

Year 11: The Exam Year

Year 11 is the final and busiest year of GCSEs: mock exams, past papers, NEA deadlines and the GCSE exams in May-June. Post-16 applications also happen in the same year: sixth form, college or an apprenticeship. The keys to this year: **planned study, early applications and a balanced life.**

Know this first: post-16 applications happen this year, and they start early.

At most places, sixth form and college applications run from September to January, with open days in September–November. Popular providers and subjects fill up early, and some hold interviews. Apprenticeship vacancies usually open between January and June.

What to do: list 4–6 options in September, go to open days in October, and complete applications in November–December. Always have a Plan B alongside Plan A.

Where to look: providers' websites (sixth forms, FE colleges), your council's post-16 guide, findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk for apprenticeships, and the Post 16 Intentions tool in Unifrog.

"Success is being better than you were yesterday." — Anonymous

Every flower blooms in its own time

No two flowers in a garden are alike. Some bloom on the first day of spring, others in midsummer. Some love the sun, others the shade. But they are all flowers, and each one blooms in its own time.

Our children are the same. Settling into a new school, new routines and sometimes a new language or country can take time. Taking longer does not mean falling behind; it means putting down roots.

Our job is not to compare them with someone else's garden, but to make sure they never go without water, sunlight and patience.

Three goals for this year

1. Planned study: a weekly plan, past papers and a Red/Amber/Green topic list. **2. The right post-16 choice:** open days, applications on time, Plan A + Plan B. **3. Balance:** sleep, exercise and managing exam anxiety.

"Make hay while the sun shines." — Proverb

Why now? What do universities and employers look for?

Two things happen at once in Year 11: sixth form, college and apprenticeship applications use the predicted grades and references the school provides, and offers are usually conditional on GCSE results. And what universities and employers want is built from habits and experiences gathered over the years:

University	Employer / Apprenticeship	The AI era
Academic results: GCSE and A Level (or equivalent) grades. Interest in the subject: reading, projects and competitions beyond school. The 3 UCAS personal statement questions: 1) Why do you want to study this course? 2) How have your subjects and education prepared you? 3) What have you done outside education, and why are these experiences useful?	Core skills: communication, teamwork, problem solving, reliability, initiative, digital skills. “Can you give me an example?” Interviews test skills through real examples (the STAR method). Experience: volunteering, responsibility, work experience. Apprenticeship applications ask the same questions.	What stands out: curiosity, creativity, people skills, critical thinking and using AI well (checking information, citing sources). In Year 11 this means: good GCSE results, an up-to-date CV, application statements and STAR examples for interviews.

A good answer to question 3 (“What have you done outside education?”) years from now starts today. Doing something is not enough; writing down what was learned matters too.

12 core skills

Unifrog, the careers platform used by many schools in England, asks students to record which skills they developed in each activity under these 12 headings. The suggestions in this guide are matched to the same skills.

Skill	What it means	Year 11 example
Reading	Understanding a text and picking out information	Set texts, application statements
Writing	Expressing ideas clearly and in an organised way	An application paragraph, exam writing questions
Numeracy	Working confidently with numbers	Full past papers, tracking scores
Planning	Setting goals and mapping out how to reach them	Revision plan, application timeline, study leave
Listening	Taking in information and ideas accurately	Open days, teacher feedback
Speaking	Explaining your ideas out loud	Interviews, oral exams
Teamwork	Working with others towards a shared goal	Study groups, a team sport
Leadership	Motivating and guiding others	Prefect / student leader roles
Problem solving	Finding a solution to a situation	Hard exam questions, a Plan B
Creativity / Innovation	Coming up with new ideas	NEA, originality in exam answers
Independence	Working effectively on your own	Managing study leave on their own
Adaptability / Resilience	Adjusting to change and keeping going after setbacks	Bouncing back after mock results

At school and at home: what to work on

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." — Attributed to Benjamin Franklin

What?	How?	Skills it builds
Weekly study plan	~2 hours on school days, ~4 hours at weekends; more after the mocks (Year 11 weekly plan)	Planning, Independence
Past papers	Topic-based in September–November; full and timed from November; 3–5 a week from February	Problem solving, Adaptability / Resilience
Tracking scores and topics	GCSE Tracker: score, %, grade; Red/Amber/Green topic list	Planning, Numeracy
Self-testing + spaced repetition	Flashcards, "close, recall, check"; review again after 1 day, 1 week and 1 month	Independence, Reading
Maths and English	IXL + the school's platform; quotation cards for English Lit, writing practice for English Language	Numeracy, Writing
Examiner reports	The exam boards' reports on "where students lost the most marks"; ask a teacher	Reading, Problem solving
Study leave plan	3 blocks a day around the exam timetable; the next day's exam comes first	Planning, Independence
NEA / coursework	Deadlines on the calendar; don't leave it to the last week	Planning, Independence

Outside school: what to try

The five areas below follow the sections of the **Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE)**, the best-known programme for young people in the UK. In the exam year it's best to cut back on activities rather than drop them completely: 1–2 hours of activity a week reduces stress and gives an answer to "What have you done outside education?" on applications.

