

Aimhigher...achieve more

steps to higher education

The qualifications framework & routes to Higher Education

Levels
7–8

Postgraduate Level

Levels
4–6

Degree

HNC/HND
Foundation
Degree,
Diploma H.E.

NVQ
Level 4

▲
Level
3

A2 + AS

BTEC
National
Diploma

NVQ
Level 3

▲
Level
2

GCSEs
grade A–C

BTEC
First Diploma
or GNVQ
Intermediate

NVQ
Level 2

▲
Level
1

GCSEs
grade D–G

BTEC
Intro Diploma
or GNVQ
Foundation

NVQ
Level 1

▲imhigher...

‘A’ levels aren’t the only way into higher education!

There are numerous qualifications and learning paths, besides A levels, that can get you onto a degree course.

For example, NVQs, BTEC National Diplomas and part-time study are routes that you can go by, and there are also other higher education courses such as Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas & Certificates (HNDs & Cs), or Diplomas in Higher Education.

We know it can be confusing, but don’t let that put you off. There’s plenty of help to guide you through the process. This booklet illustrates just some of the different paths into HE that are open to you, so read on to find out more.

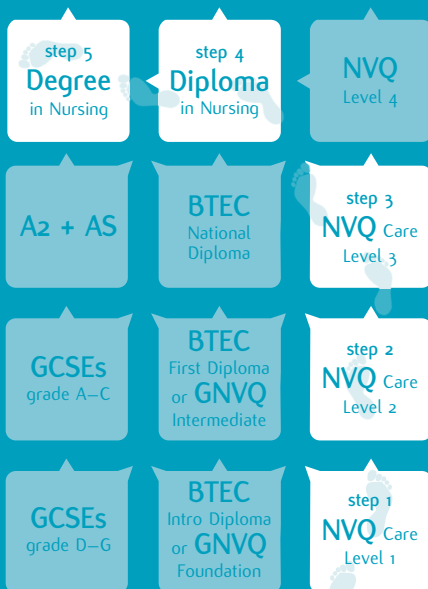
Information, advice & guidance for Higher Education

which way did they go?



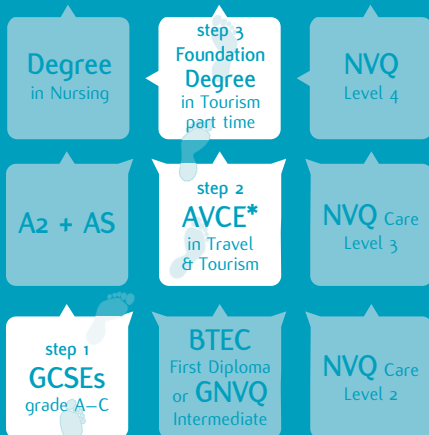
which way did Mark go?

Mark dropped out of school without taking any GCSEs. Eventually he got a part-time job as a care assistant and started taking his NVQ in Care. Once he'd got his NVQ Level 3, he was able to go to university to qualify as a nurse – and was given a National Health Service bursary while studying. But Mark didn't stop there. After qualifying, he continued studying part-time, taking the extra modules needed for a nursing degree – which increased his earning and promotion prospects even further.



which way did Natalie go?

Natalie knew she wanted to go to university, but felt A-levels weren't for her. She preferred a more vocational course linked with her interest in a career in travel. After working hard to get four 'C' grade GCSEs in Maths, English, Geography & French, Natalie was able to study at her own school for an AVCE* in Travel & Tourism. That led to her finding a job in a travel agency, which released her once a week to attend a part-time Foundation Degree in Tourism. So in the end Natalie got the qualification she needed, without having to go away to university.



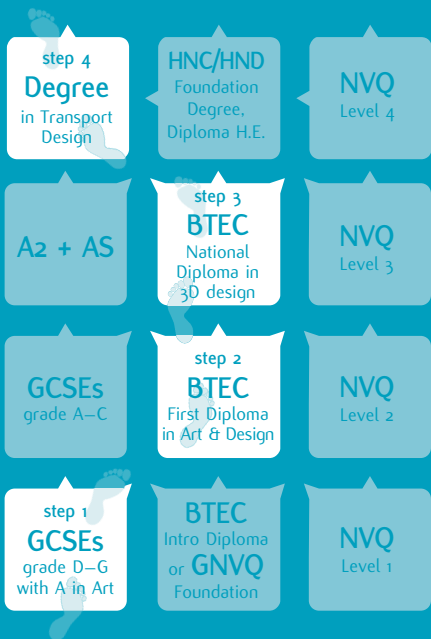
*From September 2005, AVCE or Vocational A Levels will be re-structured and brought into the A Level family. But there will still be the chance to study more vocationally-linked subjects than A Levels have traditionally offered.



which way did Stefan go?

