

Year 10: The GCSE Journey Begins

Year 10 is the first half of the two-year GCSE journey. Lessons get more intense, NEA/coursework starts in some subjects, most schools hold Year 10 exams or mocks at the end of the year, and many students do work experience. The key to this year: **practising exam questions as each topic finishes**, spotting gaps early, and starting Year 11 on solid foundations rather than “from scratch”.

Know this first: there's work experience in Year 10.

At most schools, students spend a week in a workplace towards the end of Year 10. It's the first chance to see the real world of work, add a concrete experience to the CV, and find an answer to the “give me an example” question in future sixth form, apprenticeship and university applications.

The earlier, the better: good placements fill up quickly, and some schools ask students to find their own. Start researching in September and applying in November; aim to have the placement confirmed by January.

Where to look: Futures for All (futuresforall.org), the free platform from the Speakers for Schools charity, offers in-person and online work experience and “insight days” with hundreds of employers for state school students aged 14–19. Also try the school's list, family and community contacts, local businesses and the virtual work experience courses 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. Questions after every topic: past paper questions when each topic finishes; track gaps as Red/Amber/Green. **2. Regular revision:** a weekly plan, self-testing, and full past papers towards the end of the year. **3. Getting to know the future:** work experience, a CV and post-16 options (A Level, T Level, apprenticeship).

“No pain, no gain.” — Proverb

Why now? What do universities and employers look for?

From Year 10, what students do starts to count directly: GCSE grades are used for sixth form and apprenticeship applications, and Year 11 predicted grades build on the work done in Year 10. 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 10 this means: regular past paper practice, work experience, a first CV and STAR examples.

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 10 example
Reading	Understanding a text and picking out information	Set texts, 30 minutes' reading a day
Writing	Expressing ideas clearly and in an organised way	English Language writing questions, CV, cover letter
Numeracy	Working confidently with numbers	Maths past papers, IXL
Planning	Setting goals and mapping out how to reach them	Weekly study plan, NEA deadline calendar
Listening	Taking in information and ideas accurately	Lessons, teacher feedback, work experience
Speaking	Explaining your ideas out loud	Language speaking exams, communicating on work experience
Teamwork	Working with others towards a shared goal	Group projects, a team sport
Leadership	Motivating and guiding others	Prefect / student leader, mentoring
Problem solving	Finding a solution to a situation	Exam questions, required practicals
Creativity / Innovation	Coming up with new ideas	NEA/coursework, art, DT
Independence	Working effectively on your own	Managing their own revision plan
Adaptability / Resilience	Adjusting to change and keeping going after setbacks	Bouncing back after a disappointing test result

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	~1.5 hours on school days, ~3 hours at weekends; 30–40 minute sessions per subject (Year 10 weekly plan template)	Planning, Independence
Topic-based past paper questions	10–15 exam questions when each topic finishes; check with the mark scheme	Problem solving, Independence
Full past papers	A few times a year, timed; especially in January and April–May (before the end-of-year exams)	Adaptability / Resilience, Planning
Topic checklist (RAG)	Every topic Red/Amber/Green; revision starts with the reds	Planning, Problem solving
Maths	The school's platform + IXL Year 10 Maths (2 × 20 min a week) + Corbettmaths 5-a-day	Numeracy, Problem solving
Science: required practicals	A one-page summary for each practical: method, variables, results	Reading, Problem solving
English Literature	Quotation cards for set texts; 30 minutes' reading a day	Reading, Writing
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. Keeping activities going in Year 10 matters: even during busy GCSE years, 1–2 hours of regular activity a week reduces stress and strengthens the CV. Students who have finished DofE Bronze can move on to Silver.

Area	Year 10 examples	Skills it builds	Tip
Physical (sport & dance)	Regular sport (at least 1–2 times a week), team or individual; cut back during exams rather than stopping	Adaptability / Resilience, Teamwork, Independence	Exercise reduces exam stress and improves focus.
Skills	A musical instrument (graded exams), coding, a GCSE in a home language, first aid, public speaking, photography	Creativity, Problem solving, Independence	A certificate or grade in a skill is concrete evidence on a CV.
Volunteering	Regular volunteering, mentoring Year 7s, a charity shop (may have a minimum age of 16), community or faith group events	Teamwork, Leadership, Listening	DofE Silver volunteering can run for up to 6 months.
Work experience	At most schools, a week in the summer term of Year 10; Futures for All, the school's list, family contacts, local businesses; virtual work experience courses	Speaking, Teamwork, Independence	Start looking in September–November; popular placements fill early.