Area	Year 11 examples	Skills it builds	Tip
Physical (sport & dance)	Some movement 2–3 times a week, even if short; carry on with a team sport through the season	Adaptability / Resilience, Teamwork	Exercise reduces exam anxiety and helps sleep.
Skills	Graded music exams, a GCSE in a home language, first aid, coding	Creativity, Independence	Certificates are concrete evidence on applications.
Volunteering	Monthly, until the exam period; can be stepped up again in the summer	Teamwork, Leadership	A strong example for application statements.
Work and summer experience	A part-time job (from 16), summer schools, volunteering, work experience	Independence, Speaking	Make the most of the summer after the exams.
DofE	For those doing Silver/Gold: pause during the exam period and finish in the summer	Leadership, Planning	Plan the school's DofE timetable around the exams.

Full list: more than 440 activities (sport, arts, science, volunteering...) and the skills each one builds are included in the UKER guidance pack.

The Year 11 roadmap

"Patience is a virtue." — Proverb

Stage	When / focus	What to do	Hours a week
September - mocks	Strengthen the foundations	Year 10 gaps; topic-based questions; open days and applications	~8-10 hours
Mock period	November-January, depending on school	1 full paper per subject 3 weeks before the mocks; then go through the mistakes	~10-12 hours
January - Easter	Close the gaps	Red topics; 3-5 past papers a week; NEA and oral exams	~12-15 hours
Easter holidays	Intensive revision	3 blocks × ~1.5 hours a day; full, timed papers	4-5 hours a day
Exam period	Usually mid-May - late June	Follow the exam timetable: the next day's exam first; no new topics	Depends on the timetable
August	Results day	Usually the 3rd or 4th Thursday of August; have Plan B ready	—

6 steps for a past paper: 1) Choose a paper for the right exam board and tier. 2) Time yourself, phone in another room. 3) Mark it in red pen with the mark scheme. 4) Record the score in the GCSE Tracker. 5) Mark the topics where marks were lost as red. 6) Retry the same type of questions 2 weeks later. The most recent series are open only to schools for a while and may be kept for mocks.

Post-16 options

Option	What is it?	Usually required (varies by provider)
A Level	Sixth form / college; usually 3 subjects; the most common route to university	Usually 5 GCSEs at 4-5+; often a 6 in the chosen subjects, and frequently a 7 for Maths/sciences
T Level	A 2-year technical course; ~20% spent on an industry placement	Usually 5 GCSEs at 4+ (including English and Maths)
BTEC / Applied	An applied vocational course; on its own or alongside A Levels	Usually 4-5 GCSEs at 4+
Apprenticeship	Paid work with training; you apply to the employer	For Level 3, usually 5 GCSEs at 4+ (including English & Maths)
Important rule	—	Students who don't get a 4 in English or Maths continue studying that subject from 16 to 18

UKER's extra files for Years 10-11

File	What's inside?
Year 11 Study and Tracking Pack	Roadmap, example and blank weekly plans, study leave daily plan, exam day checklist, post-16 application tracker

GCSE Tracker (Excel)	Past paper tracking by subject (score, %, grade), Topic Checklist (Red/Amber/Green), grade tracking and key dates
GCSE Past Paper List	Papers for each subject; tick ✓/X in the Higher/Foundation columns (PDF + Excel)

Exam day checklist

- **The day before:** summary cards and quick questions only; black pen + spare, ruler, calculator, clear pencil case, water bottle with the label removed; check the exam time and room; early to bed.
- **Exam morning:** breakfast; leave at least 20 minutes early; phones and smartwatches don't go into the exam room.
- **After the exam:** no post-mortems; a short break, some movement, food; plan for the next exam.

