

Making informed A Level choices

What subjects should I take? What subjects can give me the most options?

The reasons you may select a subject at A Level are:

- You have enjoyed and been good at the subject in the past and think you will achieve a high grade in it.
- You need the subject to enter a particular career or course.
- You have not studied the subject before but have looked into it and think it will suit your strengths.

Your A Level choices will be critical in determining the university courses open to you.

Below is a list of popular university course choices and the A Level subject requirements. Please note that this list is not exhaustive. The most up to date information is available at <https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/> and <https://www.ucas.com/> and through individual university websites.

For subjects including English Literature, Geography, History, and Mathematics it is essential to have studied the chosen degree subject to A Level.

<i>Accounting & Finance</i>	Usually no essential subject but Mathematics could be useful. Mathematics is essential at a small number of universities. If Maths is not taken at A Level good grades will be required in GCSE Maths by some institutions.
<i>Art & Design</i>	Fine Art, Textiles or Photography. Art portfolio required. Students normally complete a one year Art Foundation after A Level before progressing onto a BA Hons degree.
<i>Actuarial Science</i>	Mathematics is essential. Further Mathematics and Economics could be useful.
<i>Architecture</i>	Many courses prefer a mixture of arts and science subjects. Some will require Art. A portfolio is essential
<i>Business & Management</i>	No specific requirements although Mathematics is a useful subject. Some universities may require Mathematics GCSE at grade 7 or 6 (A or B) Management Science courses typically require A Level Maths. To study Management at LSE/UCL you require A Level Maths
<i>Computer Science</i>	Varies from institution to institution but typically Maths is essential and one other science or technology subject is useful/desirable.

Economics	Mathematics is usually required. Economics and Further Mathematics are useful (Further Mathematics is highly desirable at certain institutions)
Engineering	Mathematics and Physics normally required. Further Mathematics useful.
Law	Although there are no specific requirements English Literature, History or other essay subjects are useful.
Media, Communication, TV and Film Production, Film Studies	Media Studies or other creative courses are useful and in some cases a requirement. Essay based subjects useful.
Medicine	Chemistry, Biology and one other science will keep all medical schools open but only two sciences, including Chemistry, required for most places. See https://www.themedicportal.com/ for further details.
Modern Languages	French, Spanish, German at degree level require the subject to A Level. Other languages (Arabic, Chinese, Italian, Japanese etc.) can normally be started if a student has completed a modern language to A Level.
Music	There are any variations of Music course available at university and specialist colleges. Most will require A Level Music/Music Technology and some may also accept practical grade 8.
Politics	Although there are no specific requirements essay subjects are useful. Students find History and Economics useful subjects.
Psychology	You are likely to need one or two sciences. Psychology A Level counts as a science.
Sciences	Biology, Chemistry and Physics at degree level require the subject to A Level and normally one other science subject.
Sociology	Although there are no specific requirements, essay subjects are useful.
Theatre Studies	Theatre Studies is recommended and an arts and humanities mix useful.

Hurtwood students go on to study a wide range of courses at a diverse range of Higher Education Institutions. Below are some examples of the subject combinations taken at A Level and the higher education destinations.

I am reading Physics at Imperial College London having studied Physics, Economics, Mathematics and Further Mathematics to A Level.

I am reading Economics and Philosophy at London School of Economics having studied Mathematics, Economics and Theatre Studies to A Level.

I am reading HSPS (Human, Social and Political Sciences) at University of Cambridge having studied English Literature, Geography, Economics and an EPQ.

I am studying Performance Costume at University of Edinburgh having studied Fine Art, Textiles Media Studies and an EPQ.

I am starting a Musical Theatre degree at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts having achieved A Levels in Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and an EPQ.

I am completing an Art Foundation at Camberwell, University of Arts London having studied Fine Art, Textiles and Media Studies at A Level.

I have just started at Tisch, New York University having completed A Levels in Theatre Studies, English Literature and Mathematics.

I am heading to the Cinema and Audiovisual School of Catalonia to start a film course having studied Spanish, French, Media Studies and Photography at A Level.

What are the GCSE/ IGCSE (or equivalent) requirements for universities?

GCSE/ IGCSE requirements for individual degree courses do vary but the standard requirement is GCSE / IGCSE English Language to grade C or above and GCSE/ IGCSE Mathematics at grade C or above. In the new GCSE grading system most universities will consider a 4 to be the equivalent of a C. That said, very competitive courses at very competitive universities may state more specific GCSE requirements.

E.g.

