

# South Wilts Grammar School Sixth Form



## A Guide to applying for Higher Education (Part 1)

**2016 – 2017**

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Name:

Tutor Group:

# APPLYING FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

## 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### Introduction

This is a brief guide to applying for Higher Education. You will need to do your own research as well. Information, advice and guidance are available in school to assist you throughout the process.

Deciding to apply to university and to spend between 3 – 6 years studying is not a decision to be made lightly. It is however an exciting, challenging, social, opportunity-filled time that most people value throughout their lives. Not only will it develop your skills academically and vocationally, you will make new friends, you will learn to live independently and you will become involved in a large community that is a Higher Education Institution. You will also improve your job and earning prospects.

Most students who decide to go to University do so after completing their A Levels or after taking a gap year. However, provided you have the right qualifications, it is possible to apply at any stage later than this as those who are termed 'mature students' will confirm. There are also online and distance learning options if you can't or don't want to attend full-time. The Open University is the best known organisation within this sector.

We are committed to helping you choose the right course and the right university for you depending on what you want to study, how you want to study it and what you want to do after university. For some of you that will mean applying to highly selective universities and competitive courses: often known as research intensive universities. For others, it will mean applying for an equally competitive course at a university known for its quality of teaching in that field but not necessarily part of those groups. Ultimately it is about choosing the right course for **you** at the right institution.

Use resources such as

- [careercomp@nion](mailto:careercomp@nion) (now found under the careers section of the start menu – all programs-careers)
- The Complete University Guide
- The Times Good University Guide
- [www.bestcourse4me.com](http://www.bestcourse4me.com)
- [www.university.which.co.uk](http://www.university.which.co.uk)
- [www.push.co.uk](http://www.push.co.uk)
- [www.unistats.direct.gov.uk](http://www.unistats.direct.gov.uk)

to get a feel for the best universities for your subject. Remember, as with all statistics, take care when analysing them, but they do offer a start point.

Bear in mind, the more competitive and selective the university and course are, the higher the requirements are. Russell Group universities offer good research facilities, which apart from providing the latest knowledge also attract external funding. However, these are not the only universities to consider as many other universities are highly respected and also attract funding, certain universities such as Bath and St Andrews, are not members of the Russell Group but are just as renown for their research facilities. This means that students who will to apply for these universities must have a track record of consistently good grades and expect to get high grades – usually between A\*A\*A and ABB depending on the subject. You must also be able to articulate your enthusiasm and full understanding of the subject you are applying for. These universities can afford to be highly selective (Bristol for example has 23 applicants for every 1 History place) but rest assured, if you follow all the advice we give you, and are willing to work hard consistently and put in the research to your chosen subject, you will have a good chance of obtaining an offer. Whatever choices you decide to put on your UCAS form, you should be happy to accept an offer from any one of them and be pleased with the course content, the style of teaching, the location, the accommodation and anything else that is important to you. Therefore consider your choices carefully.

## 2. NEXT YEAR'S CHOICES

### A2 Choices

You will need to think carefully about which subjects to drop at the end of year 12. In general we recommend that you take 3 A2s. The only exception to this is if you are taking Further Maths. You will be expected to continue with your current 4/5 subjects until the end of the summer term, to allow for flexibility next year if necessary. Things to think about:

- **Current Level of Achievement** – there may be an obvious indicator as to which one to drop.
- **Current Level of Interest** – it may not have been what you were expecting or the topics covered next year aren't of interest or needed.
- **Careers or University Requirements** – make sure you are taking the appropriate A2 levels. Check admission requirements – for example, some French Degrees require you to have a second foreign language, others don't. If there are no specific requirements, make sure your choices make sense and you can justify them if asked about them.
- **Facilitating A levels** – these are subjects which give the prior knowledge that is needed in order to take a subject at degree level. Some universities prefer 2 facilitating subjects to be included in the mix of A2 subjects and will stipulate their requirements. These are:
  - Sciences – Biology, Chemistry, Maths, Physics and sometimes Further Maths.
  - Arts - English Literature, Languages (Modern and Classical), Geography, HistoryHowever in our experience many students who only offer one facilitating subject receive offers and it is not the most important factor in determining whether you get an offer.

