

AFTER Sixth form - Not Going to University?

There are no longer only two main choices for school leavers: get a job or go to university. The view used to be those who were successful in their A-levels went to university, those who weren't got a job. One would get a higher qualification, the other wouldn't. University was widely considered the "better" option. University is still recognised as a fantastic option, but there is an increasing awareness that it isn't for everyone. Over the last decade, the emphasis has been on getting more and more people into university, but, with the tuition fee rise and the value of university coming under scrutiny, there has been a tide change. People are increasingly willing to embrace alternatives to university. There's a real demand for something that straddles the two: combining qualifications with employment, and that's where apprenticeships programmes come to the fore.

Unfortunately, there are still some common misconceptions surrounding alternatives to university. A-level results day inevitably brings with it a slew of comments on Twitter and articles in newspapers all focusing around the same theme: "Missed out on a university place, what are your options?", "Haven't got the grades? Check out apprenticeships". Intentional or not, these sort of comments position the alternatives to university as a kind of secondary option or a lower rung choice.

This simply isn't the case

Those who "don't have the grades" to go to university do not have to be the only ones considering an Apprenticeship. Even if you are predicted AS and BS at A-level, university isn't your only option. Companies are increasingly keen to recruit bright A-level students. In the UK there has been a rise in the number of school leaver programmes, a kind of high school graduate scheme for ambitious sixth-form leavers. Trainees on these programmes are often treated like those on the graduate schemes and they often follow a similar training programme to the graduates.

You don't have to turn your back on university education either. Sponsored degree programmes and certain higher apprenticeships and school leaver programmes give trainees the chance to attend university (usually on a part-time basis) and achieve a higher education qualification whilst working for a company. These can be the route for those who want to combine university with gaining some real working experience.

It is ok to not want to go to university. University choice should be based on a passion for the subject, a desire to get stuck into some in-depth learning or as a route for certain career paths, not because you "might as well go" because everyone else is.

You need to weigh up what you think is the right option for you, whether that's university, a school leaver programme, an apprenticeship or going straight into employment. Like most things in life, your choice isn't black and white. It's up to you to tease out the pros and cons and decide what is right for you as an individual.