty and pressure. The decisions you make now will shape the paths you take in the years to come, and at times that can feel overwhelming.

I've promised to make London the greatest city in the world to grow up in by ensuring that every young Londoner has the tools to succeed. That's why I'm improving access to work and training opportunities for everyone and helping to create more than 150,000 good jobs by 2028. It's also why we've produced this guide, which is designed to help you make the right choices at this crucial moment in your lives.

On results day, you may need to navigate a different path to the one you'd expected. The tools in this guide will help you cope with the stress of the exam period and manage any anxiety about the future, allowing you to focus on the practical guidance provided to help you make your best next step. If you're a parent, educator, or trusted adult, these resources might also help you support the young people in your life.

No matter where you're from, in London, there's no end to the things you can achieve. The guide spotlights some of the many paths you could take into learning and work, including further education, higher education, apprenticeship pathways, and V Levels. The opportunities are endless.

Whatever the future brings, just remember that you have options and when you need it, help will be there for you to find your way. Always believe in yourself – London is backing and rooting for you.

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London

Welcome

Hey, my name is JULIET.

I'm a 22-year-old independent artist who grew up in South East London, but I've been in North Norfolk for the past 10 years. I have been self-employed now for three years, pursuing a career as a music artist, while also working in events as an artist liaison.

I'm the presenter of the Future Radio morning show, as well as 'New Noise', a monthly grassroots music showcase. I've also taught songwriting workshops for the past three years. I write in all genres from spoken word to rap, R&B to House and Garage.

I'm somebody that feels very deeply in this world and I'm always trying to keep on top of my own wellbeing. The main things that have really helped me over the years is having a private notebook, and when I wake up, writing anything that is troubling me in my mind. This allows me to clear out all the stuff that is fogging my brain and focus on the day ahead. Not only have I found that it helps my creativity, but it also makes me feel more organised.

Remember, no dream is too big, and anything is achievable. Don't let somebody who is threatened by your big energy in this world dull your light.

My second piece of advice is to not worry about the finished product and instead try to enjoy the creative process. Stop aiming for perfection and just enjoy being in the now. It can be easy as a creative person to sometimes forget why you were originally doing it in the first place. I found when I stopped worrying about the end product and just enjoyed the making instead, it all felt so much easier.

JULIET - Access Creative College alumni



Access Creative College | The UK's Industry-led creative college



nextsteps inlondon

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About

We're pleased to present Next Steps in London: Wellbeing & Exams - a collaborative publication from the four London Careers Hubs.

This resource is designed to support young people through the emotional highs and lows of exam season: before, during, and after results day.

We know this time can feel intense and uncertain. We believe every young person deserves access to tools that support wellbeing, build resilience, and help them make informed choices about what comes next.

Visit our hub pages for more information of the work we do :



Central London
Careers Hub



East London
Careers Hub



South London
Careers Hub



West London
Careers Hub

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What's inside?

This guide provides practical strategies, relatable stories, and links to trusted support services. You don't need to read it in order - dip in, skip around, and use what feels helpful today!

Whether you are a young person, parent or carer, or an educator, this magazine aims to offer clear, supportive and hopeful guidance. Together, let's help every young Londoner feel seen, supported, and ready for their next step.

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This magazine is designed to support your wellbeing and offer helpful tips, but it is not a therapeutic intervention or a substitute for professional help. If you are in crisis or need urgent support, please reach out to trusted services:

Mind: We're Mind, the mental health charity | Mind

Shout: Text SHOUT to 85258 for free, 24/7 support Get help - free, 24/7, confidential mental health text support service | Shout 85258

Young Minds: YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | YoungMinds

In an emergency, call **999**.



Understanding exam stress

Exam stress is a mix of thoughts, feelings, and physical reactions that can happen when you're preparing for exams, waiting for results, or thinking about what comes next. It's completely normal and lots of people experience it.

You might feel:



Worried about failing or not doing well



Pressured by school, family, or yourself



Tired, tense, or unable to concentrate



Nervous, panicky, or even physically unwell

These feelings happen because exams can feel like a big deal. But stress doesn't mean you're weak- it means your body and brain are reacting to something important.

The good news? There are ways to manage exam stress. You can learn to calm your thoughts, take care of your body, and ask for help when you need it. Our brains all work differently and that's ok! The tips in this magazine can help you manage stress in a way that suits you.

Voices from exam season

Y11 students from Addey & Stanhope School in Lewisham share their feelings during exam season.



**ADDEY
& STANHOPE
SCHOOL**

"I feel claustrophobic, overwhelmed by the workload, and smothered by options."

"I feel stressed. I have many subjects to revise, but I still want to enjoy my daily life and not fall off track."

"Nervous, stressed, scared, and believing that you cannot do it - all of these feelings and more."

"It's normal to feel nervous, but don't come unprepared."

Managing anxiety with mindfulness

Feeling worried about exams or results? You're not alone. There are things you can do to feel more in control.