Expeditions and residentials

DofE Silver (from Year 10), Cadets, Scouts, summer schools

Leadership, Planning, Adaptability / Resilience

The Silver expedition is 3 days and 2 nights.

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

Past papers: when and how in Year 10?

"Patience is a virtue." — Proverb

Past papers (exam papers from previous years) are the most effective way to prepare for GCSEs. But in Year 10 the aim isn't to "get through lots of papers"; it's to **reinforce each topic with the right questions as it finishes**:

When	What?	How?
September - December	Topic-based questions	10–15 exam questions on each topic once it's finished (sites like Maths Genie, Corbettmaths and Physics & Maths Tutor sort questions by topic).
January	First full papers	One full, timed past paper in Maths, English Language and one science. The aim is to get to know the exam format, not the grade.
February - March	Red topics	Topics where marks were lost on the full paper → topic-based questions + IXL / Oak.
April - May	Preparing for end-of-year exams	At least one full past paper per subject; mistakes go on the Topic Checklist.
Summer	Close the reds	Two red topics per subject, to start Year 11 with a cleaner slate.

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.

Note: exam boards make the most recent series available only to schools for a while (AQA releases them publicly after about a year). Schools may keep some recent papers for mocks, so ask a teacher.

UKER's extra files for Years 10–11

Files we've prepared that you can use alongside this guide (available on request from UKER):

File	What's inside?
Year 10 Weekly Study Plan	An example plan + a blank plan + a guide for parents (PDF, Word, CSV)
GCSE Past Paper List	Papers from 2020–2025 for each subject; tick ✓/✗ in the Higher/Foundation columns (PDF + Excel)
GCSE Tracker (Excel)	Past paper tracking by subject (score, %, grade), Topic Checklist (Red/Amber/Green), grade tracking and key dates
Year 11 Study and Tracking Pack	Year 11 roadmap, study leave plan, exam day checklist, post-16 options

Work experience

- **When:** at most schools, a week in the summer term of Year 10; some schools ask students to find their own placement. Start researching in September and applying in November.
- **How to find one:** Futures for All (futuresforall.org, from Speakers for Schools; free; search by location with the Work Experience Finder), the school's list, family and community contacts (including local community businesses), local workplaces, the council, hospitals, schools. Apply with a short email + CV.
- **Online options:** online experiences on Futures for All and the virtual work experience courses in Unifrog Courses (with organisations such as the NHS, the Metropolitan Police and ICAEW) are a good complement to a real placement.
- **Afterwards:** a three-sentence diary each day; log it in Unifrog; add it to the CV; send the employer a thank-you email.

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 10 students see these tools (CV / Résumé is new); Activities and Read, Watch, Listen are under "All tools":

Section	What is it for?	A small step for Year 10
Skills profile	A skills quiz	At the start of the year, if not done yet
Quiz profile	Summary of all quizzes; career and subject suggestions	Use it when thinking about post-16 options
Careers library	Career profiles; routes in (A Level, T Level, apprenticeship)	5 careers → which route?
Subjects library	Profiles of A Level and university subjects	Look into 3 subjects they're considering for sixth form
Know-how library	Guides: work experience, CVs, exam stress	Read the work experience guide
Courses	Virtual work experience and careers courses	1 course over half term
CV / Résumé (new)	A CV builder	First draft in September; update after work experience
Skills	STAR examples for the 12 skills	At least 2 examples a year
Interactions	Meetings and work experience 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 11, sixth form/college and apprenticeship applications 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 10)

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

- **Progress, not grades:** see Year 10 exam results not as “final” but as a list of what to work on next.
- **Red topics are normal:** what matters is spotting them early, so they aren't left until Year 11.
- **Plan + flexibility:** have a weekly plan, but also a catch-up plan for when an evening is missed.
- **Phones:** in another room while studying; notifications off.
- **Work experience:** use your network (friends, community), but let your child write the application.
- **Don't drop activities:** cut back, but don't stop completely; sport and hobbies are medicine for stress.
- **Stay in touch with school:** at parents' evening, ask “Which topics is my child losing the most marks on?”
- **Sleep:** 8–10 hours; sleep rather than late-night study before an exam.
- **Home language:** if your child is taking a GCSE in a home language early, this is the year; if not, keep up reading and writing at home.
- **Don't compare:** every child's path and pace is different.

