

A-LEVELS AT DAUNTSEY'S: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Where can I find out about the subjects available at A-level?

The best resource for this is our Sixth Form Curriculum Booklet which can be downloaded from the School Website.

I also recommend a publication called '[Informed Choices](#)', which can be freely downloaded online (just google it). This is put together by Russell Group universities and contains their latest advice on how to make decisions about A-levels and beyond. However, please note that all universities are different and you should also check their own websites.

Should I study 3 or 4 subjects at A-level?

Most students should study 3 subjects and an extra qualification (see below), not a fourth subject. The exceptions are:

- Further Mathematicians need to study 4 subjects to give them sufficient breadth
- 1 or 2 really top academic pupils may like to study 4 subjects for the whole 2 years and get 4 A-levels (but keep in mind it's far better to get 3 really good grades than risk getting 4 not so good grades)
- If you're really unsure about what to take in the Lower Sixth then you could take 4 options with a view to dropping one, but you'd end up with no qualification in it. You'd generally be far better off taking 3 subjects and an extra qualification, knowing you can change a subject early in the Lower Sixth if necessary.
- If you really want to study a language, then we still allow you to take an AS in it if you're only studying it for a year. Just keep in mind your grade will go on your university application. No other AS options are available.

When am I allowed to drop a subject if I start with 4?

You're free to drop your fourth option at any point, as long as you follow the usual process of seeking permission from the relevant staff first. What I don't advise is starting with 4 with a view to dropping a subject and then switching to an extra qualification. This is sometimes possible, but it is subject to timetabling (it may be that the set for an extra qualification is full or in a different option block, which can mean changing is either impossible or also means changing your other classes). You'd also miss some key content. It is a potential back-up option, but should not be your plan.

What extra qualification should I take?

There are 4 extra qualifications available as your fourth option, and each has its own pluses and minuses:

- 1) **The EPQ:** usually the best option from a pure university perspective. It is highly valued by many universities and can often strengthen an application, whether directly via UCAS points or a reduced grades offer, or indirectly by highlighting your interest in learning beyond the syllabus and your independent learning skills. However, if the idea of working independently with minimal teacher input and writing a 5000 word essay (or a 1000 word essay with an 'artefact') does not appeal to you or suit your skill-set then don't do it!
- 2) **Leadership, Sport and Adventure:** this is a good option if you are interested in sport and adventure, and/or wish to develop your leadership skills. It does not have the same university recognition as an EPQ, but can help to develop broader skills that will serve you well in later life. You do not have to be good at sport to do this.
- 3) **Maths for Science:** this is a new course that is replacing Core Maths as our mathematical fourth option. It has been designed primarily by our own Physics and Chemistry departments, who believe it will be a great course to study alongside Physics and Chemistry (with some relevance for Biology too) to give you the right level of Maths skills for

a Science A-level but without you actually having to study A-level Maths. It won't lead to a formal qualification, but could really help your Sciences as it is designed specifically for that purpose.

- 4) **IELTS:** this is an English language qualification that is recommended to all international pupils as a fourth timetabled option. International pupils are required to have an IELTS qualification if they are to obtain their Tier 4 entry visa to study at a British university. However, if you want to study a different fourth option then it is possible to study for IELTS outside of normal lesson time.

How should I decide which subjects to study?

There are 3 main factors to consider, none of which should be overlooked:

- 1) **What you're likely to do well at:** what universities really want from you is 3 good A-level grades. There may of course be certain subjects that you need to study to keep your university options open, but each university has its own entry requirements, so don't make the mistake of thinking solely about what subjects universities might 'respect'. They will usually respect a good grade more than any particular subject.
- 2) **What you might need in future:** some subjects are essential for certain courses or careers. There is a useful section at the back of 'Informed Choices' about which subjects are essential or preferred for a range of degree options that you may like to look at. However, again please remember that each university is different and the most important factor is always what you are likely to grade well in.
- 3) **What you enjoy:** you will need to do a lot more independent work at A-level than at GCSE, so it is obviously important that you enjoy the subjects you're studying. It is often said that you are likely to get the best grades in the subjects that you enjoy. I have seen far too many examples to the contrary to go along with this completely, but as a general rule there is something to it.

What are facilitating subjects and how important are they?

Facilitating subjects are those that are commonly required or preferred for a range of different university courses. They can therefore be useful subjects to take to keep your options open. A common mistake is to think that facilitating subjects are so-called because they are the most respected subjects. In actual fact, there are other subjects that are also very much respected ('Informed Choices' mentions Economics and Religious Studies for example), but are not 'facilitating' because they are just not a requirement for entry to as many degree programmes.

It's often a good idea to study at least one or two facilitating subjects to keep your options open and because some courses require them. However, there are also many courses that don't require them and that may value different subjects more. Once again, the best way to keep your options open is to choose subjects that you can do well at.

Facilitating subjects are: Mathematics and Further Mathematics; English Literature; Physics; Biology; Chemistry; Geography; History; and Languages (Classical and Modern).

Is it true that some subjects that are on offer are not as useful as the more traditional 'academic' subjects?

No! See the section above on facilitating subjects: it all depends on your future plans. There are some university courses where opting for a subject that might be considered 'less traditional' would actually be the most useful one you could take, and indeed essential in some cases. And even for courses where that's not the case, again you must prioritise the subjects that are going to be best for you.

I hope this is helpful, and please do see me if you'd like any advice or guidance at all.

*Mr Tyler
January 2018*