

## Subject Choices and Pathways

### How is a BTEC different to a GCSE?

BTECs tend to be more vocationally based qualifications, that provide the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in a field or subject. They are an alternative to the more theory-focused, classroom-based ways of learning which may not suit all learners.

The BTECs we offer are designed to be of a similar level of demand to GCSEs but they are assessed slightly differently. Dependent on the subject area; you will study a series of different units and complete a number assignments and tests that link to the theory work and practical exercises you have completed. Internally assessed assignments are set and marked by your teacher but are subject to external verification. There is also one external written or online exam that students are required to sit.

BTECs can be awarded at Level 2 or Level 1. The Level 2 grade is the equivalent of a GCSE grade between 9-4 (dependent upon final grade achieved), the Level 1 grade is equivalent to a GCSE grade between 3 and 1. Students are graded with a pass, merit or distinction (highest achievable); these grades are collated at the end of the course and students awarded either Distinction\* (8/9 at GCSE), Distinction (7 at GCSE), Merit (5/6 at GCSE), Pass (4 at GCSE) or a Level 1 Pass (3-1 at GCSE).

### Why do I have to pick a subject from Section A?

All students need to pick an EBacc subject in Section A from a choice of Computing, French, Geography, German, History, Latin, Mandarin or Spanish. This is to ensure they have a broad and balanced range of subjects. It will enable them to be more flexible in their future choices – which is helpful if they are not sure what they want to do yet.

### Why do I have to pick a reserve subject?

As a school we try to allow our students as much flexibility as possible in their choices whilst aiming to ensure students follow the most appropriate courses for their current/future interests and abilities. There are however timetabling constraints, and there may be some rare cases where it is not possible for a specific combination of choices to work in the final three option blocks. We also have limited physical resources which may limit the number of students able to choose popular subjects.

It should also be noted that courses attracting very small numbers of students will not run for financial and timetabling reasons.

### **Why have I been placed in pathway 1/2?**

As a school, we believe it is important that students choose the courses that will give them the greatest chance of success and the opportunity to achieve the best possible results whilst balancing their interests and future aspirations. The decisions as to which pathway students are placed on is based on a wide range of factors and aims to guide students towards the most appropriate courses for them. Pathway 2 students do not have to take a BTEC subject, they can choose 3 GCSE's if they wish, but we recommend they consider BTECs as they may be more appropriate in terms of the course structure/assessment.

### **I am in Pathway 1 but I would like to choose a BTEC subject**

As a school we aim to ensure students follow the most appropriate courses for their current/future interests and abilities however there are timetabling constraints. Places on the BTEC subjects are limited and priority is given to those students on pathway 2. If there is a BTEC that a student is very keen to study, they must still make choices from the GCSE subjects on the online form. However, they should indicate in the additional comments box at the bottom of the form which BTEC they would like to study in place of which GCSE subject and why and their request will be considered.

### **I am interested in taking an extra GCSE in Music/PE. How is this different to picking them as a main option?**

Both these subjects are offered on a reduced curriculum time. Extra PE runs during the core PE hour and students who choose to study this must do a sport regularly outside of school to support the practical aspect. Extra Music ('Breakfast Music') runs before school and lunchtimes and students who choose this option should play a musical instrument to a high standard. Both options require a lot of commitment as it is a significant amount of additional work for students in their own time. Further information on these options is provided in both the PE and Music FAQs.

### **Why can't I choose Computing and Creative iMedia or Art and Photography?**

As a school we believe in the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum and by picking these two subjects together students would limit future A-level/career choices. We believe that students are still relatively young and they should explore as broad a curriculum as possible in order to leave as many doors as possible open whilst their future aspirations develop and mature over the coming years.

### **I would like to do triple science – why can I not pick this option?**

### **Will this affect my chances of studying Science at Durham Johnston sixth form?**

Students will follow either the combined or triple science course. As a consequence of the GCSE reforms in 2017, there have been significant changes to the content of both the triple and combined science GCSE courses. The triple course in particular has seen a significant increase in content. We believe it is important that students are placed on the course that will give them the greatest chance of success and the opportunity to achieve the best possible results. Year 9 students are starting the science GCSE course this half term and the decision as to which course students will study in Year 10 will be made by the school. It is normally based on a triple test later in the year and also a skills test. Please note, this is based on the assumption that students will return to school as planned. The course followed will be regularly reviewed over the two years based on students' performance and attitude to their studies.

Students studying combined science are still able to access the three sciences and other A-level courses at Durham Johnston sixth form as long as they meet the minimum grade requirements. Our A-level science classes currently have an even mix of students who have studied combined and triple science and they perform equally well at A-level (the student who recently won the prize for A-level Chemistry studied combined science at GCSE, for example).

### **How many hours a week do students study a subject?**

Students study Maths and English for 4 hours a week. Science is 6 hours a week; 2 hours each of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. RE and core PE are studied for 1 hour a week each. All option subjects are studied for 3 hours a week.

### **Are students set for all subjects in Y10?**

For core subjects students are split into two parallel bands and are set for Maths, English and Science. RE classes are the same as English classes. For almost all option subjects students are taught in mixed ability groups.