Stefan didn't do very well in his GCSEs – except in Art, where he got an A*! His dyslexia wasn't diagnosed until very late in his school career, so he didn't get the additional support he needed. But his art portfolio showed his talent and he was accepted onto a BTEC First Diploma course in Art & Design at a nearby college, before progressing to the National Diploma in 3D Design. The modular course and variety of assessment methods suited Stefan.

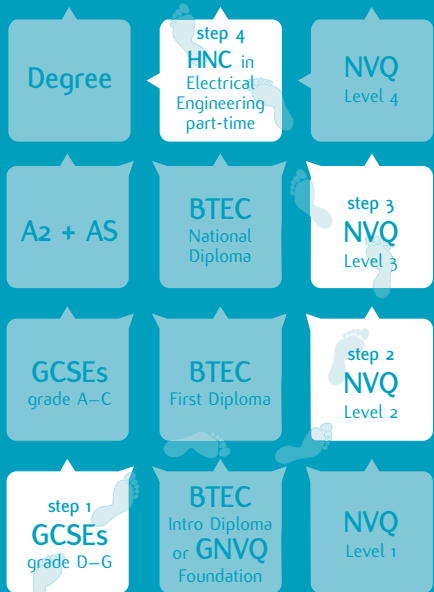
He did so well that he won a place at university on a very prestigious Transport Design degree course, despite not having the English & Maths GCSEs normally required. The university gave him some tests that demonstrated he had the level of ability required, so they were satisfied that he would cope with the course.





which way did Zoe go?

Zoe went into an electronics engineering apprenticeship straight after year 11. Through structured training she quickly gained her NVQ Level 3 and was keen to progress further. Knowing the business would need even more highly skilled staff in future, to keep pace with technological change, Zoe's employer sponsored her to take a part-time HNC in Electronics & Telecommunications. Zoe can choose to resume her studies at any time in the future – it would only take another two years to convert her qualification into a full honours degree. Who knows – she may get sponsored to do that as well!





going the right way?

All Level 3 qualifications can lead to higher education, as well as to Level 4 jobs. To help you pick the one that's right for you, it's important to understand the advantages and disadvantages of each




BTEC National Diploma



(National Award also sometimes available, which is equal to TWO A Levels, therefore easier to combine with another A Level, for instance, to widen options)



For

- 
- ❖ The modular structure and the wide range of assessment methods suit those with other than purely academic skills, and those who would prefer to build their qualification gradually.
 - ❖ The vocational focus suits those who are leaning towards a particular occupational area, AND those without a traditional academic background such as GCSEs.
 - ❖ In some non-technical fields, it is possible to 'switch' vocational areas and still progress. For example, you could switch from a BTEC First Diploma in Business to a BTEC National Diploma in Media.
- ❖ Also suits those who don't have the breadth of academic interest and/or ability to make A levels feasible.
 - ❖ They are well recognised as a progression route to HND/Cs and all relevant vocational degrees.

Against

- ❖ There are limits to the range of progression options. For instance, it's hard to move on to many traditional academic courses such as Maths, French or History without taking an extra A level.
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A–Levels



For

- A levels are a well-established pathway to higher education courses, recognised by all universities
- If you're interested in a range of subjects such as English AND History AND Economics, you can keep your options open
- From September 2005, A Levels linked to occupational areas will be available (a development from AVCEs or Vocational A Levels), which will let you test out a career interest while keeping your options open.

Against


- Sometimes students have difficulty finding enough different subjects in which they show both interest and ability.
- Despite recent changes, many A Levels still use a fairly narrow range of assessment methods, relying mainly on exams at the end of the course or module.



NVQs



For

- 
- The work-related nature of NVQs make them suitable for those who prefer applied study.
 - You can progress through the levels at your own pace from L1-L5.
 - “Earn while you learn” is an option that suits many people.

Against

- Acceptability for HE courses varies – in some cases a level 4 might be required rather than a level 3
- Progression is limited to relevant vocational courses

which way now?

If you're interested in following in the footsteps of Mark, Natalie, Zoe or Stefan, or you want to make your own path, you can find out how by talking to an adviser from your school/college or from Connexions. They're there to help you – so use them!

If you have a particular interest in a subject such as jewellery design or sports studies, and you want to locate your nearest provider – you'll find details of all the courses and training opportunities in Herefordshire & Worcestershire at:

www.connexions-hw.org.uk

Of course, the precise level and type of qualifications accepted for higher education does vary from one course, institution or career to another. For example, NVQ level 3 in Business Administration won't get you onto a Medicine Degree course! So do check out the specific requirements of any careers or courses that interest you.