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 10
Your school's platform	Sparx, Hegarty, Seneca, Educake etc. homework	Paid by the school	Always first: complete all set homework
IXL	Year 10 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 for their age.
- **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. For those taking it early, Year 10 is a good 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.
- **Choose by level:** books in the home language at this age can be demanding; if it's a struggle, carry on with easier books, and check that themes suit your child.

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 · The GCSE journey begins

- ☐ **Academic:** board/tier for each subject; the Year 10 weekly plan
- ☐ **Activity:** work experience: dates + a Futures for All account + 5 workplaces
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a first CV with Unifrog CV / Résumé
- ☐ **Listen (Unifrog):** Grammar Girl: Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing – Mignon Fogarty (podcast)
- ☐ **Read:** Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck

October · Topic by topic

- ☐ **Academic:** 10-15 past paper questions when each topic finishes + RAG
- ☐ **Activity:** keep activities going
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** Skills profile + 3 careers, 3 further subjects
- ☐ **Listen (Unifrog):** Women in Math: The Limit Does Not Exist – Damien Adams (podcast)
- ☐ **Read:** Lord of the Flies – William Golding

November · Maths and science foundations

- ☐ **Academic:** IXL Year 10 Maths + required practical summaries
- ☐ **Activity:** work experience: first 3 applications
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a table of post-16 options
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** The four things you need to know about the energy you use – Jordan Wirfs-Brock (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** Factfulness – Hans Rosling

December · Deadlines

- ☐ **Academic:** NEA deadlines + parents' evening
- ☐ **Activity:** volunteering / leadership (3+ hours)
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** 2 STAR examples (Skills)
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** What is Sociology? (Crash Course) – Nicole Sweeney (video)
- ☐ **Read:** A Christmas Carol – Charles Dickens

January · The first full past paper

- ☐ **Academic:** first 3 full, timed past papers → Excel
- ☐ **Activity:** work experience: confirm the placement / follow up
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** CV + cover letter
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** How philosophy can save your life – Jules Evans (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** The Hate U Give – Angie Thomas

February · Red topics

- ☐ **Academic:** red topics: IXL / Oak / questions
- ☐ **Activity:** a sixth form / college open day
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a virtual work experience course
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** The Future of Clean Energy (Crash Course) – Dr Shini Somara (video)
- ☐ **Read:** Prisoners of Geography – Tim Marshall

March · Literature and language

- ☐ **Academic:** quotation cards + IXL Year 10 English
- ☐ **Activity:** apply for prefect / a leadership role
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** home-language GCSE past papers (if taking it early)
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** Mind Field – Michael Stevens (Vsauce) (series)
- ☐ **Read:** An Inspector Calls – J. B. Priestley

April · Easter revision

- ☐ **Academic:** 1 full past paper per subject + knowledge cards
- ☐ **Activity:** exercise 3 times a week
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** a work experience preparation list
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** Study Session playlists – Lofi Girl (video)
- ☐ **Read:** Fahrenheit 451 – Ray Bradbury

May · Year 10 exams

- ☐ **Academic:** Year 10 exams: a plan + results into Excel
- ☐ **Activity:** home-language GCSE exam (if taking it)
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** 3 sixth form + 3 apprenticeship areas
- ☐ **Watch (Unifrog):** An unexpected tool for understanding inequality: abstract math – Eugenia Cheng (TED talk)
- ☐ **Read:** I Am Malala – Malala Yousafzai

June-July · Work experience and the bridge to Year 11

- ☐ **Academic:** record results; Year 11 targets; a summer plan
- ☐ **Activity:** work experience + a diary
- ☐ **Growth & Careers:** log it + CV; open day dates
- ☐ **Read (Unifrog):** Money: A User's Guide – Laura Whateley (book)
- ☐ **Read:** To Kill a Mockingbird – Harper Lee

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 10 readers (ages 14–15); read your own GCSE set texts first. If one doesn't grab your child's interest, choose another for that month. Ways to find books are on the resources page.

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: Futures for All / Speakers for Schools (futuresforall.org); Unifrog student dashboard (Year 10 tools and the 12 skills, October 2026); 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.