

Life after GCSEs *Thrive*

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Making choices

That reflect your hopes

You asked, we answered

Your problems solved with Matt

IT HAS TO BE RIGHT FOR YOU

Wisdom from a teacher

REAL LIFE

Experiences of traineeships, NVQs and volunteering

The
Fostering
Network



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Hello!

Welcome to another Thrive, and this time we're tackling the huge decisions you have to make about what to do when you've finished your GCSEs. Stay at school and do your A levels and perhaps head off to uni? Become an apprentice and learn a trade? Get a job and earn some money?

How are you supposed to make that decision so early in life? What resources are there to help you? Who is best placed to support you? And what happens if you make the wrong one?

We've got advice from experts and people who have had to make these decisions recently. But these people don't know YOU like your friends, family and foster carers do – so don't forget to include them in your decision making. We hope this Thrive will help you start some conversations and make some decisions.

Thanks for reading – until next time!

Thrive xxx

PS: There's loads of issues of Thrive online with advice about all sorts of things (including how to make sure your Pathway Plan includes the decision you make about what you want to do when you finish your GCSEs). Find them at bit.ly/TFNThrive

A big up to...

The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Care Forum, Daniel Sinclair, Lucie Ozturk, the Children Looked After Designated Lead at Whitchurch High School, Cardiff and Alun Richards. Without your contributions, we just couldn't create this mag. Thank you!

By the way, if you'd like to influence what we do here at The Fostering Network and what goes into Thrive, you could join the forum too. Email charlotte.wooders@fostering.net to find out more.

The Fostering Network



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Choices, choices, choices

So, you're heading for the end of year 11 at school and the BIG question is 'what comes next?' Up until now there's not been much choice because you have to go to school until you are 16, but now you're faced with lots of choices. Here are your main options:

+ Top tip

Don't forget careerswales.gov.wales is there to help you plan your career, prepare to get a job, and find and apply for the right apprenticeships, courses and training.

Carry on at school or college

You could stay on at school or apply to go to college. There are so many courses to choose from, including BTECs, Diplomas or A levels. A levels are an excellent choice if you're thinking about university, and lots of jobs require you to have them too. Remember, even if you decide to do A levels at 16 you could still do an apprenticeship later. In fact, some apprenticeships need you to do A levels first.

Become an apprentice

If you have already decided on a particular career then an apprenticeship could be for you. Apprenticeships combine practical training in a job with study - it's a proper job working towards a qualification. And you get paid (although not as much as you might like)! There are different levels of apprenticeship and they usually take one to four years to complete. A good place to start looking for an apprenticeship is gov.wales/find-apprenticeship

Become a trainee

A traineeship is a learning programme, with different levels, for people aged 16-17. It gives you a taste of a job and helps you develop the skills and knowledge you need to get a job or move on to further learning or an apprenticeship...and you get paid! A traineeship could be a good choice if you're not sure what you want to do as a career, or if you need some support to take part in employment or education. Speak to a careers advisor at school about traineeships or, if you have left school, visit www.workingwales.gov.wales

Get a job

Maybe continuing your education isn't for you. In Wales you can leave school on the last Friday in June, as long as you'll be 16 by the end of that school year's summer holidays. This is different across the UK. Applying for jobs could be the right choice for you. You learn loads of new skills, take on more responsibility and, of course, get paid. You'll need to think about what jobs you are best suited

for and get to work on your CV. Working Wales is a great resource for anyone over 16 to access expert advice and guidance to help overcome obstacles that you may be facing to get you into work. Visit www.workingwales.gov.wales

Do some volunteering

Lots of jobs ask you to have some experience, but it can seem really hard to get experience without having a job. Volunteering is a great way to get around this and to do something good for your community. It's a brilliant way to increase your skills and your self-esteem, and it's a good way to make new friends. It also looks fab on your CV.

Turning 16

Do you know which of these things you can do in Wales when you turn 16?

1. Buy a pet ☐
2. Get a tattoo ☐
3. Get married ☐
4. Apply for a passport ☐
5. Donate blood ☐
6. Change your name ☐
7. Earn the minimum wage ☐
8. Work full time ☐
9. Get a provisional driver's licence ☐

Answers: You can do 1, 3 (with parental permission), 4, 6, 8 and 9.