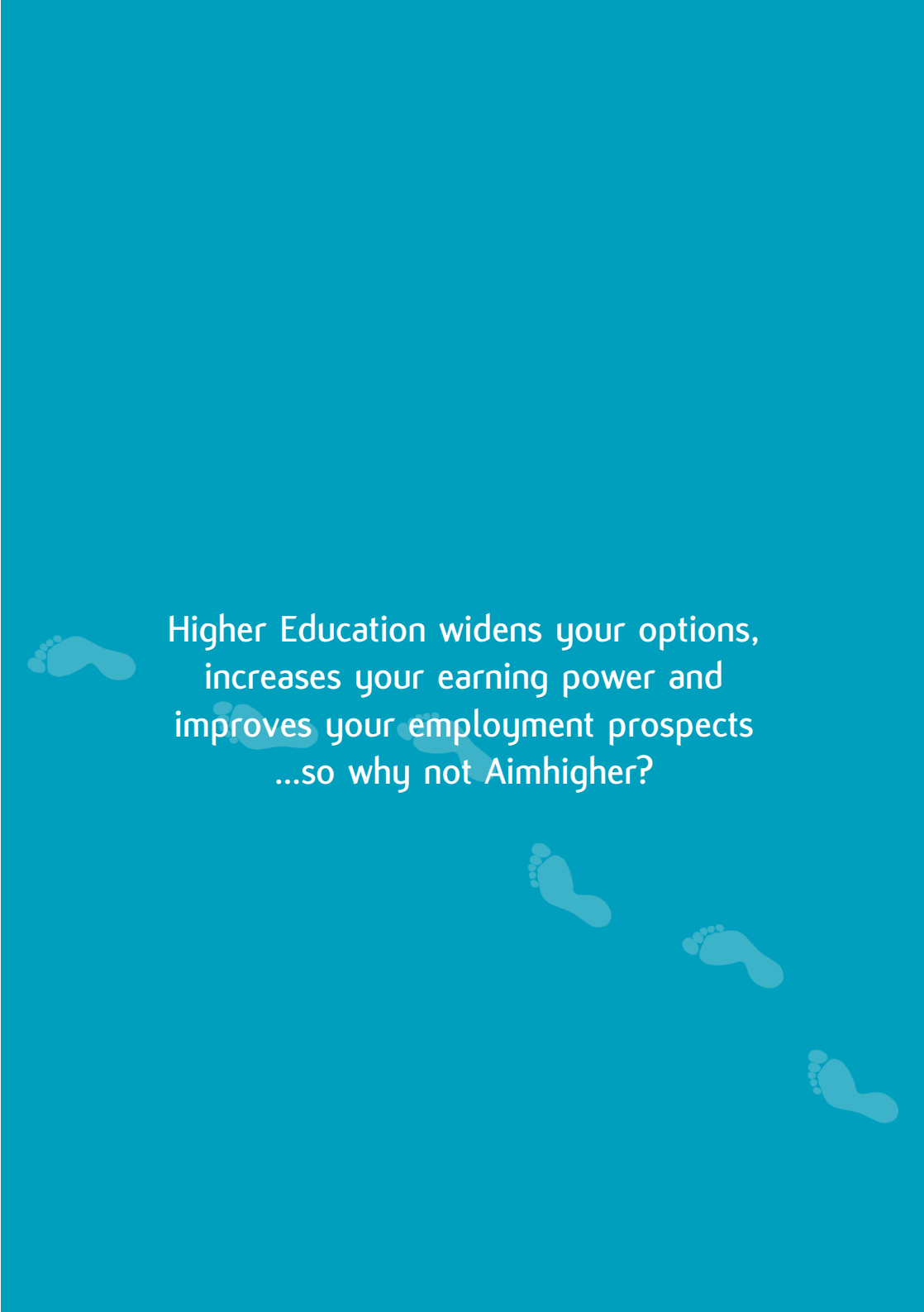
A useful site at www.ucas.com lists all full-time higher education courses in the UK and has links to the websites of the colleges and universities offering them. You can find out what courses are on offer, check out what qualifications are required and get contact details in case further enquiries are needed.

not convinced that higher education is for you?

You don't have to decide right now. You can apply to university whenever you like – some people are in their thirties and forties before deciding to take the plunge.

Normally you need a suitable level 3 qualification, but even without one, all is not lost – universities are often more flexible with older applicants who can bring valuable life and work experience in lieu of formal qualifications, and Access courses are available to help older people to qualify for HE.

If you look up www.aimhigher.ac.uk, it gives you answers to all your Higher Education questions and concerns.



Higher Education widens your options,
increases your earning power and
improves your employment prospects
...so why not Aimhigher?

Aimhigher...

*Information, advice & guidance
for Higher Education*

www.aimhigherwm.org

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