



**Simon Balle**  
All-through School

# **Post-18**

Your guide to the  
Next Step Process





# What next?

This booklet is an essential tool for preparing students for life after Simon Balle All-through School, whether applying for university, an apprenticeship, employment or a gap year.

The booklet highlights the phases of the Next Step process. However, a wealth of further information is available on all topics, so please be motivated to research your chosen pathway thoroughly.

The Sixth Form team recognise that, for many students, the choice of pathway can be overwhelming and that the choice of pathway will change once, twice, maybe more over the next year. For all, it is important that students begin to make initial decisions about their future.

## Options

You have a number of possibilities available to you after your A Level studies.

### University or College

gain valuable skills and a qualification to help you follow your chosen career

### Apprenticeship/ Employment

apply for jobs now, or start your own business, with the aim to work up to your future goals.

### Gap year (training/ volunteering/ travel)

prepare for further education or the world of work, gain experience to help you towards your study or work aspirations, get cultural insights during working holidays, learning, conservation or teaching.



# The Next Step Process

As part of our Sixth Form enrichment, students are provided awareness of the working world and future opportunities from the moment they join Sixth Form. So far this year, our students have had the opportunity to engage with professionals, experience practice interviews and participate in a work experience week to support their next step preparation.

All Year 12 students are encouraged to begin to focus on their Next Step after Simon Balle Sixth Form from January 2025. In February, students hear about degree options available locally at the University of Hertfordshire, plus Mr Prendergast will introduce apprenticeships and employment. Our visit to the UCAS Discovery exhibition continues the interaction with next steps providers.

This can often overwhelm many students. However, it is essential that students begin to consider all possibilities and use their time to research potential opportunities after A-Level study.

The Sixth Form team has developed an established programme to help support students and parents in the decision making process. Our programme is split into phases with an encouraged timeline of events.

## Phase 1

from January - August

Supercurricular  
Research  
Interaction

## Phase 2

from July - November

Personal Statement  
Shortlisting

## Phase 3

from September - January

Application  
Confirmation





# Phase 1

## Super-curricular. Research. Interaction.

All year 12 students attend an introductory Next Steps assembly. The Sixth Form team detail the potential pathways available, discuss the myths about university and degree apprenticeships and highlight how students can begin effectively using their time.

### ***ACTION***

From January to April students are recommended to use one Period 5 independent study session each week dedicated to their Next Steps preparation. This could include;

#### Super-curricular

As an A level student it is vital to not only progress academically but also to continue your personal and professional growth and development.

Students can begin to engage with super-curricular activities that extend learning and build further understanding of chosen pathways outside of course the syllabus. This involvement will help students gain new skills, shape interests and offer an opportunity to evidence experiences that can be shared with employers or university admission teams in your personal statement. There are a number of additional online learning courses available including MOOCs and short courses on platforms like Future Learn. However, many of these activities can take place outside of school hours.

Examples of super-curricular; Completion of a short course (Fundamentals of Digital Marketing/ Measuring Economic Inequality in Today's World/ Exploring Cancer Medicines), read a subject related book, visit a museum, DofE award, watch a TedTalk, enter a national student competition, complete a first aid qualification, subscribe to a subject magazine/ journal, take a graded instrument exam, volunteer with a local charity, tutor a GCSE student, run an extra-curricular club, part-time employment, listen to subject-related podcasts.

#### Research and Interaction

In addition, students should use their time to begin researching all possible pathway routes. Students are recommended to begin taking into consideration a number of factors to ensure courses and institutions fulfill all needs and requirements including; qualification type, course content, assessment, entry requirements and open events.

We recommend students begin interacting with universities and employers. This could be attending a virtual university taster session, an open day or a careers exhibition/ fair.





# Phase 2

## Personal Statement. Shortlisting.

A personal statement is an important part of the next step process for all students. When submitting a UCAS university application, the personal statement is your chance to describe your ambitions, skills and experience. It's your chance to show what makes you unique, besides your birth name and UCAS ID. Employers will ask for something similar.

