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A Level Results Day 2026 Your Options - Whichever Way It Goes

A Level results land on Thursday 13 August 2026, from around 8am. Two years of work condensed into one slip of paper and everyone acting like the next forty years hinge on it.

They don't.

Whatever that slip says, you have more routes open to you on results morning than at almost any other point in your life.

This guide covers both sides: what to do if it goes to plan and exactly what to do if it doesn't.

One rule before anything else: no decision has to be made in the first hour.

Universities are not deleting your future at 9am.

Read your options, make one call at a time.

Take your time, don't make impulsive decisions.

The world has not stopped - it will wait for you to get to your destination when ready !

If your results went right

You met your firm offer

Congratulations, you're in. UCAS Hub updates on the morning and your place is confirmed automatically. No phone calls needed.

Your job now is admin, not panic: confirm your accommodation, check your student finance is approved and pointed at the right university and read everything your uni sends over the next few weeks. Enrolment dates sneak up fast.

You did better than expected

Beat your offer comfortably? You can trade up. The old Adjustment scheme is gone (scrapped in 2021), so the route now is self-release into Clearing: you release yourself from your confirmed place through UCAS Hub, then apply to a more competitive course.

One warning and it matters. The moment you self-release, your original place is gone. Get a verbal offer from the new university on the phone first, before you press anything. Never release on hope.

You missed your firm but hit your insurance

Your insurance place confirms automatically. This is not a consolation prize. You chose that university yourself, for exactly this situation and it is a real, confirmed offer at a course you wanted. Plenty of people end up preferring their insurance choice once they arrive.

You're in, but not sure you want to go

That's allowed too. If uni suddenly feels wrong, you can ask your university about deferring for a year, look at degree apprenticeships (a degree, a salary and no tuition fees), or head into work and reapply later with your grades already banked. Results in hand are results forever. They don't expire.

If your results went wrong

First, breathe. Then read this in order.

Give yourself an hour to be human

Disappointing results sting and pretending otherwise helps nobody. Feel it, talk to someone you trust and skip the group chat grade comparison entirely. It never makes anyone feel better.

Then remember this: missing your grades says something about a handful of exam papers on a handful of days. It says nothing about your ability and even less about where you end up. Some of the sharpest people you'll ever work with took the scenic route.

Clearing: the biggest door on results day

If you missed both your firm and insurance offers, Clearing is how you can still start university this September. Tens of thousands of students find their place this way every year, including at big-name universities.

How it works: search live course vacancies on the UCAS website, phone the university's Clearing line directly and if they like what they hear, you'll get a verbal offer. You can then add that course as your Clearing choice in UCAS Hub from 1pm on results day.

Before you call, have ready: your grades, your UCAS Personal ID, your Clearing number from UCAS Hub and a two-minute answer to "why this course?" Find somewhere quiet, charge your phone and take notes.

Clearing for 2026 entry runs until 19 October, but the best courses fill within days. If uni is still the plan, this is a today job, not a next-week job.

Just missed by a grade or two? Call your firm anyway

Before you touch Clearing, phone the admissions team at your first-choice university. If you were close, they may still take you, or offer a similar course or a foundation year. It costs you one phone call and it works more often than people think.

Think a grade is wrong? Appeal it

If a mark looks genuinely off, speak to your school or college on results day. They can request a review of marking and there's a priority service for students whose university place depends on the outcome. Be aware that grades can go down as well as up in a review, so talk it through with a teacher first.

Resit and go again

If the grades don't reflect what you know, resitting is a completely legitimate route.

You can resit at your school or sixth form, at a local college, or through an accredited online course from home if the classroom environment was part of the problem. Home study means your own pace and your own schedule, which suits some people far better than a timetable ever did. Speak to your school first about re-enrolment and be honest with yourself about which setup actually gets you working.

Access to HE: university without A Levels

Not everyone reaches university through A Levels and you don't have to either. An Access to Higher Education Diploma is equivalent to three A Levels, is accepted by a wide range of UK universities through UCAS and is mostly coursework-based rather than exam-heavy. Around 20,000 people apply to university with one every year, often into nursing,

social work, teaching and similar degrees. If exams were the problem rather than the subject, this route removes them.

Apprenticeships: earn while you qualify

If you'd rather be paid to learn than pay to learn, apprenticeships run from Level 2 right up to degree level. A degree apprenticeship gets you a full degree, a salary and real work experience, with your employer covering the fees. Competition for the best ones is fierce and applications run year-round, so start looking now rather than in September.

Vocational qualifications: the direct route

Already know the job you want? A vocational qualification is often the fastest way there. An AAT qualification puts you on the path to accountancy, a CompTIA or similar certification opens IT support and trade and fitness qualifications can have you job-ready within months. Employers in these fields care about the certificate and the skills, not the A Level grades that came before them.

Work now, decide later

Going straight into a job is not giving up. A year of real work builds experience, references, savings and a much clearer idea of what you actually want. Your results don't expire, so university, an apprenticeship or a course will all still be there if you want them in a year. A gap year with a plan (work, travel, volunteering, a skill) beats three years on a course you picked in a panic.

The honest bit

There's no single route through this. The person who sailed into their firm choice and the person who rebuilt their plan over a long weekend in August can end up in the same graduate job, the same trade, the same startup, five years from now. Employers care about what you can do and results day is one Thursday out of thousands.

Whichever column you're in today, pick your next step, take it and keep moving. That's the whole game.

Some Important Numbers

Results, careers and next steps

Exam Results Helpline (National Careers Service) – 0800 100 900.

Open Thursday 13 August to Friday 28 August 2026; qualified careers advisers for students, parents or carers, covering Clearing, apprenticeships, college places, jobs and staying on at school.

National Careers Service (year-round) – same number, 0800 100 900.

Text 07766 413 219, Mon–Fri 8am–8pm, Sat 10am–5pm, for anyone 13+ in England.

Skills Development Scotland Results Helpline – 0800 917 8000.

Their results helpline opens 4 August 2026, with advisers available year-round Mon–Fri 9am–5pm.

National Apprenticeship Service – 0800 015 0400 for apprenticeship applications and vacancies.

University Admin

UCAS – 0371 468 0 468 for application, Track/Hub and Clearing process queries.

Note: UCAS does not give careers advice and directs students to the Exam Results Helpline for that.

Student Finance England – 0300 100 0607. Mon–Fri 8am–8pm, weekends 9am–4pm.

Critical for anyone switching course or uni via Clearing, as their finance application needs updating.

Talking It Through With Someone

Childline – 0800 1111 (under 19s, free, confidential)

The Mix – 0808 808 4994 (under 25s, free).

Samaritans – 116 123 (24/7, any age).

Shout – text 85258 (24/7 text support).

YoungMinds Parents' Helpline – 0808 802 5544

Mind Infoline – 0300 123 3393.