When we're stressed, our brains can jump to "what if" thoughts or past mistakes. That can make us feel stuck and anxious.

One way that can help is mindfulness. It means being in the present moment, like focusing on your breathing or seeing what is around you. This can help reduce worries about what might happen later.

It's a skill you can practice and it really can make a difference.

How does it work?



It interrupts negative thought loops by focusing on breath, body, or surroundings



Reduces physical symptoms of stress like racing heart or shallow breathing



Improves emotional regulation, helping you respond calmly instead of reacting with panic

You are not alone, and it is okay to ask for help.

Below are some strategies you can try. Use what works best for you. There is no one-size fits all approach.

Breathe

Try this: breathe in for 4 seconds, hold for 4, breathe out for 4. Repeat a few times. It can help to calm your nervous system and slow racing thoughts.

Break it down

Big tasks can feel overwhelming. Break revision or decisions into small steps. Use a checklist or planner to stay focused.

Challenge your thoughts

Ask yourself "Is this thought true?" "What would I say to a friend feeling this way?" This helps you reframe negative thinking.

Move your body

Even a short walk, dancing to your favourite music, or stretching can release tension, clear your mind and boost your mood.

Talk to someone

You don't have to go through it alone. Talk to a friend, parent, teacher or support services. You can find a list of resources and places to find support in the back of this guide.



Do you know some strategies that you have used before and have helped?

Write them down to remind yourself of what works and what you think you might try.



Sleep well ^{z z z} What really helps?

Getting enough sleep is one of the most powerful ways to manage stress and feel better during the exam season. But when you are anxious or overwhelmed, sleep can be hard to come by. That's where sleep hygiene comes in - simple habits that help your body and brain wind down.

Why sleep matters

- Helps your brain focus and remember things
- Improves your mood and energy
- Reduces anxiety and stress
- Supports physical health and immune system

Tips for better sleep



Stick to a routine

Go to bed and wake up at the same time - even at weekends!



Limit screen time before bed

Try switching off phones and tablets at least 30 minutes before



Create a calm space

Keep your room cool, quiet and dark. Use soft lighting or calming music if it helps.



Avoid caffeine late in the day

Energy drinks, tea, and coffee can keep you wired when you want to wind down

Don't stress if sleep doesn't come right away.

If you are struggling to fall asleep, try a calming activity like listening to gentle music, doing a breathing exercise, or reading something light. Staying relaxed is more helpful than worrying about the time.

How I prepared for exams and looked after myself

Eesa in Year 12 shares her experience

What helped you get motivated to start preparing for your exams?

What helped motivate me to prepare for my exams was the idea that this was the first major step in getting me to a Russell Group university. That would only be possible if I put in the work to get the grades that both the school and I wanted me to achieve.

Did you set goals for yourself? How did you decide what was realistic?

I did set goals for myself. I really wanted a 9 at least in history or at least match my mock results. I knew it would be unrealistic to get a 9 in everything. If I dedicated the same intensity across all of my subjects, I would burn out and not get what I wanted.

Did you follow a daily routine? What did it look like?

Yes, I did. I would come home, shower and eat, then I'd get to studying. I'd study in 90-minute intervals and then take a 10-minute break then repeat until approximately 9pm, then I'd watch an episode of a show with my parents, then go to sleep so I could get up early to get in a final bit of revision before my exam.

What did you do when you felt overwhelmed or anxious?

I'd stop revising a little bit earlier and read for pleasure. If it was on a weekend/during half term, I'd take myself into London and walk around Picadilly and the parks to clear my head.

"You should start revising at least by April 1st because it means you'll get through content quicker. Going at a sensible pace means you can do exam practice more quickly."

Were there any activities or habits that helped you stay calm or focused?

Yes, I'd have my signed Taylor Swift CD in front of me as a reminder of what success can look like if one works hard.

Who supported you during exam season (friends, family, teachers etc)?

My parents were great at leaving me alone to study and made sure I took breaks. My teachers always helped me when I needed it, but it was my Principal and my great-aunt who always ensured I was in a good head-space and provided a comforting solution to stress when I needed it.

What kept you going when things felt tough?

I knew I was going to my favourite macaroon shop (Ladurée) after my last exam. I wanted to go there feeling good about how I performed throughout the entire exam season.

What advice would you give to someone preparing for exams next year?

You should start revising at least by April 1st because it means you'll get through content quicker. Going at a sensible pace means you can do exam practice more quickly. A major problem lots of people have is knowing how to answer exam questions, so if you're confident in that as well as the content, you will be fine.



Harris Academy
Merton

Routine planner



During exam season, even a simple routine can help you feel more in control, reduce stress and boost your confidence. When life feels unpredictable, having a daily rhythm gives your brain a sense of safety and stability.

