

Subject Choices and Pathways

How is a Vocational Qualification different to a GCSE?

These qualifications 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 qualifications 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 are also external written or online exams that students are required to sit.

These qualifications 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 Computer Science, French, Geography, German, History, Latin 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?

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 vocational subject, they can choose 3 GCSEs if they wish, but we recommend they consider these qualifications 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 Pathway 2 subject

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 vocational subjects are limited and priority is given to those students on Pathway 2. If there is a qualification that a student is very keen to study, they must still make choices from the GCSE subjects on the form. However, they should indicate in the additional comments box at the bottom of the form which Pathway 2 qualification 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 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.

Why can't I choose Art and Photography?

Art and Photography are the same GCSE qualification, GCSE Art and Design. The difference between them is the title that students choose to specialise in. If you are unsure which course you would be better suited to, please speak to Mr Devlin (Art).

I would like to do separate sciences – why can I not pick this option?

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

The course studied will be determined by the Science Department based on ability, attitude to learning and engagement with science, to ensure all students achieve the best possible results. The majority of students will be placed in either a 'Separates' or 'Combined' class at the start of Year 10.

For some students it is too early to make a decision on which course is the most appropriate and these borderline students will be placed in a 'Separates/Combined' class. Students in these classes will have updates at key points in the year on their progress and a decision will be made at the end of Year 10 as to which course they will be entered for in Year 11.

Whilst decisions are based on a range of factors, students who would like to study Separate Sciences should aim to achieve excellent outcomes in end of Year 9 assessments.

Both courses provide a solid foundation for studying all three sciences at A Level. 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 separates and they perform equally well at A-level.

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 Year 10?

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. All option subjects students are taught in mixed ability groups.