

Waiting for Results Day – don't panic!

For many 16-19 year olds the summer is not always such a fun relaxing time due to the long wait for their exam results. With most GCSE and A Level exams finished by mid-June students have several weeks in limbo before they know their fate.

As those two Thursdays in August draw closer – 17th for A Level/Level 3 results and 24th for GCSE/Level 2 results - the stress and anxiety levels build up as there's so much at stake. Get some decent grades and all is fine: the next three or four years are "sorted" and the journey continues. But, drop some grades or mess up and you may feel like you're entering a black hole of uncertainty with some tough decisions ahead.

Try not to spoil your summer holidays by stressing about your results though. Instead, think of this time as an opportunity! It is really useful for you to think ahead and set out a results day plan of action! Know when and where you have to go and pick up your results. Talk through with family about what you might do if you don't get the grades you were hoping for so you have a back up plan and you're not panicking on results day. If you have a university place or apprenticeship offer that will rely on your results, make a list of the key telephone numbers that you may need to call. For universities, this may well be the Admissions Tutor for the subject area/faculty you have applied to. If you have the number to hand, you can call them on the day to see if they're still willing to offer you an interview or a place.

If your GCSE grades are linked to your sixth form place, most sixth forms and colleges will have sent you letters and information packs that include contact numbers and advice about what to do on results day – keep this somewhere safe so you are not rushing around on the day trying to find it.

What are your options?

For A level and Level 3 BTEC students who don't quite get the grades you need plan ahead and make sure you know about the UCAS Clearing system – this could be your life saver. The UCAS Clearing system lets you apply, from A Level results day, for university courses that still have places available. This system is for those who have not received any offers, have rejected all their offers, or have missed the conditions of their offers.

There is also a less well publicised version of the UCAS Clearing System for students who do better than expected called Adjustment. This gives you the opportunity to 'trade up' to a better university or course without losing your current offer. It is important to remember that you are in charge here and you don't have to change your choice if you don't want to. If you do better than you had hoped in your exams, but are happy with your original choice of course or university, that's fine, but remember you do have that option.

For students waiting for GCSE results and about to start sixth form, again there may be more options than you think if you don't quite get the grades you were expecting. The advice is to go along to your scheduled interview/course discussion, as there may be alternative subjects or qualifications in the same subject that you could study instead. Colleges will always have careers staff, and maybe even staff from other colleges or providers, that will be able to offer you guidance or possibly an alternative course.

Good grades in GCSE English and Maths are often key grades that will allow you to progress on to your course of choice; again if you don't quite perform as well as you were expecting, there may be

an opportunity to re-sit one of these GCSEs and still take most of your favoured subjects. If you feel that you really want to 'try again' or have changed completely your idea about the career route you want to follow then many colleges do offer a complete level 2/retake Year 12. Often you would take GCSEs alongside say a BTEC course and hopefully in a year's time you could have the right qualifications to progress either at the same college or at the college you originally wanted to go to.

What else can I be doing this summer?

With at least six weeks of summer holiday in front of you there is a lot of time to both plan and do stuff whilst waiting for your exam results. Whether you are heading on to further study or are thinking of going straight into work, either now or sometime in the future, you are very likely to need to write about, or talk about in an interview, your real life "experience" of a particular job or career. Employers will always prefer candidates with experience in the "real world".

Using the time over the summer to tackle this 'experience' deficit would be time well spent. What are the skills and experience that would be beneficial in your intended *career*? What are your current strengths? What type of experience could you already talk about from the things you have done at school, college or in part time jobs you have already had? What about areas of experience that need further development? How feasible would it be to fill some of these gaps over the next few weeks?

Many of you will be planning to find a summer job or part time work while you wait for your results. Think about the skills and experience such a job will expose you to. If nothing else, a good reference from a part time job will show a potential future employer that you have the habits of good worker e.g. punctual, committed, able to follow instructions, communicate well with the public, ability to accept responsibility

Would you consider volunteering? Working or giving up your time for free may not feel like a great idea initially. But volunteering, helping at a local charity, group or organisation could help you develop the skills that will serve you well for your career and future job prospects, as well as providing you with the opportunity to learn new things, meet new people and make a difference.

Taking part in volunteering opportunities could provide and help you develop essential life skills; leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, time management, communication and working as part of a team are just some of the skills that you can develop. Volunteering may even lead on to paid work. Schemes aimed at students, who have just left school, such as the National Citizen Service is a really good option and runs in many parts of the country over the summer holidays. Of course you also need to take time this summer to relax, wind down, and let all the stress of the exams escape, spend time with family and friends, and have enjoy life again. But, if you combine that with taking time to grab the opportunities that are out there, you won't regret it.

The most important thing we want you to remember over the summer is that, even if things don't go your way, there are always options open to you. The exams are done, the papers are submitted and other people (the examiners) are now working very hard to get you the best result so there is nothing you can do now except wait to see what your results are.

In the next blog we will look at a plan for the big day – how to cope with exam result days