Why routine helps

- Reduces anxiety by adding predictability
- Improves focus by building helpful, repeatable habits
- Supports your sleep and energy, so you can think more clearly
- Builds resilience by helping you manage time and emotions

Tips for building a routine

- Start with the basics: sleep, meals and planned study time
- Include regular breaks: short pauses help your brain recharge
- Add something positive: a walk, music, creativity, or time with people you enjoy
- Keep it flexible: routines should support you, not add pressure

Tiny Habit Builders

When completing your 'Weekly Rhythm Template' here are some examples of tiny habit builders you could include. Pick from each category what works best for you each day!

Body

- Drink water
- Stretch/move for 5 minutes
- Get outside for 5 minutes
- Aim for a consistent sleep/wake time

Brain

- Review notes
- Organise materials
- Do one small task
- Read something

Break

- Music
- Snack
- Quiet moment
- Phone break (with timer)
- Breathing or grounding tool

Boost

- A hobby (with timer)
- Creativity (draw, doodle, write)
- Talk to a friend
- Time with family/friends/pets
- Watch or listen to something enjoyable

Weekly Rhythm Template

My weekly focus (optional) :

Day	Study focus/goal	Break Ideas	Positive Activity	Choose a tiny habit builder	Notes/Adjustments
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

End of Week Check Out

This week I ...

Something that helped me this week ...

Breathe!

When stress builds up, your body can go into 'fight, flight, or freeze' mode - even if the challenge is an exam paper or something else that feels overwhelming. Breathing exercises can help calm your body and mind. These techniques are based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), which shows how thoughts, feelings, and actions are connected. Breathing is a simple way to interrupt the stress cycle and feel more in control.

Why breathing helps:

- Slows your heart rate and relaxes your body
- Helps you think more clearly and focus
- Reduces anxiety and panic symptoms
- Builds emotional resilience over time

Breathing

1. Inhale for 4 seconds
2. Hold for 4 seconds
3. Exhale for 4 seconds
4. Hold for 4 seconds
Repeat for 1–2 minutes. Imagine drawing a box with each breath. (If holding your breath feels uncomfortable, skip that step.)

4-7-8 Breathing

1. Inhale through your nose for 4 seconds
2. Hold for 7 seconds
3. Exhale slowly through your mouth for 8 seconds - Repeat 3–4 times.



TIP: Practice regularly - not just when feeling stressed. The more you train your body to relax, the easier it becomes to stay calm during exams or other challenges.

(If you have breathing difficulties, adjust timings or consult a health professional.)



Grounding techniques

When emotions feel tense, grounding techniques can help you to feel calmer and more present. These simple strategies are often used in wellbeing support to ease anxiety, panic and overwhelm.

Grounding works by gently shifting your attention away from racing thoughts and strong emotions. Think of it as giving your mind a brief pause so you can feel more steady and in control. It's like pressing a mental reset button. **Try these techniques:**

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Use your senses to reconnect with the present:

- 5 things you can **see**
- 4 things you can **touch**
- 3 things you can **hear**
- 2 things you can **smell**
- 1 thing you can **taste**

2. Name It to Tame It

Say out loud what you're feeling: "I'm nervous, and that's okay." Naming emotions helps reduce their intensity.

3. Cold Water Reset

Splash cold water on your face or hold something cool. This activates your nervous system and helps calm your body.

4. Grounding Object

Keep a small item in your pocket (stone, fidget, fabric) and focus on its texture when you feel overwhelmed.

Why It Works

Grounding techniques help interrupt the fight-or-flight response, which is your body's automatic reaction to stress. When you feel anxious or overwhelmed, your brain can act like there's danger, even if it's just results day. Grounding brings your attention back to the present moment, helping you feel safer and more in control.



What if....

Results day can bring a mix of emotions - excitement, nerves, relief, and sometimes disappointment. Whatever happens, you are so much more than grades alone.

Here are some "What if...?" scenarios to help you feel prepared and supported.

What if I don't get the grades I hoped for?

- Take a breath. It's okay to feel upset. You've worked hard, and that matters.
- Talk to someone you trust (teacher, careers adviser, parent/carer). You don't have to figure it out alone.
- Look at your options: resits, different courses, appeals, or other pathways can still lead to success.
- Remember: one day doesn't define you. Many people take unexpected routes and thrive.

What if I do better than expected?

- Celebrate - you've earned it.
- Review your plan: is your original pathway still the best fit for you?
- Speak to your school/college about next steps so you can make an informed choice.

What if I feel overwhelmed or anxious?

- Try one calming tool: breathing, grounding, or a quick reset (even 30 seconds helps).
- Take a short break: step outside, sip water, listen to music, or message a friend.
- Reach out: support is available through school, family, and helplines. (You'll find support resources towards the back of this magazine.)

What if I don't know what to do next?

- That's okay. Lots of people feel this way.
- Start small: what do you enjoy? what matters most to you right now?
- Keep reading: this magazine has options, ideas, and support to help you choose your next step.

If you can only do one thing:
Pause + breathe
+ talk to someone.
You don't have to do this alone.

Your future isn't written in your results, it's shaped by your courage, your choices, and your next steps.

