

YEAR 9 OPTIONS



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY DO I HAVE TO MAKE CHOICES?

That is a really good question! As you made your way through key stage 3, you studied all the available subjects, but now we ask you to choose some to stop studying, and we offer you a couple of subjects you haven't previously studied.

The reason is that we want you to concentrate on subjects that are:

- vital to your future – this is why we all continue to study maths, science, PE and English, and
- interesting and relevant to your future: you have the chance to 'specialise' a little bit.

As you travel through key stage 4, you may decide to study further by taking A levels and then you will be asked to 'specialise' even more.

HOW DO I KNOW WHAT SUBJECTS TO TAKE?

There is lots of guidance available and you will have a guidance interview to discuss your option choices.

Read the options brochure and look at the subject information on the options webpage: there is a presentation about each subject, answers to frequently asked questions, and feedback from pupils currently taking the course.

Book appointments for the Y9 Parents Consultations and talk to the subject teachers!

As a general rule, choose the subjects which you like most and work hardest in, whilst aiming to keep a broad range.

WHAT IS THE CORE CURRICULUM THAT PUPILS TAKE IN Y10 AND Y11?

All pupils continue to study English, mathematics, science and PE through timetabled lessons. RPE, work-related learning, citizenship and personal development also form part of the curriculum through collapsed days, cross-curricular links and other experiences (such as work experience).

WHAT ARE THE CORE QUALIFICATIONS?

Most pupils will take GCSEs in English language and English literature, GCSE mathematics and GCSEs in science.

WHEN CHOOSING SEPARATE SCIENCE, DO WE STILL NEED TO DO COMBINED SCIENCE AS WELL?

Yes, although you will be entered a different qualification. All pupils will study Biology, Chemistry and Physics as part of their core science lessons. Most pupils will then be entered for GCSE Combined Science, which is equivalent to two GCSE grades (a double award). Some pupils may choose Separate Science as one of their options. This means that they will have additional time to study Biology, Chemistry and Physics in more depth, covering more content, on top of what is covered in combined science. GCSE Separate Science is often known as triple science, as pupils would gain a third GCSE grade, and gain a triple award in Science. Please see the Science information on our Options webpage, and in the options brochure for more information.

IF HISTORY OR GEOGRAPHY IS NOT PART OF OUR SELECTION, WILL WE CONTINUE TO HAVE LESSONS ON THESE SUBJECTS AS PART OF OUR CURRICULUM EVEN IF WE ARE NOT GOING TO HAVE EXAMS ON THEM?

No. You will continue to have PSHE and core PE lessons as part of your normal timetable. You will also be studying RPE through collapsed curriculum days in Year 10 and 11. All other subjects will focus on working towards a qualification. Pupils will only continue study History and/or Geography if they choose this as an option.

IS PE A CORE OR OPTIONS SUBJECT?

Both. All pupils have four periods of PE lessons per fortnight. Within that time, it is possible to follow a range of PE activities. It is also possible to opt for a qualification in PE (where you will either study GCSE PE or BTEC sport) as one of your option choices if you want to.

WHY IS THERE A LANGUAGE OPTION?

Studying a language allows pupils to acquire important knowledge and pupils are entitled to it; learning a language, and gaining a qualification in it, helps prepare pupils to live in the world after they leave school – TRAVEL, CAREER, and FUTURE STUDY.

WHICH LANGUAGES CAN I CHOOSE?

Pupils can choose to which language they wish to continue to study. Most pupils at Cambourne VC take GCSE Spanish, however others opt to take GCSE German or GCSE French. You can only take German or French, if you have previously studied it at Key Stage 3.

CAN I TAKE ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE GCSEs?

We are offering Spanish as a 2nd GCSE option to pupils who opt for GCSE German or French as their language option. However, we are only able to run this class if we have enough pupils opting to do this; therefore pupils opting for Spanish as a 2nd GCSE option should consider their reserve options carefully.

