

A Level Subject Choices – Additional Information (October 2020)

Your choice of A level subjects in Year 11 can have a significant impact on the course options available to you at university, apprenticeships and employment. When selecting your A level subjects, if you are considering progression to university degree courses, you need to be aware of the likely entry requirements, in terms of both the grades you need to achieve and the actual subjects you study. As the number of top grades achieved at A level has steadily increased over the last five years, many universities have become more specific about the qualifications they expect of their applicants.

- If you have **already decided on a course** that you would like to study at university, we recommend that you take a close look at the course requirements at a number of universities before you finalise your A level choices, to check that your A levels will be suitable for your application.
- If you have **not yet decided on a course** that you would like to study at university, we recommend that you select subjects to maximise your potential course choice. Certain A level subjects are considered either essential or useful for a number of degree courses, so choosing one or more of these will help you keep your higher education options open.
- Whether or not you have an idea of the course you want to study at university, having the right information now will give you more options when the time comes to make your mind up. We recommend that you take a look at the '**Russell Group: Informed Choices**' guidance, which includes advice on the best subject combinations for a wide range of university courses:
<https://russellgroup.ac.uk/policy/publications/informed-choices/>

Those universities offering the more traditional, 'academic' degree courses are more demanding than others in what they expect of their applicants. Cambridge has gone furthest in this respect, publishing very clear guidance on its entrance requirements and even going so far as to identify subjects that, in its view, 'do not provide a good preparation for the courses that the University of Cambridge offers.' Full information about Cambridge's entrance requirements can be found at the following place on its website, particularly in the section 'Course Requirements':

<http://www.cam.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/requirements/#course>

Cambridge has taken this very public lead in its attempt to distinguish between the growing number of Grade A applicants, and the London School of Economics (LSE) is similarly explicit, but increasingly the other 'research' universities that offer the most competitive theoretical, exam-based degrees are also now placing a greater emphasis on grades achieved in 'academic' A level subjects. For example:

- Government at LSE prefer 'at least two traditional academic subjects' (as do most other courses at LSE):
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/howToApply/DepartmentalAdmissionsCriteria2016/government.aspx>
- Oxford publishes a table of 'Essential', 'Recommended' and 'Helpful' A level subjects for all of its degree courses: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/courses/entrance-requirements/table-entrance-requirements>

For Medicine, A level Chemistry is often essential, plus at least one from Biology, Maths and Physics, but the admissions criteria for each Medical School vary and do need to be checked individually.

You can easily find out a good deal from the universities' own websites, which can be accessed either directly (e.g. <http://www.sgul.ac.uk/>) or via the central UCAS (Universities & Colleges Admissions Service) website (www.ucas.com).

Officially, the standard approach from the 'research' universities is that no more than **one** of a student's A level subjects should be a 'non-preferred' subject. However, the suspicion remains that if a high demand course receives many strong applications from students with a straight set of three traditional A levels, a student with one 'non-preferred' A level may in reality be at a disadvantage.

As universities are now becoming more transparent about what they are really looking for, applicants need to make sure that they are better informed at an earlier stage. Although maximising your grades at GCSE this summer is obviously the current top priority, spending some time looking very closely at university requirements may also turn out to be time well spent.

If you would like some further guidance once you have looked into this, come and see either me or one of the Assistant Heads of Sixth Form in Upper School.

Mr J Hillier
Head of Sixth Form