Further Education after GCSEs

Results day can feel overwhelming. Whether your grades are exactly what you hoped for or not, it's important to remember that GCSE results are just one step on a much longer journey.

For many young people, going on to college or sixth form (together called Further Education) offers flexible and practical pathways to build skills and confidence, gain qualifications and move towards a future career.

Your grades don't define your future!

Further Education is an option for all students, whatever your results look like. There is a course for everyone, no matter your starting point.

FE includes a wide range of choices such as A Levels, T Levels, BTECs, vocational qualifications and resit GCSE programmes. Most of the vocational routes can suit different learning styles, allowing students to gain skills for the workplace with hands-on, practical lessons and industry placements.

FE colleges can be especially helpful if you didn't achieve the grades you expected. They give you the chance to meet new people, explore new interests and think about a different career path.

Choosing the right next step is about finding what works for you.

Talk to teachers, careers advisers and family members, attend open days, and explore college and training provider websites.

Whatever your results, FE can provide a positive, supportive route forward after GCSEs.

Insight shared by
nclondon.ac.uk



Going on to Higher Education

Higher education offers a wide range of benefits and opportunities. The most common reasons people choose it are better career prospects and the potential for a higher income after graduation. But it's not only about your career; life experience plays a big role too. This time can be extremely formative in helping you become the person you want to be.

Deciding what you want to study is a big step, and you have plenty of options. A common misconception is that choosing a course means committing to a single career path. This is not necessarily true; many roles are open to a wide range of higher qualifications, and your choices now will not lock you into one profession forever. While some careers, such as healthcare or law, require specific qualifications, most jobs are far more flexible.

Higher education can look very different depending on what you want from it. There are options to suit your preferred learning style, from course content and modules to placements and hands-on experience. No two courses are exactly the same, so think about what matters to you, begin researching your options, and compare them to find the best fit.

The UCAS Hub is one of the best places to start. It has many features to guide you through your options. You can search thousands of courses and learn about career prospects. Remember, the earlier you start, the more time you will have to make informed choices that suit you.

See what your options are

Feeling uncertain about your future or what to do next? Explore your options to help you find the route that suits you best.

Discover Careers, Apprenticeships And University With UCAS



Not just a job

How apprenticeships can shape your future

If you're looking for a way to earn while you learn, apprenticeships could be the perfect choice. They combine real work experience with training and qualifications, giving you a head start in your career.

Apprenticeships have been designed by industry experts to ensure that learners are equipped with the essential skills that employers are looking for. There are over 800 apprenticeship standards available in England which means every industry can now be accessed via apprenticeships. From engineering, to finance, law, construction, public service, and creative industries to name just a few, there is a strong chance that your career aspiration could be achieved through an apprenticeship!

In addition to getting paid to do a job you love, you will also spend 20% of your programme time studying, either at an FE College, an Independent Training Provider, or a university, depending on the level of apprenticeship you are completing. Apprenticeship levels include Foundation (8 months), Intermediate (11-18 months), Advanced (usually 2 years), Higher (2 to 4 years), and Degree (3-6 years). You can start Foundation, Intermediate, and Advanced apprenticeships from age 16, and Higher and Degree apprenticeships from age 18.

You should apply for apprenticeships throughout the school year prior to the year you would like to start (year 11 or 13) and there are lots of places to find vacancies!

If you would like to know more about apprenticeships and find live vacancies, please do visit the below sites!

Amazing Apprenticeships: [Amazing Apprenticeships | Explore Technical Education & Apprenticeship Opportunities](#)

Skills England: [Apprenticeship search / Skills England](#)

Gov.uk Apprenticeships: [Find an apprenticeship - GOV.UK](#)

UCAS Apprenticeships: [Apprenticeships | Learn About Apprenticeships And Find The Right One For You](#)

London Apprenticeship Providers: Check local councils and college websites for vacancies.

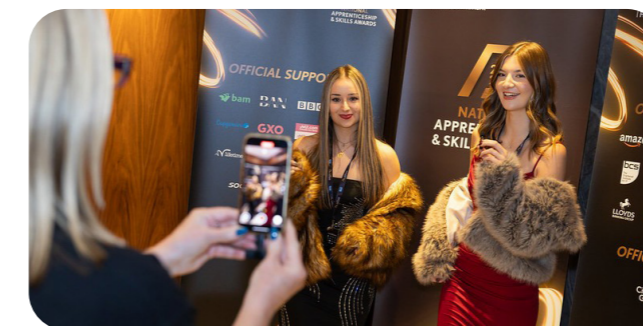
[Where Can I Study - Connecting you to Education](#)

Considering an Apprenticeship?

Exam season can feel overwhelming, full of pressure and uncertainty. But it doesn't have to decide your future. Amber and Patrisia, now Digital Marketing Apprentices at the **London Apprenticeship Ambassador Network**, were once in the same position, waiting for results and unsure of what came next...