Re-read entrance requirements for each course you are considering and check with Mrs Mackay if unsure.

### Extended Project (EPQ)

The extended project can be undertaken in your own time with the guidance of an EPQ supervisor. If you haven't taken an EPQ in year 12, you have the opportunity to pick it up in yr 13 starting on your return after your summer exams, giving you the summer holiday to carry out your research. Most universities do not include it in their offer but many recognise and value it as an indication of the ability to study at undergraduate level, particularly if you are choosing to study a subject that you haven't studied at A level. However, a few universities are giving a lower offer of grades if you have a predicted A or A\* for your EPQ. However, this is not to be taken lightly and not at the cost of good grades at A level. The 6<sup>th</sup> form team will guide you on this in discussion with your subject teachers.

### AEA and STEP Maths

Some universities require an extra maths paper to be taken either AEA or STEP which is taken at the same time as your A2 papers. Double check with your course requirements and speak to the Maths Dept for assistance with the papers.

### Work Experience and Volunteering

For the following courses experience in the work place is a requirement and for some universities there is a minimum time requirement - Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry, Health Related Courses (nursing, physiotherapy, paramedic midwifery, dietetics etc.) Primary Teaching, Journalism, Architecture to name a few. Double check with the university web site and Mrs Mackay

Even if the institution doesn't make it a requirement, it will quite often help your application. It will help demonstrate that you understand the profession as well as give you a good basis for writing your personal statement. For many courses, it is not necessary; the admissions tutor is looking for an interest. However, even if you are unable to get direct experience, think about the skills that are required within that career. For example, you may not be able to get work experience in psychology but a psychologist needs to understand and study people. Where can you get experience to demonstrate that you've been able to spend time with people that may have difficulties etc.?

## Summer Schools, Taster Days

Don't forget to consider summer schools and taster days. These are an excellent way of finding out more about the subject, learning more and developing your understanding and knowledge. They will also give you an insight into university life.

### 3. APPLICATION PROCESS

In the UK applications to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are administered by UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service based in Cheltenham. Most HEIs subscribe to the scheme, but there are still a small number who accept applications direct. You will initially register with UCAS in school in the summer of year 12 and the UCAS application cycle starts on 1<sup>st</sup> September. Applications are completed online and once you have registered you can begin completing the form through 'Apply' on the UCAS website. (We will explain this process to you after summer exams).

If you wish to take a GAP YEAR you can apply in two different ways:

- a. Apply for deferred entry so that your place is arranged for the following year (2018) but conditional on your A2 grades. This allows you to go on your gap year and not worry about the application process.  
OR
- b. Apply after your results for the following year which will mean (barring re-takes) you will receive unconditional offers. If you decide to do this, you are advised to apply through school and will receive as much help from us as you need.

Each institution publishes a prospectus (copies are held in school and are available on the institution's website) detailing information about the courses on offer and entry requirements. Always refer to the website for the latest entry requirements and check they are for entry 2017. These vary from a minimum of 2 A levels or equivalent, to 3 A levels plus 1AS. Some institutions specify grades for particular subjects and some use UCAS tariff points which allows a little more flexibility, particularly if they allow you to include points from your AS subject that you have dropped. Some institutions use a tariff with a specific subject requirement. READ CAREFULLY and check with 6<sup>th</sup> form team if not sure.

The Tariff system allocates a certain number of points to A2 grades. **Please be aware, the tariff points are changing this year.** This means that if you look at universities now, their tariff point requirements will be based on current tariff points for 2016 entry. You will need to look again in the summer for actual points for 2017 entry. I have given you old tariff points and new ones, so that you can compare whilst carrying out your early research.

2017	A*	A	B	C	D	E
A2	56	48	40	32	24	16
AS		20	16	12	10	6
2016	A*	A	B	C	D	E
A2	140	120	100	80	60	40
AS		60	50	40	30	20

So for example if you were to apply for Engineering at Plymouth they are currently asking for 280 points. This could be made up from ABD, ACC, BBC and may even allow you to include the tariff points from the AS that you dropped. The equivalent entry requirement for 2017 is likely to be 112. Information about other qualifications including music and drama examinations, can be found at [www.ucas.com/students/ucas\\_tariff/](http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/)

#### Key points to remember:

- It is important to look at courses whose entry requirements correspond with your predicted grades - it is pointless applying for a course at a competitive university requiring AAB for entry, when you are predicted 3 Cs! USE YOUR TARGET GRADES AS A GUIDE.