Making choices that reflect your hopes

Making decisions can be really tough, especially when they can feel like they're life changing. It's really important to know that whatever path you start on isn't the end of the story. You might decide to do an apprenticeship, but that doesn't mean you can't do A levels or go to college or uni in the future. Or you might decide to get a job, but then realise that an apprenticeship would be a better option to get to where you want to be. The truth is, you will never know if a decision is the ideal one until you actually commit to a choice.

Here are some questions to ask yourself, to help you decide which route to take after your GCSEs. Have a look at these questions and discuss your thoughts with friends, family, teachers, your foster carers...anyone who knows you well.

What does the future look like for you?

Nelson Mandela once said that you should try to make choices that 'reflect your hopes, not your fears'. When you close your eyes and think about the future (perhaps the next five years or so), what do you hope it looks like? What job are you doing? Where are you living? What qualifications or new skills do you have? Are you working on your own or as part of a team?

Knowing what you would like to be doing in the future helps you plan what you need to do to get there. Your Pathway Plan which you wrote with your personal advisor is a great tool to help with this – see the last issue of Thrive for more information bit.ly/ThriveOct2021

What are you good at and what do you enjoy?

Maybe art, drama or music are your thing? Or perhaps it's maths or fixing things that excites you? Have your friends or family told you that you're good with people, animals or children? Are you a patient person? Or someone who likes to make decisions?

It's time to be honest with yourself about what your likes and strengths are, and to

ask those who know you well to tell you what they think. It's also important to reflect on what you enjoy, because we all learn and work better when we're doing something we like. Then it's worth looking to see which jobs, courses, traineeships or apprenticeships might best fit your skills and the things you enjoy.



How do you like to learn?

There are loads of different ways that we learn things, but knowing HOW you prefer to learn can be really useful in helping you decide what you might choose to do after your GCSEs. Here's one model to help you think about how you prefer to learn:

VAK stands for Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic. These are three different ways of learning, and many people show a preference for one of these ways.

- **Visual learners** prefer to see the information about a task or project presented in a visual form. Useful tools for visual learners include charts, diagrams, illustrations and videos. Visual learners often enjoy careers in jobs like design, construction or consultancy.
- **Auditory learners** learn best by listening to information through lectures, audio books and so on. They tend to be good at remembering things they are told. Auditory learners often enjoy careers in jobs like teaching, journalism or nursing.
- **Kinaesthetic learners** learn best by doing and using a hands-on approach. They usually find it difficult to sit for long periods of time, like to practice things to learn. Kinaesthetic learners often enjoy careers in jobs like mechanics, art or sport.



So, for example, imagine you're setting up a new phone. How would you prefer to learn how to do that? Would you:

- like to use a video or an instruction booklet? This is visual learning.
- prefer someone to explain it to you? This is auditory learning.
- want to just get your hands on the phone and have a go yourself? This is kinaesthetic learning.

It's good to know that there are lots of different ways to learn. Most people can adapt to different ways of learning, and your 'preferred' style can change as you get older.

What sort of personality do you have?

It's super helpful to know yourself well when applying for jobs or courses.

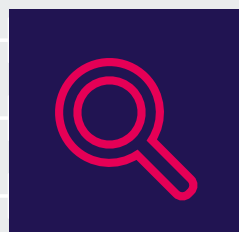
Careers Wales have a great personality quiz on their website: careerswales.gov.wales/buzzquiz

The quiz helps you understand if you're an extrovert or introvert, are more sensing or more intuitive, are more thinking or more feeling, are more judging or more perceiving.

For example:

- **Extroverts** are people who often like to make quick decisions and speak before thinking. They gain energy from being around people and being active. They enjoy working in teams and being the centre of attention, and can be seen as sociable and outgoing.
- **Introverts** are people who are good listeners and usually think before they speak. They enjoy spending time on their own, are reflective, can think deeply about specific things, work well independently and can be seen as quiet or shy.





YOU ASKED, WE ANSWERED

Matt's back to help with your problems

Q I'm applying for jobs at the moment and am not sure whether to mention that I'm in foster care. I'm a bit worried that saying that I'm fostered might lead some people to think that I'm going to be trouble, but I also wonder if I can use it to show that I know how to deal with difficult situations. What should I do?

Matt says: This is such an important question because it's about your identity. The key thing is to ask yourself who needs to know what, and what do I want to communicate about myself?