Amber's journey: Receiving my GCSE results was nerve-racking after months of revision and pressure building to that one day. With a strong support system around me, the relief of opening my results was huge, and I was proud to have passed everything, doing better than expected. I went on to study Music Performance and Production at college for two years, where I discovered my interest in Marketing. Although I received university offers to study marketing, I chose to defer and work full time instead. I spent two years in healthcare, which helped me realise it wasn't the right path for me. Knowing my passion was marketing, I explored apprenticeships and loved the idea of earning while learning. This led me to secure a marketing apprenticeship at LAAN, which I'm now nearly two years into and wouldn't change for the world. At the LAAN, we promote apprenticeships across London and support students who are in the same position we once were, helping them find a path that works for them.

My advice to anyone awaiting results is to stay optimistic, explore different paths, and remember your results don't define your future, hard work always pays off.



Patrisia's journey: As someone who has high expectations of themselves, I was under lots of pressure, I feared self-disappointment as I'd revised lots. Fortunately, I did better than what was predicted for me! Business stood out to me as I enjoyed revising it and becoming more knowledgeable in the subject. So, after some research, I decided to do a T Level in Admin & Leadership, as I knew it came with work experience, and how valuable that was. Through work experience I found my love for marketing and decided an apprenticeship in marketing is the route I should go on. I knew an apprenticeship was for me as my boyfriend started one after school; hearing all about it mixed with some research, it convinced me instantly! It wasn't mentally or physically easy - with applying for over a year - I finally secured my Marketing Executive apprenticeship at the LAAN, where I use my personal experience to help others with advice, and discover their potential through apprenticeships!

My advice for students on results day is be prepared and don't consume yourselves. Do some research for different pathways you could take, and don't overwhelm yourself with stress, grades aren't as big of a deal as you think!



Apprenticeship Ambassador Network

The Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (AAN) is a national network of apprentices and employers who share real experiences to raise awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships.

[Apprenticeship ambassador network](#)

FOUR PATHWAYS TO YOUR FUTURE

What This Means for 16-19 Learners (2025-2028)

- The government is simplifying qualifications so that young people choose between **Academic, Technical, and Work-Based routes**.
- **By 2028, A Levels, T Levels, Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs), and Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs)** will be the main Level 3 options.
- Many older **BTEC and Vocational Technical Qualifications (VTQ) courses** will be replaced or restructured to align with these new pathways.
- Schools and colleges will help learners identify the most suitable route based on strengths, career goals, and learning style.

PATHWAY	WHAT OPTIONS WILL BE AVAILABLE?			LEVEL	ENTRY REQUIREMENTS	IDEAL IF YOU...	LEADS TO...	KEY MESSAGE
ACADEMIC PATHWAY (A Levels & AAQ)	1 3 x A Levels	2 2 x A Levels + 1 small AAQ (Various combinations available)	3 1 x large AAQ	Level 3	Usually 5 x GCSEs at grade 4-9 , including English and maths . Some subjects need higher grades in specific areas.	Enjoy academic learning, exams, and independent study.	University, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, and professional careers.	The traditional route for learners aiming for higher education.
TECHNICAL PATHWAY (T Levels, TOQs & Occupational Diplomas)	1 T-Levels	2 Technical Occupational Qualifications (TOQs)	3 Occupational Entry Diplomas	Level 2 to Level 3	Usually 4-5 GCSEs at grade 4-9 , including English and maths .	Want to combine classroom learning with industry experience and develop specialist technical skills.	Skilled employment, Higher and Degree Apprenticeships, or technical degrees.	The new specialist route for learners focused on technical careers.
VOCATIONAL PATHWAY (VTQs & BTECs – during the transition)	1 VTQs still available in some areas	2 BTECs and Cambridge Technicals (until phased out)	3 V-Levels (First subjects to be launched Sept 2026)	Level 1 to Level 3	Level 1-2 courses: open to learners with fewer GCSEs grades 1-4 Level 3 courses: usually 4-5 GCSEs at grade 4-9	Prefer practical, hands-on projects and continuous assessment.	Further study, Apprenticeships, or direct employment in skilled trades, health, business, and creative industries.	A practical skills-based route being streamlined as new technical qualifications replace some courses.
WORK-BASED PATHWAY (Apprenticeships & Supported Internships)	1 Apprenticeships (Intermediate to Advanced)	2 Supported Internships (for learners with SEND)	3 Work Experience or Industry Placements as part of a Study Programme	Entry Level to Level 3	Vary by employer; typically GCSE English and maths (grade 4+) for Level 3+ .	Ready to earn while you learn and gain real work experience.	Employment, Higher or Degree Apprenticeships.	Learn on the job, develop skills, and get paid while you train.