Unifrog: through your school or UKER

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." — Aristotle

Unifrog is the careers and applications platform used by many schools in England. If your school uses Unifrog, your child logs in with the account the school provides. If your school doesn't provide Unifrog, you can request an account from UKER (ukegitimrehberi.co.uk). Year 11 students see these tools (Post 16 Intentions and the Uni & Employer library are new); others are under "All tools":

Section	What is it for?	A small step for Year 11
Post 16 Intentions (new)	Dream career, Plan A and Plan B; the school sees the post-16 plan here	Fill it in in September; update it in March
Work environments profile	A quiz showing which working environments would suit them	Compare with Plan A/B
Quiz profile	Summary of all quizzes; career and subject suggestions	Use it when choosing A Level / T Level subjects
Careers library	Career profiles; routes in	The entry requirements for Plan A and Plan B
Subjects library	Profiles of A Level and university subjects	Look into the subjects to take at sixth form
Uni & Employer library (new)	University and employer profiles	Look at 3 profiles
Courses	Short courses and virtual work experience	1 course for the summer
CV / Résumé	A CV builder	Update it before applying
Skills	STAR examples for the 12 skills	2-3 examples for interviews
Interactions	Meetings recorded by the school or an adviser	Careers meetings are recorded here

Tip: Be specific in Activities entries (e.g. "We collected 40 parcels for the food bank"). In Year 12, the UCAS personal statement, university and apprenticeship tools come to the fore. Your school may use a different platform (e.g. Xello, Start); the idea is the same: explore, record, update regularly.

10 tips for parents (Year 11)

“Do not be afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still.” — Chinese proverb

- **Don't feed the anxiety:** a calm, organised home is worth more than any extra tuition.
- **See mocks as a diagnosis:** the mock grade isn't “final”; it's a list of where to focus.
- **Track application dates together:** open days, deadlines, interviews.
- **Talk about Plan B:** students with a Plan B go into exams more relaxed.
- **Phones and sleep:** phone out of the room while studying and at night; 8–9 hours' sleep.
- **Food and movement:** regular meals; at least 30 minutes outside every day.
- **Deciding on tuition:** talk to the teacher first; if the red topics are clear, short and targeted support.
- **Stay in touch with school:** at parents' evening, ask about predicted grades and where marks are being lost.
- **Home language:** if your child is taking a GCSE in a home language this year, past papers and speaking practice.
- **Don't compare, celebrate:** whatever the result, celebrate two years of hard work.

Resources: which platform? Where can I find books?

Which online platform? Little and often

This is the question parents ask most. The rule is simple: **use no more than 3 platforms:** the one your school provides + IXL + one free resource for revision. Too many platforms means none of them gets used regularly.

Platform	What for?	Cost	How to use it in Year 11
Your school's platform	Sparx, Hegarty, Seneca, Educake etc. homework	Paid by the school	Always first: complete all set homework
IXL	Year 11 skills practice in Maths, English and Science; instant feedback	Membership (can be requested from UKER)	2–3 × 20 min a week on that week's class topics
Oak National Academy	Video lessons + short quizzes	Free	Rewatch a topic that was missed or not understood
BBC Bitesize (GCSE)	Short explanations, videos and tests	Free	Topic revision, a quick review before tests
Corbettmaths	Maths videos and “5-a-day” questions	Free	A daily maths habit with 5 questions
Duolingo	Foreign language practice	Basic version free	10 min a day in the language learned at school
Unifrog	Career exploration, activity log, Read-Watch-Listen	School account; otherwise can be requested from UKER	1–2 tasks a month (see the monthly checklist)

Where can I find books?

- **School library:** the easiest route; ask the librarian for suggestions.
- **Local council library:** membership is free. If a book isn't on the shelf, it can be reserved from another branch.

- **E-books and audiobooks:** borrow them free with the same library card through your council's app (Libby or BorrowBox).
- **Second-hand:** charity shops, Oxfam Books and online second-hand booksellers are great value.
- **Books in your home language:** many council libraries have world-language collections (ask your library); community centres and supplementary schools often lend books; visits to family abroad are a good chance to stock up.
- **Swap with friends:** a “book swap” with families of the same age is both cheap and motivating.

Two languages, one advantage

“To have another language is to possess a second soul.” — Attributed to Charlemagne

For children who speak another language at home, being bilingual is one of their biggest advantages. Strengthening the home language through reading and writing deepens family ties today and opens academic and career opportunities later:

- **GCSEs in home languages:** exam boards such as Pearson Edexcel and AQA offer GCSEs (and often A Levels) in many community languages, including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Polish, Russian, Turkish and Urdu. If your school doesn't offer one, your child can sit it as a private candidate. If they haven't taken it yet, Year 11 isn't the last chance, but it is the best time: the exams are in May-June, and private candidates usually need to register with an exam centre early in the year.
- **In the eyes of universities and employers:** a second language is concrete evidence of communication, cross-cultural understanding and adaptability. The Unifrog talk *Grow Up, Learn Another Language* (Gaston Dorren, TED) covers this.
- **Practice at home:** past papers in the language (listening, reading, writing); one piece of writing a week on GCSE topics (family, school, the environment, technology, the future); conversation at home for speaking practice.
- **Keep it manageable:** as this is the exam year, home-language reading can be kept short; if it's a struggle, carry on with easier books from previous years.

