

Choosing subjects to study in the UK education system

In the sixth form in UK schools (Years 12 and 13) students usually study fewer subjects than you will in your own country which allows them to specialise and study these in greater depth. The choice of subjects is very important as it can affect which university courses are available to you and also your eventual career path.

The examination system you will follow will normally be one of the following:

- A level
- International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB)
- Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers

and these systems lead to examinations at the end of two years of study which are essential for entry into university. These qualifications are recognised not only in the UK but also internationally. However, to qualify for entry into university in your own country you may be required to take mandatory national examinations or take certain combinations of subjects. You should check carefully to make sure of compatibility with your intentions for higher education when selecting subject options.

In the **A level system**, you will choose 3 or, in some cases, 4 subjects and you will take examinations in these after two years of study. Your UK school may allow you to take some Advanced Supplementary (AS) examinations at the end of Year 12, but these are not sufficient for entry into university in isolation. Most schools will normally require certain A level subjects, notably languages and sciences, to have been studied previously. Many schools offer students the chance to complement their A-Level studies by taking an Extended Project Qualification. Some, more practical subjects may be taught to the BTEC specifications which are modular in approach and usually have a higher proportion of internal assessment rather than examination. However, some top UK universities, *may* view BTEC qualifications less favourably for entry onto courses and they are not normally recognised by universities in Europe.

For the **International Baccalaureate diploma**, you have a degree of choice of subjects, but you must study literature, and mathematics; as well as at least one science and at least one societal subject (e.g., economics, geography, history). You study your chosen six subjects to higher (HL) or standard level (SL) depending on which are more important for university entry onto the course of your choice. Broadly speaking, those subjects you study at higher level will be equivalent to the subjects studied at A level. The idea of the IB is to maintain your breadth of knowledge and skills. In this system you are also required to write an extended essay and to study 'theory of Knowledge (TOK)'.

The **Scottish Highers** and **Advanced Highers** are like the AS and A level examinations in that the Highers require one year of study and the Advanced Highers normally require two years. As the name suggests this examination syllabus is followed in many schools in Scotland although some Scottish schools teach A level courses instead. It is very unusual for Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers to be taught outside Scotland.

One year or two years in your UK school

The scholarship offered by schools through HMC Projects is **for two years** to enable you to complete your courses and take the final examinations for entry into university or college.

Your choice of subjects

The choice of subjects that you might study in your UK school depends on several factors:

- Your interest and ability in a subject;
- Your choice of university;
- Your choice of subject to study at university;
- Your choice of career

There is normally a large range of subjects to choose from in any school but not all schools offer the same set of subjects. This is often the case with some foreign languages: for instance, one school may offer German language and another may not. There are two further important points:

- If you choose to study English in the UK then you will normally be studying English **literature**;
 - If you choose French, German or Spanish then, generally, you will be expected to have studied these for **at least** two years to achieve the right level;
- N.B.: some IB courses offer a language ab initio i.e. for beginners.

It is also important to be aware that universities may prefer certain subjects for entry onto a particular course. Generally, universities can be rather traditional in the subjects they prefer. These subjects are generally on offer in every school and are listed in the left column in the table below:

Subjects popular with universities	
Normally offered by all schools	Offered only by some schools
Biology Chemistry English Literature Economics French Geography History Art Mathematics Further Mathematics Music Physics Spanish	Business Classical Civilisation Computer Science Design Tech (Graphics) Design Tech (Product Design) Drama and Theatre Studies English Language Latin Greek German Psychology Religious Studies Politics

Examples of subject combinations useful for certain university courses:

Course	Preferred subjects for university
Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science	Chemistry and Biology are strongly advised (the majority of medical schools require Chemistry).
Natural Sciences	Two or three of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics.
Engineering	Mathematics and Physics are required. Further Mathematics is advised.
Computer Science	Mathematics is required. Computer Science or Physics are desirable.
Psychology	Usually two Sciences are advised, but entry via Arts subjects is perfectly possible.

Economics and PPE	Whilst Mathematics is advised, students should also consider Economics, History, Geography, Politics or Religious Studies.
Business Studies, Management, Marketing	Mathematics can be helpful, but not essential. Business, Economics, Geography, Psychology may be helpful.
Architecture	There are usually no essential subjects, but an art/science mix might be preferred, and a portfolio of your Art and/or Design work is essential.
Foreign Languages	Two languages (modern or classical) are desirable but not essential
Law	Any A Levels at the highest grade. Including a subject involving extended essay writing may be desirable.

For more information on the subjects required in UK universities for specific courses see the Russell Group website:

<https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/degrees>

Thinking ahead to university courses

One of the consequences of Brexit is the withdrawal of home fee status and access to student loans for those holding an EU passport to study at a university in the UK. This means that all students holding an EU passport are now treated as international students and require a Student visa to study at university in the UK and have to pay the more expensive international student tuition fees¹. This has always been the case for students who do not hold an EU passport.

Scholarships to study at a UK university are very rare and you will be competing with students from all over the world for these. All scholars are encouraged and advised to consider higher education (university) outside the UK. There are universities in Europe where courses are taught in English and the fees are much more affordable than those of universities in the UK.

With universities outside the UK, you should find that A levels, the IB diploma and Scottish Highers are recognised for university entrance although in some countries a process of nostrification of your results may be required. Certain qualifications may not be recognised and universities outside the UK may not recognise BTEC qualifications. For this reason, we would suggest that you consider your future plans carefully before choosing to do a BTEC course at your school.

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¹ Although some universities have put in place transition scholarships for EU students to bring the fee back down to the level paid by UK students.