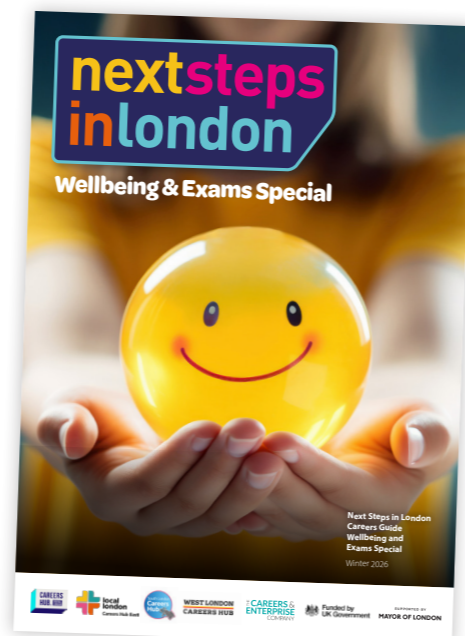
Speak to a Careers Adviser to help you explore the options in more detail.

Getting ready for results day

Use this planner to organise your thoughts and next steps

Results day can feel like a rollercoaster, but planning your next steps can help you feel more in control. This page will guide you to turn your story into an action plan.

Every successful person has faced setbacks. This is just one chapter in your journey and you're the author. **Write your next steps with confidence.**



Step 1: Tell your story

Start by writing down what happened and how you felt

- What were your expectations before results day?
- How did you feel when you saw this result?
- What matters most to you now?

Why this helps: Writing your story helps you process thoughts & feelings as your experience as part of a bigger journey!

Step 2: Reframe the challenge

Ask yourself:

- What can I learn from this?
- What strengths have I shown so far (e.g. persistence, adaptability)?
- How could this be an opportunity to explore something new?

Step 3: Set your goal

Think about where you want to be in six months or a year.

- Do you want to start college, an apprenticeship or university?
- What skills do you want to develop?
- What skills or qualifications will you need to get there?
- Who will help me get there: family, teachers, friends, career leader, others?



My Goal:

What is my desired next step:

Why do I want this:

What is my first step to make it happen:

When will I complete this first step by:

Who can help me:

When will I achieve it by:

Step 4: Break it down

Turn your goal into small, doable steps. Use the checklist below as a guide to help you write your goals and action plan. **Remember:** This checklist is a guide to support, you may not need to tick off each one!

- Research courses at FE colleges, sixth forms, universities or apprenticeship providers
- Compare your options: pros/cons, time commitment and costs
- Check entry requirements for each pathway
- Consider how each option matches your learning style
- Think about how each pathway connects to your future career goals
- Look for work experience or volunteering to strengthen applications
- Talk through your shortlist with a trusted adult
- Book an appointment with a careers adviser
- Update your CV or personal statement
- Attend a careers fair or virtual event to explore new pathways
- If relevant, call a clearing or support hotline for guidance

It's OK to feel this way

Results day can bring up lots of emotions. You might feel relief, disappointment, anger, numbness or anxiety. You might feel these all at once, on their own, or not at all. There is no "right" reaction. What you are feeling makes sense.

A positive mindset does not mean forcing yourself to feel happy. It means saying: "This is hard, but I can get through it."

Reframe the story

Your brain can turn one result into a painful story about who you are. Try swapping that story for something kinder and more accurate.

Instead of: "I failed", try:

"This didn't go how I wanted."

"I'm disappointed, but I can still move forward."

"This is one moment, not my whole future."

"I can learn from this or try a different path."

Why this helps: When you talk to yourself kindly, it's easier to feel settled and focused.

Challenge the thought

Strong emotions can make thoughts feel like facts, but they are not always the full picture.

Ask yourself:

"Is there another explanation?"

"What do I know for sure and what am I assuming?"

Try this reminder:

"What would I say to a friend in my situation?"

"Will this matter as much in a week/month/year?"

"My brain is giving me a scary thought. That doesn't mean it's a fact."

Focus on growth and what you can control

Grades can affect next steps, but they don't decide your worth or your whole future.

What matters next is:

- what you try
- what support you get
- what choices you make from here

Try this reframe:

"This result gives me information, not a label."

"My next step might be different than I expected and that's okay."

Try this next-step anchor:

"One small thing I can do today is: _____"

Tiny steps

If your brain is overloaded, try small steps:



- drink water
- slow your breathing for 30 seconds
- message someone safe: "I need support today"
- take a short walk / change rooms
- do one grounding technique from the previous page

Choose one affirmation

Pick one that feels believable for you:

"I can handle this moment."

"I am more than my results."

"This feeling will pass."

"I can take one step at a time."

"I don't have to figure everything out today."



Why this works

When you're stressed, your brain can go into threat mode (fight/flight/freeze), which makes thoughts more intense and more negative. Reframing and self-compassion help calm the threat response so you can access problem-solving again.

My apprenticeship in an art gallery

Meet Elina Smith, a Level 3 Cultural Learning and Participation Officer (CLPO) apprentice at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum, working with Warwick District Council.

Elina's path into the cultural sector has been unconventional. Before her apprenticeship, she earned a Foundation Diploma in Art & Design and a BA in Fine Art and Curating. Despite her academic background, she preferred an apprenticeship to gain practical experience. However, limited opportunities in galleries and museums at the time led her to choose university instead.

