

How to Choose your Key Stage 4 Options

Once you are settling into Year 9 we will start to talk to you about your GCSE and Vocational e.g. BTEC options, otherwise known as Key Stage 4 (KS4) options.

Remember, Key Stage 4 options are very broad based where you will study lots of subjects, with later qualifications getting increasingly narrow in focus. Because you study so many GCSEs / vocational subjects it is actually quite hard to make a drastic mistake. So please do not worry too much.

There will be lots of help provided at school where we will help to explain the range of subjects on offer and how you will go about choosing them.

The following questions may help you to approach this decision in a positive and informed way:

1. Should I base Key Stage 4 options on what I am good at?

Yes, it is definitely worth including this as a factor when choosing your options. You are likely to enjoy the subjects you are good at. Being good at a particular subject might help you manage your Key Stage 4 workload, too, because you will possibly be more motivated and able to complete work quicker and achieve good results. What is more, learning more about a subject you have a natural ability in might be useful when making career choices later in your life. The subjects you are good at now will give you a clue about what you might like to do in the future.

If you are not sure how good you are at a subject, you can talk to your teachers and ask for their opinions and advice.

2. Should I base Key Stage 4 options on what I enjoy?

It is good to consider choosing subjects you like for your KS4 options. You will be studying that subject for several periods a week for the next two years, so it will definitely help if there are parts of the subject you enjoy. Even if you are

not overly keen on lots of subjects, there are bound to be a few subjects you connect with. This could work to your advantage, because if you enjoy a subject you are more likely to be motivated, work harder and achieve a higher grade. It is good to study a subject because you like it however, when choosing subjects you enjoy do ask yourself two questions: What is the **content** of this subject at KS4? (Are you interested in the things you will be learning about?) and What **skills** does it require? (Do you think you have or can build the skills this subject requires?)

3. Should I choose a Key Stage 4 subject because I like the teacher?

This is a bit more difficult, because any great teacher can inspire you to do your best in any subject. However, how much you like your teacher should not be one of the key factors when choosing your options, because after all, that fantastic teacher might leave the school, or the subject may be a subject that a number of different staff teach and you could end up with any one of them.

4. Should I choose a Key Stage 4 subject because my friends are doing it?

You need to do what is best for you. It is definitely better not to just choose a subject because your friends are taking it as you may not enjoy it or find it easy. Doing different subjects should not have any effect on your friendships. It will just mean you have lots of new interests to talk about when you are together at other times. Plus, there is a chance you will make additional new friends in the subject you choose.

5. Should I choose a Key Stage 4 subject because of a career I am interested in?

If you have a career you already feel passionate about pursuing, then do bear this in mind. However, do not choose a subject because of this without first checking the subject content and the assessment methods used for the subject. These things will help determine how likely you are to enjoy and do well at the subject. It will also help you to check that you have an accurate understanding of the career that interests you. The Careers Adviser could help you with this by providing information about your career of interest.

6. Whose advice should I listen to when choosing Key Stage 4 options?

Teachers are really well-placed to offer you advice and support on the subjects that they teach, so do talk to your teachers if you have any questions about any particular GCSE / BTEC.

Careers Advisers are well-trained and prepared to help you with your careers and KS4 option-related questions – whatever your questions are, the Careers Adviser will be able to offer support, resources and information to help you with your choices.

Your **Parents/Carers** can also help – they may not understand new things that were not around in their day, but they will have your best interests at heart, so will always do their best to help you.

Your **Friends** will be going through the same process as you, so you can bounce ideas off them or you could research answers to questions together... but it is important to remember it is your final decision.

7. Are my A-level (or equivalent choices) affected by the Key Stage 4 choices I make now?

Some A-level options do not require you to have studied them at GCSE / BTEC first – for example, psychology, law, business, economics, media studies, philosophy, government & politics or sociology. However, for some other subjects you will most likely need the GCSE / BTEC – for example, history, geography, maths, English, so check with your Careers Adviser to make sure. The Science A levels should be open to you whether you take double award science or triple award science (physics, chemistry and biology). However it is advisable to discuss this with your Careers Adviser and your science teachers.