Following a workshop with the Sixth Form team, students will work with their form tutor and begin structuring a first draft of a personal statement. This first draft is due on return from your summer break. The word limit for a UCAS personal statement is 47 lines, or 4000 characters.

What to write about:

**The structure for your personal statement should be**

### **Question 1: Why do you want to study this course or subject?**

Your motivations for studying this course(s)

Your knowledge of this subject area and interests

Your future plans and why this is a good fit for you

### **Question 2: How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?**

How your studies or training relate to your chosen course(s) or subject area

What relevant or transferable skills you have that make you a great candidate

Any relevant educational achievements

### **Question 3: What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?**

Work experience, employment, or volunteering

Personal life experiences or responsibilities

Hobbies and any extracurricular or outreach activities

Achievements outside of school or college

### **Shortlisting**

You can apply for up to 5 university courses. There is no limit on the number of apprenticeship applications you can submit. However, please be aware that every employer has their own applications process and deadlines.

Many students continue with applications for both university and apprenticeships throughout year 13 and up until A Level results day in August, before confirming their next step.





# Phase 3

## Application. Confirmation.

University applications open 03 September 2025.

Key dates for 2026 UK university entry.

Before beginning your application it is important to familiarise yourself with key UCAS deadlines. Some universities (Cambridge and Oxford) and courses (medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry) have much earlier deadlines and it is important you are aware of those which impact your application.

### Important UCAS deadlines

15 October 2025 - All courses at Cambridge and Oxford and most medicine, veterinary medicine and dentistry courses at all other institutions.

14 January 2026 - All other undergraduate courses for EU students.

### Application

When applying for all post-18 university courses and apprenticeships, you will be asked to submit any extenuating circumstances, your predicted grades and a reference.

Your reference is written by your tutor. It is important that you communicate your next step plans clearly as you prepare to submit your applications. Contextual information including any extenuating circumstances is submitted by Sixth Form and the school Senior Leadership Team. Predicted grades are determined by your subject teachers. Staff take into account previous submissions, your application to the subject and your end of year threshold examinations when finalising your predicted grade. Within your 5 choices, we recommend you apply to universities with a range of course requirements that are both aspirational and achievable.

### Confirmation

Once you have made your application, you will hopefully receive a conditional offer and you will often be invited by universities to attend applicant events, offer-holder days or an interview. It is important to make sure you respond to invites and emails from universities and employers.

By June, you are required to submit your FIRM and INSURANCE choices. These are your next step preferences. Many students will also have apprenticeship offers from employers to consider.

Students and parents can use the following websites and resources for information and support

UCAS - [www.ucas.com](http://www.ucas.com)

UNIFROG - [www.unifrog.org](http://www.unifrog.org)





# A Gap Year

A break from education.

A number of students choose to take a gap year following A level study.

## **This break from education has a number of positives:**

Students sometimes choose to focus on their A levels and only consider their next step after leaving school. Gaining real results in August helps students consider the options available to them, rather than work with predicted grades and the increased pressure this can add.

Students are mentally fatigued following A level study. A gap year can offer a short break before continuing education. Students often gain short-term employment or choose to volunteer or travel during this break.

If students are unsure of their next step and their commitment to further study a gap year can offer further time to consider their application.

## **Important Information**

While studying A levels at Simon Balle All-through School, we recommend that all students participate in the next step process and write a personal statement. After leaving Simon Balle, we are not always able to offer additional support should you wish to make an application in the future. We also recommend that every year 13 student gains a reference from their tutor that can be kept on file should you need a professional referee in the future.

However, if you are considering a gap year before potentially reapplying to university please remember the deadlines you are working to.

After collecting your exam results in late August, future university and employer open events begin in the September. If you are looking to make degree level applications, you need to begin your shortlisting phase before completing your applications by the new year. Students often think they have a whole year to consider their options.

## **Planning your gap year**

When you're preparing for a gap year, make sure you:

- Plan ahead of time
- Think about money and how you'll support yourself
- Keep your CV up to date
- Make a note of application deadlines so you do not miss them





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