"Had the apprenticeship been an option post-school, I would have taken it," Elina reflects. "But six years ago, opportunities in the gallery and museum sector were few and far between."

After graduating, Elina faced a challenge familiar to many creative graduates: a competitive job market that prioritised hands-on experience. While searching for roles, she discovered the CLPO apprenticeship through the Arts Council England jobs board. What stood out was the opportunity to gain industry experience while earning a salary, something she felt had been missing from her earlier education.

Elina, part of the Collections and Engagement team at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum, is gaining valuable experience in supporting cultural projects and helping audiences connect with the gallery's collection. A highlight of her apprenticeship has been planning and delivering community engagement events.

"It's inspiring to be part of a movement that's breaking down barriers to arts participation and transforming galleries into community-led spaces."

"I love finding new and exciting ways to connect visitors with the collection," she says. "It's inspiring to be part of a movement that's breaking down barriers to arts participation and transforming galleries into community-led spaces."

For Elina, the apprenticeship has been transformative. Learning directly from industry professionals has given her insight into how cultural projects are developed from start to finish. From writing funding applications and building partnerships with local organisations to increasing audience engagement, the skills she's developed closely align with her career ambitions. "The learning modules link so closely with my day-to-day work," she explains. "They've given me a real toolbox that I'll carry forward into my career."

Elina is confident about her future, inspired by her apprenticeship to pursue engagement programs in cultural institutions, especially with local communities. As she wraps up her apprenticeship, she reflects on how the experience has exceeded her expectations, thanks to her supportive training provider and workplace. Her advice to those considering an apprenticeship is simple: "Go for it. Apprenticeships provide the confidence and experience needed to build a career in an industry you care about."



From setback to success

Meet Niwhar Amin

Results day was one of the toughest moments of my life. Opening my grades and realising they weren't what I had hoped for left me feeling like I had wasted my potential. I remember breaking the news to my parents and explaining that I didn't get the grades. It felt like everything I had imagined for my future had suddenly shifted.

However, Clearing turned out to be a turning point. I applied for the University of Roehampton. When my family and I visited the campus, the atmosphere, location, and environment all felt right. It gave me a sense of reassurance that this was somewhere I could rebuild my confidence and move forward. I decided that if I was given this second chance, I would make the most of it.

From the moment I started university, I committed myself fully. Within weeks, I was selected as the Programme Representative for Software Engineering, and later I became a Lab Assistant supporting first year students. These voluntary roles helped me develop strong communication and leadership skills, especially learning how to guide and manage other students while still being a student myself. It taught me responsibility, patience, and how to represent others professionally.

"From the moment I started university, I committed myself fully. Within weeks, I was selected as the Programme Representative for Software Engineering, and later I became a Lab Assistant supporting first year students."



One of the most meaningful experiences was being offered a research internship in China, where I worked on an AI Project predicting Type-2 Diabetes. It reminded me how far I had come from that difficult morning on results day.

If you're in this position in your life and haven't received the news you wanted, it's not over yet. Put in the extra work and stay consistent. With adaptation and time, you will get there.



Future-ready: The skills you'll need by 2035

The world of work is changing fast. New technology, like Artificial Intelligence (AI), new jobs and big global changes – such as climate change – mean that what employers will be looking for in the future is changing too.

At the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), we've carried out **research**, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, to explore what the job market might look like in 2035. What we've discovered is that there are six Essential Employment Skills (EES) that will be really important for young people to have.

The good news? You're probably already using many of them.

The six EES are:

- 1 Communication** – This is about sharing ideas clearly and understanding others. You use this when you explain your thoughts in class, message friends, create content online, or listen to someone else's point of view.
- 2 Collaboration** – Working well with others. Examples are working on group projects, team sports, gaming with others, or organising something with friends - all help you build this skill.
- 3 Creative thinking** – Coming up with new ideas or different ways to do things. You use this when designing something, writing music or stories, solving puzzles in games, or finding a new approach to coursework.
- 4 Information Literacy** – Knowing how to find information, check it's reliable, and using it properly. You do this when researching for a project, comparing websites, spotting fake news, and using AI tools wisely. All these count.
- 5 Organising, Planning and Prioritising** – Managing your time and deciding on what needs doing first. This is when you juggle your coursework, revision, part-time work, and your social life. All this is already helping you practice this skill.
- 6 Problem solving and decision making** – Working out what to do when something doesn't go to plan. Fixing a tech issue, sorting out a disagreement, or making choices about subjects, all build this skill.



These skills develop over time and with practice. Your school, college and everyday life are all helping you to build them - step by step.



NFER

National Foundation for Educational Research

By Julia Thompson from the National Foundation for Educational Research

Self-Management

Overcoming challenges and setbacks to achieve goals

Life may not always follow your plan. Things can shift without warning. Being *adaptable* means you can cope with these moments. You can adjust your thinking, your feelings and your actions.