- Applicants interested in Medicine are normally required to have very good GCSEs in English, Maths and Science. It is not unusual for medical schools to look for 5+ 9s or 8s (A*s) at GCSE.
- For a degree in English some universities will look for applicants to have a GCSE in a modern or classical language.
- For a Business degree sometimes a 7 (A) grade or at least a 6 (B) grade is required in GCSE Maths.
- For some Psychology degrees a grade 6 or 7 (A or B) in Maths and Science is required.

If you have not completed GCSEs a number of overseas qualifications are accepted by universities in lieu of GCSE. These qualifications are useful supporting documentation for your application.

E.g.

- The *Attestat o (Polnom) Srednem Obschchem Obrazovanii* (Certificate of Secondary Education) is recognised as the Russian equivalent to GCSEs by UK universities. Students must achieve 5 or 4 in Mathematics for this to be the equivalent to A*/A/B at GCSE.
- The *Realschulabschluss* or *Mittlerer Schulabschluss* (Lower Secondary Education) is recognised by UK universities in lieu of GCSEs. Students must achieve 1 (sehr gut) or 2 (gut) in Mathematics for this to be seen as the equivalent to A*/A/B at GCSE.
- The *International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP)* is regarded as the equivalent to GCSE. Students must have studied English Language A and Mathematics to level 5, 6 or 7 for it to be the equivalent to A*/A/B at GCSE. Ideally students will have taken the eAssessments in English Language A and Mathematics for the qualification to be globally recognised.

If you hold any other qualifications please check with the Life Skills Team to see if they will be accepted by universities in place of GCSE.

Will I need IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or equivalent to study at a UK university?

IELTS assesses an individual's English language proficiency. IELTS tests all four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking. Candidates receive scores on a Band Scale from 1 to 9. The IELTS requirement of universities will vary but the minimum requirement for a number of institutions/ courses is 6.5 overall with no lower than 6.0 in each language skills. However, some of the leading universities and humanities based degrees may require 7.5 overall with a minimum of 7.0 in each language skill.

If English is not your first language the universities may ask you to complete IELTS as part of any offer they make. Some exemptions may apply (see below) but you will need to check the university requirements very carefully:

- If you have been educated in the English system throughout your secondary education and have already achieved a 9 - 7 (A or A*) in IGCSE English (First Language) or GCSE English Language.
- If you have completed the MYP in English and have completed the e-Assessment in English Language A with a 5 - 7.
- If you have been taught in English for a number of years and have achieved GCSE or IGCSE English Language and are also doing essay based subjects as part of your A Level programme.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I am interested in Oxford or Cambridge - what subjects should I select?

Firstly you will need outstanding GCSE results (or equivalent). Oxford University typical offers for students studying A Levels will range between A*A*A and AAA depending on the course. You will need to research the course requirements on the university websites www.ox.ac.uk and www.cam.ac.uk

2. I really want to go to LSE (London School of Economics) - any advice?

LSE is highly competitive and for many courses they have more than 12 candidates for every place. In the last few years the candidates from Hurtwood that have secured places for the most competitive courses at LSE have been very strong mathematicians who have shown breadth to their academic programme (e.g. Maths, Further Mathematics, Economics and History) and many have continued with 4 subjects through to A Level or have offered the EPQ. If you are a double Mathematician (Maths and FM) for certain courses at LSE you will need to two other A Level subjects.

3. I want to study in the USA - what is the best subject combination?

USA universities look for academically rigorous and demanding programmes. The top institutions in the US are as competitive as Oxbridge and not only will they be looking for excellence but they will be looking for consistency in your grades. The USA application process is very holistic; on top of a strong academic profile universities are looking for community minded individuals with lots of interests. You may need to complete SAT or ACT examinations for US universities; the standard of the mathematics questions on these tests is up to AS level therefore studying Mathematics can be useful.

4. I am native speaker of Russian, Chinese, German, Italian, Spanish, Polish . . . - is there any point in me completing the A Level?

A large number of universities in the UK recognise language A Levels when taken by native speakers and the grade you achieve can form part of your university offer. E.g. King's typical offer is A*AA but one of the grades could come from a native language. However, universities normally expect to see native languages as part of a 4 A Level programme (not instead of one of your other A Levels).

5. What is an EPQ? Is it useful?

The EPQ was designed to give students time to ask those deeper questions and learn how to use them as a starting point for research, development and reflection. Students are expected to make personal choices about the objectives of their project. Many universities now make slightly lower overall university offers to students achieving an A or A* in an EPQ.

For further information contact Jane Collier, Head of Life Skills

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