- Check you are studying the right A levels for that specific course. Biochemistry at one university might require Maths A level and not at another.
- Popular courses such as History, English, Medicine, Law and Psychology may have higher entry requirements, as do popular institutions.
- Universities recommend that you check their websites for entry requirements – these provide the most up to date requirements. Although UCAS discourages it, entry requirements are sometimes changed throughout the year! THE UNIVERSITY WEBSITE SHOULD BE KEPT UP TO DATE, if in doubt, check with the admissions department.

You can make up to 5 selections – most applicants choose the same or similar courses at up to 5 different institutions rather than choose a variety of different subjects. For Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine/Science you can choose 4 institutions for that course and have the option to put a different course down for your 5<sup>th</sup> choice. These selections are **not** prioritised on the UCAS form nor do the institutions know who else you have applied to.

You should also ensure that your selections have a good breadth of grade requirements and entry requirement grades the same as or lower than your predicted grades. Discuss this with your tutor and Mrs Mackay if unsure. This will mean that even if your results are lower than expected, you will have a course of your choice to attend and will not have to rely on hoping to get a place through Clearing.

## Qualifications Available

Most HEIs offer a variety of qualifications. With A levels you will be looking at ‘undergraduate’ courses, most commonly known as first degrees.

- The BA (Bachelor of Arts) or the BSc (Bachelor of Science) are the two most common degree awards, but there are others (BMus (Bachelor of Music), BEng (Bachelor of Engineering) etc.
- Many science courses are now offered as an MSci for a first degree lasting 4 years allowing you to carry out a more detailed research project, all important for a career in science. If both BSc and MSci courses are offered, it is recommended that you apply for an MSci, (presuming you have the predicted grade requirement). You will be expected to achieve a certain grade in your first year to stay on the MSci programme and you will have the opportunity, during your course, to ask to stop after 3 years and accept a BSc if you wish. The opposite is also often true, if the grades are lower for BSc and your predicted grades match that, you can apply for the BSc and if you do well in your first year, may be able to move onto the MSci programme.
- Most degrees are honours degrees and are offered as single (one subject), joint (two) or combined (up to 4). Some courses offer the opportunity for a year out on placement (sandwich courses depicted as SW on the UCAS course list).
- Others offer the opportunity for a year abroad; not only language courses – many other subject courses are part of the Erasmus Scheme which arranges a year at a university in Europe or others may offer a year or semester in an English speaking country such as North America or Australia.
- HEIs also offer other types of undergraduate award, for example Foundation Degrees or BTEC Higher National qualifications. These are two year courses in more vocational subjects, with lower entry requirements. You may have the opportunity to ‘top-up’ later to a full degree.
- The majority of Fine Arts or Arts related BA courses expect you to have spent a year obtaining an Art Foundation, giving you a chance to explore different art mediums and making sure you are ready for the BA.

## 4. HOW TO CHOOSE THE SUBJECT OF YOUR DEGREE

You have three basic options when it comes to choosing a subject. As a start point you may choose to take one or more of the questionnaires found on CareerComp@nion (year12 – help with making choices) and visit [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk) for information about graduate careers and ideas. Explore the extensive books, leaflets in the LRC and ideas from PSD and on the VLE. You can also speak to your tutor, your subject teacher or the 6<sup>th</sup> form team.

### Continuing with a subject you currently enjoy

#### Points to consider:

- There are often marked differences between A level content and degree content. For example a Biology degree will include far more Chemistry than you might expect.
- Some subjects such as English and History are highly competitive – you may like to think about a subject that is equally appealing, that uses the same study techniques but have a slightly different focus.
- There are also broad degrees that combine different subjects and allow you to choose modules from a range of disciplines – for the science world these are Natural Science degrees, for the arts and humanities – Liberal Arts.
- Consider the career implications. See [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options\\_with\\_your\\_subject.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/options_with_your_subject.htm) for ideas as to what you can do with your degree and what transferable skills you will gain.