For some applications, there is no need to refer to fostering as it doesn't add to the application, although you always have the option to 'share' this personal information at any interviews you have. But in other applications, you will want to be fully transparent and use your experiences in foster care to show how you can successfully overcome challenges and how you made best use of your time in care to develop resilience. Remember, you don't have to tell people that you are care experienced...but there's also no reason to be embarrassed about that either. It's an important part of what makes you, you.

Should I tell?

Q I am doing a traineeship at the moment. I'm about a month in, but I really don't like it. I seem to be doing all the jobs that no-one else wants to do and I have heard people talking about the fact that I live with foster carers. Should I tell my boss that I'm not happy?

Matt says: I'm sorry to hear about this experience. It still may be early days in your traineeship, but you most definitely need to tackle this. The following plan will hopefully bring about the sort of change you're after:

Ask for a review meeting with your boss and the manager of the traineeship programme. Before you have that meeting, collect all the paperwork you have had about the traineeship programme and use a highlighter to note those parts of the programme that have not yet happened for you. Be clear what you want to get out of the meeting and rehearse what you want to say with your foster carers, your Personal Adviser or someone you trust.

In the meeting itself, be calm, patient and assertive, and make sure you agree an action plan at the end of the meeting and the date for your next review.

Good luck!

Traineeship troubles



Got a problem? Get an answer you can trust, right here

Q I get on really well with my foster carers, but they're driving me mad at the moment because they are insisting that I do A levels and then apply for university. I'm just not sure that uni is for me. I don't want to let my foster carers down, so should I just choose to do A levels to keep them happy?

Matt says: Let's start by saying that I'm sure your foster carers want the best for you, and that's why they're encouraging you to apply to uni. Have you told them that you are not sure about uni? Do you have an alternative to suggest to them?

Try to see this as an exciting time to be thinking about what you want from your future, listen to why your foster carers think A levels and uni are the best route for you, and then take advice and information from school staff who you respect, and your close friends and family. It might also be worth looking at the information at careerswales.gov.wales/ and getting an appointment with them or at school. Then you can explain to your foster carers what you would like your plan for the next couple of years to be.

Is uni for me?

Q I am hoping to become an apprentice hairdresser, but I need to buy all sorts of equipment before I start. I can't afford it and I don't think it's fair to ask my foster mum to cough up. Is there anywhere else I can go for help?

Matt says: It's great that you've got a career in mind. The good news is that it is not the responsibility of your foster mum to find this money. The additional financial support you need, for as long as you are in education, is the duty and responsibility of social services.

So, you need to pull together a list of all the items (including where you can buy them and how much they cost) that you will need to take part in the hairdressing course. Give the list to your social worker or personal advisor, asking them to let you know as soon as possible how social services will pass the money on to you so that you can buy all the items.

If you have any problems with this, you can contact the Children's Commissioner for Wales on 0808 801 1000 asking them to speak to your local authority on your behalf, or you could also put in an official complaint to social services.

And good luck on your course. Any chance of a haircut?!

Money help





You don't have to do what other people want you to do. Pick something that you enjoy doing. Don't feel that you have to find something that you will do as a job by a certain age. It can take time to work out what you want to do.

My foster carers really wanted me to go to college, but college wasn't for me. Doing a traineeship was the best choice I've made. Learning hands-on is a lot better for me, and I get paid and gain some qualifications.

Have your say

Members of The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Care Forum share their experiences of life after GCSEs.



I wouldn't have known what I wanted to do if I hadn't volunteered. Volunteering opens doors, it gives you a sense of purpose and enjoyment. It shows that you are determined, are a hard worker and it is good for your CV.

I left school having been told that I wasn't good enough for university. I did a number of practical courses, but now I know what I want to do so am doing an Access to Higher Education course before going off to university.

I really wish that I hadn't rushed into going to university. If I had waited for a year or two then maybe I would have known more about myself.



Real life: The university option

Some young people are put off thinking about A levels and then university because they are worried about how they will afford it or where they will live. If that's you, then Faye and Cassy, two of the members of The Fostering Network in Wales Young People's Care Forum, want you to know that there might be answers to some of your concerns.



Hi Faye and Cassy, Tell us a bit about yourselves.

F: I'm in my first year at Oxford University, studying Politics, Philosophy and Economics. It's a course that lots of Prime Ministers have done, but I don't really know what I want to do!

C: I'm currently doing a Master's in Social Work at Cardiff University. Before that I did a law degree at Aberystwyth University, but I realised that law wasn't having a direct impact on someone's life, and that's what I want to do.

