



A-Level & GCSE results day guide

Your complete, one-stop guide for
what comes next after results day

Whatever your results, you have a next step

Hundreds of thousands of learners go through results day every year, and every outcome, from top grades to a missed offer, has a clear path forward.

This guide sets out what those paths look like. Got the grades you needed? There's guidance here on making the most of them. Fell short, or changed your mind? You'll find clear routes forward, including resits, UCAS Clearing, and a flexible alternative that gets you to the same destination a different way.

We work with learners and parents on every side of results day, from those celebrating top grades to those weighing up resits or Clearing. This guide draws on that experience.

Inside, you'll find:

- What to prepare and what to expect on results day itself
- What GCSE and A-Level grades mean, and what to do if they aren't what you hoped for
- How resits work, and what the data tells us about resit success
- A full breakdown of UCAS Clearing; how it works, your chances of success, and guidance for parents and international learners
- Flexible alternatives to the traditional university route, including Online Degree Pathways and Access to Higher Education Diplomas
- Where to turn for further support, whatever decision you make next



Getting ready for results day

A little preparation goes a long way. Know your options in advance and you can act decisively the moment you have your results, instead of scrambling under time pressure.

In the days before results day

A few practical steps make a real difference:

- **Prepare, don't predict.** Check your options for a range of outcomes, including top grades, middle, and lower than expected. That way, nothing comes as a shock on the day.
- **Plan practical logistics.** Know when and where you'll get your results - in person, by email, or through UCAS Track - and who you'll be with.
- **Limit comparison.** Stay off group chats and social media in the final 24 hours. Everyone's situation is different, and comparison won't help you think clearly.
- **Talk it through.** Talk through your plan A, B and C with a parent, friend or tutor/teacher beforehand, so decisions on the day are quicker.
- **Look after the basics.** Get a proper night's sleep and a decent breakfast. You'll think more clearly than if you stay up refreshing a results portal.

If your results aren't what you expected

Every year, hundreds of thousands of learners get results that differ from what they expected. Most find a route that works, such as resits, Clearing, an alternative qualification, or a change of direction. The rest of this guide sets out exactly what those routes look like.



GCSE results day: Preparing for what's next

Here's what to expect from GCSE results day, and what your grades actually mean.

What do GCSE grades mean?

GCSEs in England use a numerical scale of 9 to 1, replacing the old A*-to-G system. 9 is the highest grade, 1 the lowest. Broadly:

- Grade 9 is set above the old A*, representing the very top performers
- A grade 4 is broadly equivalent to the old grade C and is considered a "standard pass"
- A grade 5 is considered a "strong pass" and is the benchmark many sixth forms and colleges look for in English and maths
- Grades 1 to 3 are broadly equivalent to the old grades D to G

Some vocational or applied subjects use different grading structures, so check the scale for each of your subjects if you're unsure.

If your results aren't what you expected

A single set of GCSE results doesn't define your options, and there is almost always a credible way forward, including:

- Looking at resit options for individual subjects, particularly English and maths, which are widely required for further study and many jobs.
- Exploring alternative qualifications such as **Functional Skills** or vocational routes that don't depend on a specific GCSE grade profile.
- Talking to a careers adviser about how your results affect your original plans, and what alternatives might suit you just as well.



How do GCSE resits work online?

Online GCSE resits with learndirect let you restudy a subject flexibly, around school, college or work, rather than waiting a full year for a classroom resit. Our programmes include:

- Structured course materials covering the full syllabus, accessible at any time.
- Support from qualified tutors who can mark work and answer questions.
- Flexible study pace, allowing you to focus more time on chosen topics.
- Exam booking support, helping you find and register for a suitable exam centre.

This makes online resits a popular choice for learners retaking GCSEs without disrupting other studies or work.

Resit your GCSEs

GCSE resits and alternatives: What the data shows

National data shows a meaningful proportion of learners who resit GCSE English and maths go on to improve their grade, especially with structured, well-supported study rather than simply repeating the exam unprepared. A disappointing first result is rarely the final result.



A-Level results day: Your alternatives sorted

Whether you're considering future A-Level study, resits, or a different route altogether, here's what to know.

Are online A-Levels any good?

Online A-Levels offer the same recognised qualifications as classroom study, with far greater flexibility:

- Studying around work, family or other commitments, rather than fitting your life around fixed term dates.
- Learning at your own pace, spending more time on challenging topics and moving faster through ones you find easier.
- Access to experienced, qualified tutors for support and marking, despite studying remotely.
- The ability to start at a time that suits you, rather than waiting for a new academic year.

For many learners, particularly those resitting or returning to education as adults, online A-Levels are a genuine, often more manageable alternative to sixth form or college.

Didn't get the results you wanted?

If your A-Level results aren't what you were hoping for, you don't need to make a final decision on the day itself. Common next steps include:

- Resitting your A-Levels online to apply again in the next UCAS cycle with stronger grades
- Switching to an Access to Higher Education Diploma, which can fast-track you into university in as little as a year
- Applying through UCAS Clearing for the same or similar course at a university that has relaxed its entry requirements to fill vacancies
- Taking a structured gap year that builds relevant skills or experience before reapplying
- Pursuing an apprenticeship or vocational qualification directly linked to your career goals

[Explore Access to HE Diplomas](#)



How do A-Level resits work online?

Online A-Level resits work like online GCSE resits with learndirect; flexible, self-paced study with qualified tutor support, plus help booking your exam at a recognised centre. They suit learners improving a specific grade without repeating a full year, or juggling resits alongside work.