Month-by-month checklist

“Little drops of water make the mighty ocean.” — Proverb

Each month: 3 small steps (Academic · Activity · Growth & Careers) + 1 suggestion from Unifrog's Read, Watch, Listen + 1 book. If you speak another language at home, add a book in that language too. The calendar is flexible: if you finish a month early, move on; if you fall behind, just carry on in order. Tick the boxes together with your child.

September · Planning the final year

- ☐ **Academic:** RAG list + target grades up to date; the Year 11 weekly plan
- ☐ **Activity:** 4–6 options: sixth form / college / apprenticeship
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** Unifrog Post 16 Intentions: Plan A + Plan B
- ☐ **Read (Unifrog):** Using narratology, stylistics, pragmatics, intertextuality in analysing passages of writing – Michael Rosen (article)
- ☐ **Read:** Nineteen Eighty-Four – George Orwell

October · Open days

- ☐ **Academic:** topic-based past paper questions + IXL
- ☐ **Activity:** at least 2 open days + notes
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** update the CV
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** How to learn any language easily – Matthew Youlden (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde – R. L. Stevenson

November · Applications

- ☐ **Academic:** 1 full past paper per subject before the mocks
- ☐ **Activity:** sixth form / college applications
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a “Why this provider?” paragraph + 2 STAR examples
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** Why societies collapse – Jared Diamond (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** Never Let Me Go – Kazuo Ishiguro

December · Mock period

- ☐ **Academic:** mock exams: a plan + self-testing
- ☐ **Activity:** exercise 3 times a week
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** application tracker + the Uni & Employer library
- ☐ **Read (Unifrog):** Happy hormones: what are they & how can you boost them? – Atlas Biomed (article)
- ☐ **Read:** Frankenstein – Mary Shelley

January · After the mocks

- ☐ **Academic:** mock results → the red list
- ☐ **Activity:** apprenticeship vacancies (if relevant)
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** interview preparation (5 questions)
- ☐ **Read (Unifrog):** Twelve Ways Young People Can Get Involved in Politics – Emily Beever (article)
- ☐ **Read:** Mindset – Carol Dweck

February · Red topics

- ☐ **Academic:** 3-5 past papers a week (sections)
- ☐ **Activity:** NEA deadlines + oral exam preparation
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a table of offers and their conditions
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** What's hidden under the Greenland ice sheet? – Kristin Poinar (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** Pride and Prejudice – Jane Austen

March · The home straight

- ☐ **Academic:** one-page summaries + full papers
- ☐ **Activity:** oral and practical exams
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** update Plan A/B
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** Buildings that blend nature and city – Jeanne Gang (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** Long Walk to Freedom – Nelson Mandela

April · Easter revision

- ☐ **Academic:** Easter: 3 blocks a day, timed papers
- ☐ **Activity:** 30 minutes outside every day
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** exam timetable + study leave plan
- ☐ **Read (Unifrog):** since feeling is first – e. e. cummings (poem)
- ☐ **Read:** your own Shakespeare set text (re-read)

May · Exams

- ☐ **Academic:** GCSE exams: the next day's exam comes first
- ☐ **Activity:** sleep and short walks
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** the exam day checklist
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** All Creatures Great and Small (TV series)
- ☐ **Read:** Becoming – Michelle Obama

June-July · Exams end, a new beginning

- ☐ **Academic:** the last exams; summer tasks
- ☐ **Activity:** summer: volunteering, a job, a summer school
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a results day plan + CV
- ☐ **Read (Unifrog):** The Economist (weekly magazine)
- ☐ **Read:** The Old Man and the Sea – Ernest Hemingway

The watch/listen suggestions come from Unifrog's Read, Watch, Listen library. If your school doesn't provide Unifrog, you can request an account from UKER or find the same content free on TED and BBC Sounds. TED talks are made for adults: we recommend watching together, talking about them and turning on subtitles if needed. The books are commonly recommended for Year 11 readers (ages 15–16); read your own GCSE set texts first. If one doesn't grab your child's interest, choose another for that month.

Would you like one-to-one support?

The UKER guidance programme offers one-to-one follow-up for each student, with monthly tasks, a skills map and an activity log. Find out more: ukegitimrehberi.co.uk

Sources: Unifrog student dashboard (Year 11 tools and the 12 skills); findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk; JCQ exam timetable (jcq.org.uk); AQA past paper release schedule (aqa.org.uk); The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (dofe.org); DofE activity list (dofe.org); UCAS personal statement questions (ucas.com). Information correct as of October 2026.