



## Push's Quick Guide to... Your Choices at 18

### What choices are out there?

When you leave sixth form or college, there are numerous pathways available to you, to build your life journey, such as:

1. **Further/Higher Education courses:** There are over 14,000 job-specific and non-job specific degrees at over 160 universities/ 250 higher and further education colleges available in the UK. If you're not sure what you want to dedicate yourself to for 2-5 years, you may find foundation degrees more suited to you. Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are shorter and give you foundational knowledge, experience and skills, and usually offer the option to 'top up' into a full degree. All these courses may be available full time, part time, or online – or with a mix of flexible/hybrid studying. There's also Access to Higher Education courses, which can help you boost core requirements in English and Maths, to help you get ready for a degree.
2. **Employment:** Giving your time and effort to get rewarded (financially) by being professionally useful in a setting. What settings? A public sector job (what our taxes pay for), a private sector job (for-profit businesses) or 'third sector' jobs (charities, non-profits). Employment could mean a full time job with a contract agreed or pay per hour based on a full year's salary (pro rata) or a set salary for the year (per annum). It could mean part-time work (perhaps an agreed amount of hours/ shifts per week with your employer). Zero hour contracts means you don't have any obligation to work a certain amount of hours per week, so some weeks you might do a lot of hours, some weeks you might do...zero. You need to be careful about exploitation from an employer (you don't get many worker rights), but for students balancing studies, and those with parenting/caring responsibilities or another main job on top, zero hour contracts can be really useful due to their flexibility. If you're zero hours, you'll need to take off your own national insurance, income tax and holiday pay from the fee they charge...so make sure you're getting a good rate of pay per hour/day that accounts for the 20% you'll need to take off and pay the tax man (HMRC) with once a year.
3. **Employment + Training:** Private employers and the public sector combine with the government or with higher education organisations to offer 'earn while you learn' courses, which mix experience in a professional job setting alongside academic or vocational training at a uni or college. These can be called apprenticeships (advanced and then higher level), degree apprenticeships (for example, a degree in Policing), post graduate training (such as a PGCE in teaching in England or PGDE in Scotland), sponsored degrees, or they can be jobs which train and qualify you from day 1 of employment, such as public sectors like the Army, Fire & Emergency Services, Navy, and certain Civil Service and NHS roles.
4. **Gap years:** work placements, volunteering, training schemes, internships, mentoring, travel

### So, which choice is best?

**The ones that match your needs closest:** work out which rewards – emotional and physical - you might want from a career or learning journey over the next few years (things you'd expect each day to keep you content, focused and motivated to improve), and think about what an employer would want from you in return (the skills you have developed that are desirable or essential for their industry).

**Remember...** a career is a life journey. People often pause and reassess to see if they are still passionate, curious, and aligned spiritually and ethically with a job (and the industry the job is in). Get going, and see where life takes you. Choose something now, and stick at it, or switch it up later down the line. Be true to your instincts.

### What if you're not really sure?

Firstly, look for any paid and unpaid opportunities to develop your **transferable skills**. These are things like problem solving, creative thinking, working in a team, picking things up quickly, communication, being adaptable, and building resilience from failure. Employers like them because they show you are a rounded person who is more likely to handle a job, and a person who is more than just a collection of grades.

Secondly, build a network of different professional contacts in different jobs each day - in person and online. This is called **networking** and it's a skill to keep in touch with people, monitor what they are doing, and then asking them about a job when you sense an opportunity that may be right for you.

### How do you start networking?

Set up a LinkedIn profile: it's an online CV and you can search and 'connect' with people across all industries...and even look for jobs. Save hashtags linked to jobs and industries you like on Instagram or TikTok. Subscribe to interesting Youtube channels related to an industry you like. Join groups on Facebook that interest you. Hunt out inspiring people who seem to enjoy their jobs. Research them: which routes did they take? You may even decide to contact them - via a direct message or a professionally written email - asking how they navigated their career path (or even ask if there is an opportunity to shadow their job, be mentored by them, or work for them).

Watch (2 mins):  
**Johnny's (Push CEO) video on exploring what you want from life**



### What if your parents/guardians/carers want you to decide now?

Pop the kettle on. Sit down with them over a nice cuppa and speak calmly, openly and honestly. Come up with a **professional development plan** for your next 12 months so they feel reassured by your current uncertainty and make sure to demonstrate your commitment to finding the right path for you.

**“Choose a job you love and you'll never have to work a day in your life”**  
- Confucius

### What things do employers want?

**Employers want the right mix of skills for their industry/the job role:** hard and soft skills.

**Hard skills:** the knowledge (mental & physical) you need to do a specific job (qualifications, training).

**Soft skills:** the traits that make you an attractive person to work with e.g. initiative, resourcefulness, tenacity, creativity, adaptability, empathy, picking up things quickly, working well in a team, understanding others, active listening, communication, planning and organisation, self-reliance, independence, honesty, resilience, punctuality, and your ability to self-reflect etc.

### All you need is a stool...



If you work on constructing these three stool legs (solid foundations), you'll make a great choice for yourself in life. You'll ensure that a job gives you the things you want from life (your 'career rewards') like respect, lifelong learning, flexibility, creativity, travel, meeting new people, opportunities to develop, and money (of course).