[Resit your A-Levels](#)

A-Level resits and alternatives: The statistics

Data shows a substantial number of students who retake an A-Level achieve a higher grade, especially with focused, structured support rather than self-study alone. A first attempt is rarely the only attempt, and most universities and employers are entirely comfortable with resit grades.



UCAS Clearing: Your path to university

If your grades weren't what you'd hoped for, or you've had a change of heart, UCAS Clearing lets universities fill remaining places, giving thousands of learners every year the chance to find a suitable course after results day.

What is UCAS Clearing?

UCAS Clearing matches learners without a university place to courses with spaces available. You may enter Clearing if you didn't receive any offers, missed the conditions of your firm or insurance offer, applied after the main deadline, or simply prefer a different course after seeing your results. It runs from results day to mid-September, though popular courses fill quickly.

UCAS Clearing explained

Is UCAS Clearing right for me?

Clearing isn't only a fallback. Many learners use it deliberately, having changed their mind on subject, location or institution. Consider it if:

- Your results were lower than predicted and you no longer meet your firm or insurance offer's conditions
- You've decided your original course or university isn't the right fit after all
- You didn't apply to university through the main UCAS cycle but have now decided you want to
- You achieved better grades than expected and want to explore more competitive courses (sometimes called "Adjustment" rather than Clearing)



What are your chances of success in Clearing?

A significant number of learners secure a place through Clearing every year, many of whom go on to thoroughly enjoy their course. Your chances are strongest if you research courses in advance, stay flexible on subject and location, and contact universities directly on the day rather than waiting.

Practical tips for Clearing

A calm, organised approach makes a real difference:

1. Have your UCAS Track login, exam results, and Clearing number ready before you start making calls.
2. Make a shortlist of backup courses and universities in advance, based on realistic entry requirements.
3. Call universities directly. Lines open early on results day and popular courses can fill fast.
4. Prepare a short “pitch” about why you want the course, in case you’re asked during the call.
5. Don’t feel pressured to accept the first offer; you can hold a verbal offer while you consider other options.
6. Once you accept a place, add it through UCAS Track to confirm it formally.

Guidance for parents

Stay calm and positive regardless of the result. Help with research like comparing courses rather than deciding for your child, and be ready to help with calls, travel, accommodation if a place comes up at short notice.

Guidance for international learners

International learners should check a few extra factors before entering Clearing: Visa implications of changing course or university, differences in tuition fees and funding, varying English language requirements, and earlier deadlines for accommodation and visas. Contact a university’s international office directly to clarify these before accepting a place. Alternatively, learndirect’s [Online Degree Pathways](#) provide a route that will be much less costly than going down the traditional path.

Bypassing the Clearing process

Clearing isn’t the only option. With learndirect, you could also apply for an [Access to Higher Education Diploma](#) for entry the following year, choose an [Online Degree Pathway](#) with guaranteed progression to a degree, resit exams, or pursue an apprenticeship or vocational qualification instead.



Beyond results day: Flexible routes into higher education

If the traditional university route doesn't feel right, there are well-established, flexible alternatives that still lead to a degree and a rewarding career.

Online Degree Pathways

Online Degree Pathways let you study towards a degree entirely from home, around work or family commitments, with guaranteed progression to a partner university on completion. They suit learners who want to learn at their own pace, those balancing study with other responsibilities, and anyone who prefers a lower-pressure alternative to full-time campus study.

Popular subject areas for learndirect Online Degree Pathways include:

- Accounting
- Business and Management
- Computing
- Cyber Security
- Law
- Management for Health and Social Care
- Psychology
- Quantity Surveying

Download course brochure



Access to Higher Education Diplomas

An Access to Higher Education Diploma is a recognised alternative to A-Levels, designed for adults returning to education or anyone wanting a faster route into university. It typically takes around a year and is widely accepted by universities in place of A-Levels.

Specialist Access to HE Diplomas are available in a wide range of subjects, including:

- Art and Design
- Paramedic Science
- Midwifery
- Nursing
- Social Work
- Veterinary Science

These pathways suit learners who didn't get the grades they needed, or anyone considering a career change who wants a structured route back into higher education without repeating school-style study.

[Download course brochure](#)



FAQs

The most common questions learners and parents ask around results day.

What should I do to prepare for results day?

Know your options for a range of outcomes, confirm the practical details (when, where, how), and have a shortlist of next steps ready.

What happens if I don't get the grades I need?

You have options. Resits, UCAS Clearing, an Access to HE Diploma, or an Online Degree Pathway can all provide a route forward.

What do GCSE grades mean?

GCSEs use a 9-to-1 numerical scale, with 9 the highest. A grade 4 is a standard pass and a grade 5 a strong pass.

How do online resits work?

You study flexibly at your own pace with support from a qualified tutor, then sit your exam at a registered exam centre.

What is UCAS Clearing?

A process that matches learners without a confirmed university place to courses with remaining spaces, running from results day into September.

Can I still get into university without A-Levels?

Yes! An Access to HE Diploma is widely accepted as an alternative to A-Levels for university entry, often completed in around a year.

Are online degrees a good alternative to a traditional university place?

Online Degree Pathways offer flexible, self-paced study with guaranteed progression to a partner university, making them a strong option for many students.

The team behind every outcome

learndirect is the UK's leading online learning provider. We've helped over a million learners gain the skills and qualifications to progress their education and careers. We support learners across every results day outcome, including resits, Access to HE Diplomas, Online Degree Pathways and more. Our courses are built around flexibility, expert tutor support and recognised qualifications.

Talk to an expert

Our advisers speak with learners in exactly your position every day, across every outcome from top grades to resits. If you'd like to talk through your options, get in touch.

Get in touch to discuss your results, your course options, or your existing study programme.

Let's chat