### Choosing a subject based on a career idea / vocational routes

#### Points to consider:

- A large number of careers are graduate-only entry (medicine, engineering, teaching and nursing for example). Some careers require a specific degree and others require a high level degree in any subject.
- Not only must the degree reflect your academic skills, it needs to reflect your interests, skills, values and attitudes. Investigate and research what these are and how you match up to them.
- If you change your mind, are you still able to choose careers in others areas? What transferable skills are there?

### Choosing a subject based on a new interest:

#### Points to consider:

- These can be split into two categories: degrees with a vocational link and degrees with no obvious vocational link.
- Examples of degrees with a career link include Geology, Psychology, Marketing, Paramedic, etc. These are usually studied because students are interested in them; a career in them may follow but by no means always.
- Examples of degrees with no obvious vocational link are Philosophy, Anthropology, Classics. Again students study these because of their interest and should not worry about prospects for employment as the latest figures show that 60% of graduate employers don't mind what subject the degree is in.

## 5. CHOOSING YOUR COURSE

There are over 39,000 courses on offer at HEIs in the UK and they need to be researched carefully.

Start with UCAS Course Search - <http://search.ucas.com/>

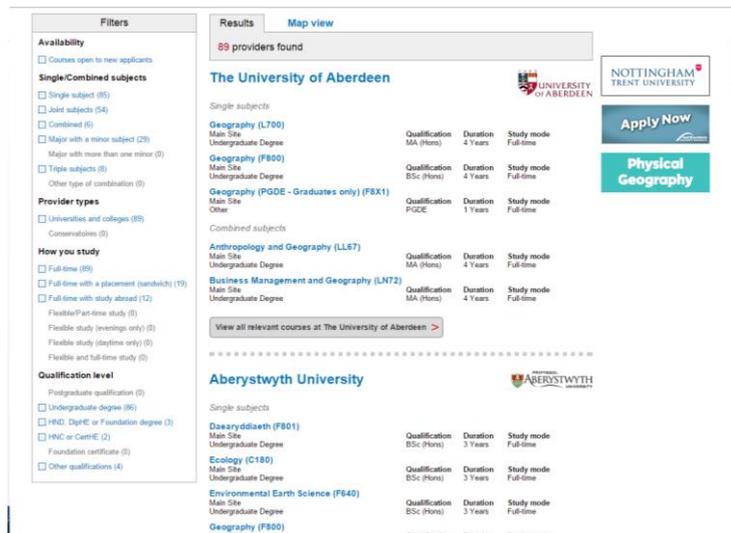


Chose England from drop down menu

Allows you to filter your search

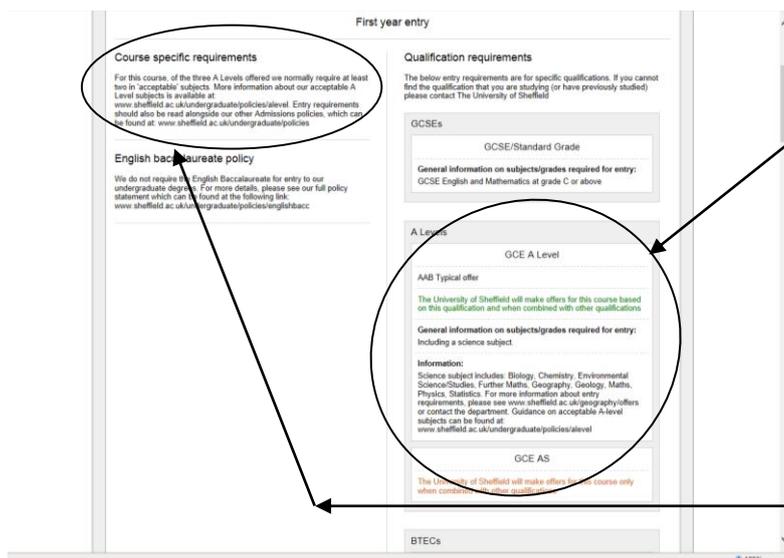
For example: course searched – Geography

The search tells me there are 89 universities that offer a Geography degree



You can now follow the links through to each university to find out more information:  
You will be given a summary page and then links to entry requirements, fees & finance and how to apply.