The **Skills Builder Framework** describes adapting as learning from challenges and changing your approach when you need to. This includes noticing your emotions, managing your reactions and choosing new ways forward when things get tough.

Being able to adapt matters for your mental health in many ways.

Handle change without crumbling

Exam periods can feel intense. You might feel pressure from teachers, family or yourself. Adaptability helps you steady your mind in these moments. You pause, breathe and look at what you can control. This reduces panic and helps you stay focused.

Build confidence

Every exam challenge teaches you something. You learn how you best revise. You learn what helps you stay calm in the exam hall. You learn how you respond when the paper feels harder than expected. These lessons build confidence. You begin to trust that you can face future tests with more clarity and control.

Grow our resilience

You may not get the result you wanted. This can feel disappointing or unfair. Adaptability helps you recover. You reflect on what worked and what did not. You explore new revision strategies. You set fresh goals. Each step strengthens your resilience and helps you bounce back.

Better relationships

Exam stress can affect how you speak to others. It can make you short-tempered or withdrawn. Adaptability helps you adjust your communication. You explain how you feel. You listen to the feelings of others. You find calmer ways to handle tension. This supports healthier relationships during stressful times.



Reflective questions

- What does it mean to manage your reactions to challenges?
- Why is it important to try to remain calm?
- How can you help yourself to stay calm when facing a challenge?

Skills Builder helps you understand and develop important skills step by step. It shows you what you are already good at and how to build skills that will support you in school, work and everyday life.

www.skillsbuilder.uk/universal-framework



Skills Builder
UNIVERSAL
FRAMEWORK 2.0

From Challenge to Change

Results don't define you. There will always be opportunities and other options waiting for you to discover them, so think of your results as redirection.

Maya-Louise Bryan

Science Student at Harrow College
(part of Harrow, Richmond and Uxbridge
Colleges (HRUC))

On results day, I had a lot of different emotions: I was nervous, excited, and petrified. I remember feeling a lot of pressure. When I got my results, I was shocked because I failed quite a few subjects, and I felt as though my dreams were crushed.

The hardest part was definitely telling my family my results. I felt as though they would be disappointed in me. I also had the uncertainty that I wouldn't be able to pursue the plans I had for my future.

The first person I turned to was my sister who always encourages me and tells me that I will do great, even when I feel like I've done my worst. My teachers gave me guidance on how to move forward. I always go to people who have my best interests at heart, which make me feel less alone and more grounded.

I managed my stress by doing things that I really enjoyed: listening to music, reading my Bible, and hanging out with my friends. This helped release my anxiety and overthinking.

Doing some critical thinking helped me realise that it's not the end of the world. It made me feel more at peace with myself and gave me the mindset that I will still do great in life, so I looked for options.

"I've learned that life will come with obstacles, and you are going to have to face them, but you won't be alone, and you will not be the only one."



Harrow College is near my high school and my cousin went here. She told me that there were great opportunities. Further education has more career paths that I could choose from.

I saw this as an opportunity to resit my maths GCSE and still be able to do a science course. I immediately knew that it was what I wanted to study, as science has always been my favourite subject and it's something that I excel in.

What helped me change my perspective was meeting other people on my course and so I felt less behind because we are all working to achieve the same thing.

I've learned that life will come with obstacles, and you are going to have to face them, but you won't be alone, and you will not be the only one. I've definitely learnt about resilience and adaptability, and it taught me that there are multiple paths to success, not just one, so take your time and don't rush.

I now feel more optimistic about my future and have a clear idea and path of where I'm heading. I'm very excited about the opportunities ahead!



HRUC
HARROW, RICHMOND & UXBRIDGE COLLEGES

Resources to help you

Mental Health and Exam Stress

[Info on exam stress - for 11-18 year olds](#) | [Mind](#)

[Staying mentally healthy during exams](#) | [Resources](#) | [YoungMinds](#)

[Exam stress](#) | [Barnardo's](#)

Next Steps and Post-Results Support

[Navigating Exam Results: Free Guides for Students, Parents & Carers](#) | [Futures Advice](#)

[Get help with your exam results](#) | [National Careers Service](#)

[Where Can I Study-Connecting you to Education](#)

[Become an apprentice: How apprenticeships work - GOV.UK](#)

[Clearing and results day](#) | [UCAS](#)

[Alternatives To University](#) | [NGTU](#)

[Occupational Maps: Skills England](#)

[Career Advice Hub](#) | [Careormap](#)

[Exam results and Clearing](#) | [Discover Uni](#)

Support

[Chasing the Stigma - Hub of Hope](#)

Find mental health support near you

[Kooth](#)

Free, safe and anonymous online mental wellbeing community

[Shout](#)

Free, confidential and 24/7 mental health text service for crisis support. Text 85258.

[Young Minds](#)

Free, confidential support for young people and parents/carers

[Off the record](#)

Off the Record Youth Counselling

next steps in london