Whilst we are unable to offer teaching of other languages, as part of our timetable, we are able to enter pupils into additional GCSE language examinations, to be taken at the end of Year 10 or Year 11. In the past, we have had pupils gain GCSE qualifications in Greek, Italian, Polish, Hebrew, Russian, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese. If this is something that you are interested in, please email CAM-ExamsTeam@cambournevc.org for further information. Please note that this would be an additional qualification and would not be taken in place of your language option of Spanish, German or French.

I DO NOT DO A LANGUAGE IN YEAR 9. WHAT WILL I DO INSTEAD?

All Key Stage 4 pupils take a language GCSE, unless in very exceptional and authorised circumstances.

For a very small number of pupils, a reduced curriculum has been already been put into place in Year 9. When this has resulted in a pupil being withdrawn from language lessons in Key Stage 3, we will not be expecting them to take a language GCSE. These pupils will have timetabled intervention or enrichment lessons and work towards alternative qualifications during this time.

Please discuss this at your options guidance interview if you have any queries.

HOW MANY OPTIONS CHOICES DO I HAVE?

You must first choose your language option (Spanish, French or German). You then have 3 further options. We ask that you also consider carefully and choose 2 reserve options.

You may also decide to opt for studying an additional afterschool GCSE subject, however this is entirely optional and considerations must be made regarding the cost and additional workload involved.

ARE THERE ANY AFTER-SCHOOL OPTIONS?

Yes. We offer GCSEs in Art, Ancient History, Film Studies, Psychology and Statistics. In order to take one of these options you may have to meet certain entry requirements because of the extra work involved.

IN THE OPTIONS PRESENTATION, IT LISTS BTEC DANCE AS AN AFTER-SCHOOL SUBJECT BUT THIS IS NOT LISTED IN THE BROCHURE. IS IT AN OPTION?

Sorry, this was an error on the presentation. We are not running Dance as an after-school subject in 2021-2021. However, we are offering Dance as a main options subject. Therefore, if you are interested in taking this course, please included it as one of your three option choices.

IF A STUDENT WOULD LIKE TO DO AN AFTER-SCHOOL OPTION, DOES IT HAVE TO BE ONE OF YOUR 5 OPTIONS?

Yes, these are the only subjects that we are teaching as additional GCSE courses.

CAN I TAKE MORE THAN ONE AFTER-SCHOOL OPTIONS?

We usually don't recommend this. You will need to allow enough time in your week to complete homework and other independent learning tasks for your in-school subjects. Some pupils can manage to add one after-school option to these subjects, but we don't recommend that you try to take two of these.

HOW MUCH ARE THE AFTER-SCHOOL OPTIONS?

There is also a cost associated. For our current Year 10, afterschool courses cost £380, paid in four instalments. The first payment is due at the end of the summer term in Year 9. The overall cost is reviewed annually. We will confirm the exact cost in May, when we confirm your option subjects.

We are aware that many people are struggling financially at the moment, and do not wish this to be a barrier for pupils taking these courses. Pupils, in receipt of free school meals, will therefore have their fees paid in full by the school.

WHY DO I NEED TO CHOOSE RESERVE CHOICES?

Each year, we build the school timetable around your option choices. Once we have everybody's option forms returned on 22nd February, we create the option blocks for our timetable. Every year, for approximately 90% of pupils, we are able to accommodate their first three option choices.

However, sometimes the combination of subjects, that a pupil chooses, just doesn't fit because of timetabling clashes, particularly if they are opting for our smaller subjects. In this case, we would look to use one of their reserve choices, swapping that in for their 3rd preference or, very occasionally, their 2nd preference. All pupils should receive their 1st preference. It is therefore vital that you consider the order of preference, and your reserve subjects carefully.

Sometimes reserve options are used when we cannot run a course because it is undersubscribed, and it is therefore not viable. This is the only occasion when a pupil will not be given their 1st preference.