If you follow the entry requirement link you will be given detailed information:



For Geography at Sheffield University you are required to have a science subject from the list. Depending on your subject combination, they will also accept General Studies at A2 (as they do not say it is excluded).

Sheffield University usually require 2 subjects from their 'acceptable list'. All subjects we offer are either on their acceptable list or on the list where they are acceptable if 2 from the acceptable list are offered. For example, if you were taking Geography, History of Art and Communication, you would have an acceptable combination.

## Course Content

- Many degrees are similar from one university to another, many are not. Read beyond the first page.
- Many degrees have similar content but are called different names – think laterally when looking for courses e.g. Journalism may also be called Media Studies; Geology may be Geosciences or Earth Science.
- Many degrees have the same name but vary in content e.g. History, Geography – make sure you know what you are going to be studying.
- Some degrees are rigid in their content; others allow you to choose modules in your 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or maybe 4<sup>th</sup> year.
- Some require you to take an additional subject in your first year.
- If you are planning to enter into a profession e.g. Psychology or Engineering make sure your degree is accredited by the relevant professional body.

## Predicted Grades

- These will be worked out at the beginning of Year 13 using your AS grades as a basis.
- Check and double check entry requirements - universities keep the websites up to date if there are to be any changes.
- Match sure your grades match the requirements -the more popular the degree course, the higher the grade requirements – some History courses have 23 applicants for every one place. The universities can afford to be choosy!
- Some HEIs that offer using the UCAS tariff, may include AS points in their offer but may also stipulate a grade in a particular subject. e.g. 300 points with a B in Music, some will also include General Studies at either AS or A2.
- Make sure you have the right predicted grades in the right subjects – Economics degree offers often stipulate A or A\* in Maths. Even if the offer is AAB, they will not accept the B in Maths.
- If you are taking four A levels, universities may choose to give you an offer based on 4 subjects even if their average offer is based on 3 subjects.

## 6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

### The University

- You will want to consider what is being offered, what the opportunities are for you when you have your degree and graduate employment opportunities.
- You may wish to judge courses and universities according to teaching quality and research. All universities are required to include key information for each subject on their web sites including ratings for teaching, research, student satisfaction and graduate destinations. See CareerComp@nion for more comparison websites.
- What are their relationships with the professions and industry, what sort of research funding do they attract? In today's economic climate research external funding is all the more important to universities.
- The location, size, type, accommodation and cost of being a student at that university.
- Distance from home and travelling expenses
- The style of teaching – lectures, seminars, tutorials, lab work, field work, practicals.
- How big are teaching groups? How many lectures a week will you have? How disciplined are you with working on your own with long term deadlines?
- What tutorial support is offered?
- What help and careers guidance do they offer to assist you with finding employment after your degree?

### Open Days

It is also VERY important to attend open days to see whether you like the look of the institution and its geographical location and to talk to tutors and students about the course you are interested in. You can find dates from the individual institution websites or from [www.opendays.com](http://www.opendays.com). You are sometimes required to register. Wherever possible these visits should be arranged outside school time (during holidays or at weekends).

Visits made during school time should, if possible, be limited to a no more than **3** in term 6 of Year 12 and **5** anytime in Year 13. (This does not include interviews.) You must get permission in advance for all visits by completing a pink University Visits form (in pigeonholes outside 6<sup>th</sup> Form office) and handing it to your tutor. We will give you an overview in PSD and a booklet of How to get the best from a University Open Day before visits to university start.

### Oxbridge

You might consider applying to Oxford or Cambridge. We encourage everyone to consider them whilst carrying out your research. The process of applying to both of these is very specific and we will guide you through it with a specific programme – detailed in a separate handbook. There are some key things that Oxford and Cambridge are looking for and you need to be aware of:

- An excellent feel, enthusiasm and drive for the subject you are applying for and evidence to prove it.
- Predicted Grades of at least A\*AA at A2 and high UMS scores at AS (particularly for Cambridge an average of above 90% is required). All Cambridge offers will include at least one A\* for arts and humanities and two A\*s for sciences, Oxford will ask for one A\* for science based courses and 3As for arts and humanities.
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- High average points at GCSE – whilst they do not use GCSE grades to rule out applications; the average student at Oxbridge has 6/7 A\*s but there are also students with less or more. This data is matched against the average GCSE scores at the school you took your GCSEs at.
- Continual high marks at all modules, with very few, if any, re-sits.
- Usually 2 or more facilitating subjects studied at A level (see paragraph on A2 Choices)
- Performance at interview and additional tests.
- Comfortable with working on a one to one basis with tutors through tutorial or supervision system.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Form team are more than happy to discuss this with you further.

