

The Big Day arrives – one envelope = your future

Waiting for your exam results can be one of the most stressful times in your life. Panic, regret and fear about the future are just some of the many feelings you may be experiencing. There's nothing wrong with any of this – up and down the country thousands of other young people are experiencing the same emotions. In this blog I hope to offer some guidance, reassurance and tips on how to cope with the big day.

Tip #1 – share the experience – don't go alone

You may not think you want to take your parents or friend along with you to pick up your results, but you'll probably really appreciate having someone with you when you get there and the nerves set in. If things don't go according to plan, several heads (and phones) may be better than one when it comes to gathering as much info as possible about your next steps. Even if they don't come in handy for any of the above, they might buy you a nice lunch or present afterwards!

Tip #2 – you only have to take a small step next, not plan the rest of your life.

One of the most common concerns for almost all young people is that they're not sure what they want to do with the rest of their lives. This is true whether you have secured a place at university or 6th form, or if you don't yet know if that is an option, or if you've decided to pursue a different direction into further or higher education or employment.

The first thing to remember is that's ok. Very few people at your age can set themselves exact career and life goals. However, if you do have an idea of where you might want to go, then you can make informed choices that can lead to amazing opportunities.

In the last blog we considered your options if results don't go quite as well as planned

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, rejected all their offers, or missed the conditions of their offers.

For students waiting for GCSE results and about to start 6th 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 always go along to your scheduled interview/course discussion that the 6th form has offered you. 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 may be able to offer you an alternative courses or guidance there and then.

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 GCSE's and still

take most of your favored 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. Remember you may be able to sit this type of course at one college and then reapply to your first choice college next year.

Tip #3 – have a plan for the day in place

Know where and when you need to go and pick up your results. Think and talk though with family about what you might need to do if you don't get the grades you were hoping for so you're not panicking on results day. If you have a university place or apprenticeship offer that relies on your results, make sure you have the key telephone numbers with you in case you need to call as they may still be willing to offer you an interview or a place.

For students picking up their A Level or BTEC level 3 results you can get a head start online if you have UCAS places pending. *From 8am – UCAS Track goes live and you'll be able to see your university confirmation.* Your marks won't show on UCAS, so you will still need to go and pick these up from your school or college. You may receive an email or confirmation direct from your UCAS choices even before 8am.

For UCAS students who have met their required grades for either their firm or insurance offer, UCAS Track will update to show if you've been accepted onto either your firm or insurance choice university and you will be able to view your confirmation letter in Track. Make sure you read this, as it may contain information from your university about what to do next. If you have already sorted your student finance and accommodation, there is now nothing left to do except celebrate and prepare for the big move!

If you have missed your grades, speak to your university as they may still accept you. You may be offered an alternative course by the university, which you will need to accept or decline in UCAS Track. If not, check your status on Track to find out if you are eligible for Clearing.

Remember that if you do better than expected, you are eligible to use UCAS Adjustment, which gives you the opportunity to 'trade up' to a better university or course without losing your current place.

Want to defer your offer until next year or consider a 3rd year at 6th form?

Again, you will have to call the university or college and ask if this is possible. Some universities will let you defer an offer to the following year, but it is best to contact them as soon as possible to see. It is worth having a good reason in place to support your decision. Maybe you plan to take a gap year that will support your studies, or maybe you plan to get work experience in your chosen field. Changes to how schools and colleges are funded has meant that there are fewer 3rd year places offered and this is further complicated by the move to linear 2 year exams and the need to retake virtually the whole courses again the following summer – again it is

always worth speaking to your current sixth form to see if they can or will offer you a 3rd year – the general advice is to try and move on. Consider a degree foundation year or Year Zero course that many colleges and universities now offer. Alternatively, apprenticeships are becoming a great option for many students post-sixth form.

And finally - If you don't get the exam results you were hoping for...

Don't panic! Take a deep breath and be patient because you do have options even if you don't get the exam grades you wanted. Take another deep breath and start talking. Speak to your teacher, careers adviser and anybody else who can advise you and help you decide what you should do next.