8. Do universities care about which Key Stage 4 options you choose?

Most universities need you to have passes at grade 4 or above in English and maths GCSEs... which is fine, because you will be studying them as core GCSE subjects anyway.

For some degrees, or careers, their requirements for KS4 and A-level subjects are not too strict. For example, most universities do not mind which subjects you have studied before if you want to do a law degree or a psychology degree, there are many degrees like this – they just want you to have done well in the subjects you chose.

However, in some cases, you will need specific A-levels (and therefore specific GCSEs) to get on certain university courses (e.g. the sciences, history or foreign languages).

We would not advise you to get too involved with university research just yet, but if you are thinking of going to university and want to explore degree ideas, have a look at www.ucas.com as a starting point. If this raises further questions, talk to your Careers Adviser for further help.

9. Should I think about how courses are assessed when choosing my Key Stage 4 options?

Individual subjects will be marked in a variety of ways – through coursework completed either in lessons or as homework, exams and perhaps spoken exams (as in the case of languages). You can think about how you perform best, and if there are any assessment methods you find particularly challenging.

Your teachers are there to help you choose the most appropriate subjects for you. You can ask them if there's an oral test or if there is laboratory or fieldwork involved, and you can also ask them what percentage of marks is given for coursework and for exams.

If you have any additional learning needs, make sure you discuss this with the school and consider these needs when making your choices.

10. What is the difference between Triple and Double award science?

Triple award science is made up of three GCSEs, and students get separate GCSE grades for biology, and for chemistry and for physics at the end of the course, for example you may achieve biology grade A, chemistry grade A and physics grade C.

Double award science is made up of two separate GCSE grades although your course will cover units in biology, chemistry and physics, so you may achieve at the end of the course for example double science grades 66 or 56.

Your school and teachers are likely to have a good idea which science GCSE route would work best for you.

11. How important is it to get good grades in my Key Stage 4 subjects?

If you want to give yourself a wider choice of options after school (Year 11), getting good grades is quite important. Aim to achieve your own potential. Sixth Form and Colleges will usually require 9-5 GCSE pass grades or equivalent for entry to A levels, A levels are level 3 courses. 9-4 GCSE pass grades or equivalent are normally required for entry to level 3 BTECs / T levels and other vocational courses and for the International Baccalaureate level 3 course grades 6/7 and above are usually required.

The good news is that there are many post-16 options out there that are flexible in terms of grade requirements. There are not just level 3 courses (as mentioned above) but also level 2, level 1 and entry level courses all requiring their own grades. The range on offer can be a bit confusing, so the key to all of this is asking for help when you need it. That is what your Careers Adviser is here for.

12. Will I ever regret my Key Stage 4 choices?

If you ask around, you will find many people who wish they had not taken a certain subject, or wish they had tried another subject. But a lot of the time, these are not life-changing regrets.

There are plenty of options for more education as you get older if you feel you made a big mistake with your choices. You may also be able to swap GCSEs / BTECs if you change your mind very early on – speak to your teachers, but do consider if you have fully given your chosen subjects enough of a chance.

However, most students are overall very happy with the choices that they make.

13. How can I cope with the stress of choosing Key Stage 4 options?

Try not to worry – you can do this. It can be difficult to choose but do remember, however impossible it might feel to make these big decisions you are not alone. Keep asking questions, seek information, advice and guidance from your Careers Adviser, your Teachers and look towards your Parents/Carers and Friends for support, we will all help you in this decision making process and you will therefore eventually be able to make good, well informed, positive decisions. Good luck.

Your Careers Adviser is Mrs Vicki Banbrook

Her working days are usually Wednesdays and Thursdays

Her office is in the Main Building first floor, opposite the Food Tech classroom, on the corner where the Art Dept and the I.T. Dept meet, there is a careers notice on the careers office door

Mrs Vicki Banbrook – Careers Adviser

Aug 2025