## **Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine**

These are highly selective courses and you will need:

- The highest possible A level grades and a very good record of As and A\*s at GCSE. Universities require a mixture of A\*AA or AAA as minimum grades.
- No re-sits for the majority of institutions
- Good results at additional tests (UKCAT and BMAT)
- An overriding interest in and enthusiasm for your chosen subject and the ability to demonstrate this.
- A real understanding of why you want to be a doctor / vet / dentist and what it means to be one.
- Successful applicants tend to have good time management skills, take lessons and advice seriously, take advantage of opportunities and seek them out, contribute to school, work consistently across Year 12 and Year 13.
- You will be expected to have carried out several different types of ‘people based’ work experience such as ‘old people’s homes, volunteering at the hospital and other examples of communicating with people and be able to demonstrate what you learnt from it.

Again applying for these is a complex and very specific process so please discuss further with Mrs Wilkes or Mrs Mackay.

## University Abroad

It is, of course, possible to apply to university abroad. To find out more:

- USA - [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)
- Europe - [www.eunicas.co.uk](http://www.eunicas.co.uk)
- Australia and New Zealand - <http://www.studyoptions.com/>

The systems for applying are different to ours as is the funding. For example, for USA you will need to take SATs for most universities, for Europe, some universities expect you to apply with firm grades (i.e. after your results). You will not be able to access UK Student Finance for studying abroad, however, some European countries allow you to access their funding system and some universities in USA may have a scholarship or bursary that you can apply for. Having said all that, it is a great opportunity and one we suggest you consider if you are independent and like the idea of moving abroad.

## Finances

Most universities charge £9,000 tuition fees per year. This fee **will not have** to be paid up front – the Student Loan process loans the fees and some finances towards living expenses and you will not have to start paying the amount back until you are earning £21,000. Student Loans are split into two – the Tuition Loan and the Maintenance Loan which will cover your accommodation, living costs, books, equipment etc. Maintenance Loans will be a minimum of £3,820 per year outside London and £5,330 inside London with more money available depending on family income. It is rare for your maintenance loan to cover all your expenses so you will need to consider either help from your parents or a part time job. You need to consider the following as well, as they differ from university to university and town to town.

- Tuition Fees and other fees
- Accommodation
- Course Equipment and Field Trips
- Specific Insurance for the course
- Cost of Living
- Funding
- Sponsorship, Scholarships, Bursaries

All institutions offer extra help which tend to be dependent on household income. Bursaries are dependent upon home income, vary in amounts and are not paid back. Scholarships (again not paid back) are offered for specific courses for specific reasons: for example, Imperial offer a range of scholarships covering based on income and or academic achievement and Aberdeen offer £600 toward tuition fees for Music lessons. So hunt around and see what you can find – it all helps. See [www.scholarship-search.org.uk](http://www.scholarship-search.org.uk) or individual university websites for more information.

We will be giving briefings to you and your parents in the Spring Term of Year 13 but do consider the costs of living in different universities and towns and how you are going to fund it. Look very carefully at the accommodation costs. You can find out more about student finance at [www.directgov.uk/student-finance](http://www.directgov.uk/student-finance)

## CONCLUSION

It may seem like a huge process to manage but you have many resources at your fingertips. We are here to help along the way and give you the tools and guidelines but we do expect you to do research yourselves. Start early, and do ask us any questions, however silly they may seem to you.

Use all the resources available to you inside and outside of school including the 6<sup>th</sup> Form Team, subject teachers, countless books and publications in the LRC, the internet, professional bodies, parents, family and friends, people you know working in a field you are interested in - the list is endless. **START NOW and MAKE INFORMED CHOICES.**

**Good luck and enjoy the process**  
**The 6<sup>th</sup> Form Team**