In this Thrive we're thinking about life after GCSEs. What did you do?

F: I knew I wanted to do my A levels. I was lucky that I was offered a scholarship to a boarding school and that was a really positive experience.

C: After my GCSEs I fancied a change for my A levels, so I applied to a grammar sixth form and unexpectedly got in.

Some young people don't really think about A levels after GCSEs because they think university will be too expensive or they're not sure where they will live in the holidays. What would you say to them?

F: I know it's difficult, but there are definitely options. For example, the support I've had from Oxford has been amazing - I feel like they've just scooped me up. They have subsidised my room so I can get a bigger room and I can stay there all year round. They also give really good

bursaries (some money which you don't have to pay back). I ticked the box on my UCAS [ucas.com](https://www.ucas.com) university application form which said I was care experienced, so the grades I needed to get to go to uni were much lower than it would have been. So, don't write off the idea of doing A levels because they can open the door to university.

C: Funding-wise there is a lot of support if you decide to go to university. You get a full grant, some local authorities will give you financial support (mine sent me a bit of money every week to go toward my living), and my university had a care leavers' bursary and a low-income bursary.

Thank you so much. Is there anything else you'd like to say to young people living in foster care?

F: Explore your options. Have confidence in yourself. When I started applying for university my self-esteem was low and I wasn't going to apply to Oxford, but universities do look at the context you've come from. Have high aspirations and try to invest in yourself. I've spent lots of money buying education resources, paying for my driving licence - and it's all paid off.

C: It's important to know that what you pick isn't what you have to be doing for the rest of your life - it can change. It took me a long time to work out what I want to do. There will probably be a lot of pressure on you to decide but if it is the wrong decision, you can change.

I didn't really think about other options after GCSEs. When I was going through school it was, 'Go to university as that will get you a really good job.' It's never explained that you don't have to go to university now or ever - you've got the rest of your life!

It has to be right for you

Lucie Ozturk is Children Looked After Designated Lead at Whitchurch High School in Cardiff. Here she shares some of her wisdom from helping loads of students make decisions about what to do after their GCSEs.



Hi Lucie. Can you tell us a bit about your job and what you love about it?

I see myself as an advocate for children who are looked after – someone to speak up on their behalf and to ensure that they have everything they need to thrive in school. I love my job, especially when you've worked hard with a young person or in the background and see something change for the better.

When a student is doing their GCSEs, how do you help them think about what to do next?

I always ask young people what they want to do, but most don't have any idea! I don't think there's a single best option for everybody – it has to be what's right for that individual. If you know a student well you can usually pick up on what they would be good at. I talk about A levels, but also vocational courses and apprenticeships. I also talk about the option of work, but always remind people it's never too late to do a course. If you get a job for a year, or a part-time job at college, you might figure out what you want to do.

Other top tips for form filling

- Get your CV (short for Curriculum Vitae!) into shape. A CV is a short, written summary of your skills, achievements and experience. Employers often ask for a CV instead of an application form, and it's your first chance to impress.
- Be honest, but show what you can do. Celebrate your successes and use positive, active phrases like 'I successfully organised...', or 'I produced a high quality...'
- Save a copy of everything you do. This will be helpful if you get an interview so that you can check exactly what you said, but it can also be the basis of future applications.

What questions do you ask your students to help them make their post-GCSE choice?

I ask them what skills they think they have, what they enjoy doing and where they see themselves in ten years. If appropriate, I ask them if they have thought about university and, if they say no, I ask them if there is a particular barrier because they can get a lot of support going to university. The important thing is to look at who is in front of me and work with them as individuals.

What would be your three top tips to young people filling out application forms?

My top tips would be:

- If it's a form for a job, make sure you get the person specification and job description and write down what you can do against EVERY line.
- If you're struggling to fill out the bit on the form about your skills and personal attributes, ask someone who knows you well (your foster carers perhaps) to tell you what you're good at.
- Make sure everything is spelt correctly, is accurate and is grammatically correct. Ask a friend, social worker or your foster carer to read it over as well.



- If you've got an interview, then well done – your application must have been great! Make sure you do loads of prep before the interview. For example, research the organisation, try and work out what questions they might ask you and practice answering them with someone else. Wear smart clothes and check the address of the interview. Ask your social worker or personal advisor if your clothes and travel expenses could be covered by the St David's Fund. [bit.ly/FosterlineFactsheet](https://www.bit.ly/FosterlineFactsheet)