Sometimes reserve options are used if a subject is over-subscribed and we are unable to run further classes. In this case, we will prioritise pupils who have put this subject as their 1st or 2nd preference.

In summary, do consider your reserves as seriously as your first three options. If one (or both) of your reserves will need to be used, we will get in contact to offer further guidance.

WHAT IS A RESERVE SUBJECT?

Reserves are chosen in the same way as other option subjects. They can be thought of as a 4th and 5th choice, after your first three option preferences.

I CAN'T DECIDE ON A 1ST OR 2ND RESERVE. WHAT SHALL I DO?

Read the options brochure and look at the subject information on the options webpage: there is a presentation about each subject, answers to frequently asked questions, and feedback from pupils currently taking the course.

Book appointments for the Y9 Parents Consultations and talk to the subject teachers!

As a general rule, choose the subjects which you think you will be successful at. It is worth looking at your Year 9 reports, to see what your strengths are. You will be able to discuss this at your guidance interview, where we can also discuss similar courses or alternatives, to your first three option preferences.

IF I DON'T GET MY FIRST THREE OPTION SUBJECTS, AND AM GIVEN MY RESERVE INSTEAD, WILL THIS AFFECT MY GRADES AND PROGRESS?

It shouldn't impact your grades or progress. This is why we are you to consider your reserves as seriously as your first three options. If one (or both) of your reserves will need to be used, we will get in contact to offer further guidance.

We also ask you to carefully consider the order of your first three option preferences, as we will prioritise your first and second choices if we are unable to offer you all three.

Please do discuss any queries or concerns you may have at your guidance interview.

WHAT SUPPORT WILL I HAVE WHEN CHOOSING MY OPTIONS SUBJECTS?

There is lots of guidance available and you will have a guidance interview to discuss your option choices.

Read the options brochure and look at the subject information on the options webpage: there is a presentation about each subject, answers to frequently asked questions, and feedback from pupils currently taking the course.

Book appointments for the Y9 Parents Consultations and talk to the subject teachers!

Please also email your form tutor and/or the Year 9 year team, if you have further questions.

FOR THE PARENT CONSULTATION REGARDING OPTIONS, IS IT POSSIBLE TO DISCUSS WITH THOSE TEACHERS LEADING AFTER SCHOOL OPTIONS (I.E. ANCIENT HISTORY OR STATISTICS)?

Yes, you will be able to book appointments with all option subject leaders or teachers, including for afterschool subjects. However, there are limited time slots, so please only book appointments for the subjects that you are definitely interested in taking or have specific questions about.

You can find information about each subject in the options brochure and on the options webpage.

WILL GRADES EFFECT THE LIKELINESS OF A PUPIL BEING ABLE TO TAKE AN OPTION?

Our courses are open to all pupils. We will be able to discuss this with you and your child at the guidance interview, and offer support in selecting suitable courses which both interest your child and will play to their strengths.

I AM A PARENT WHO WAS EDUCATED IN A DIFFERENT SCHOOL SYSTEM. WHAT ADDITIONAL SUPPORT IS THERE?

That's fine! You will be invited to an individual guidance interview with a member of staff and your child, and we can explain everything then.

You will also find lots of information in the Options brochure and on the Options webpage, where you can also listen to a recording of the presentation from our virtual options evening.

HOW DO I TELL YOU WHAT MY OPTIONS ARE?

On Friday 5th February, following the Year 9 Parents consultations, parents will be sent a link to an online form on School Post. You will state what your options are using this form by the deadline of Monday 22nd February 2021.

If a pupil submits the form more than once, we will look at the most recent submission when allocating choices.

If you do not receive School Post, we will arrange for a paper version to be posted to you.

THERE ARE TWO COURSES BUT ONLY ONE BOX TO TICK. WHY IS THIS?

For certain subjects (PE, History and Food), we offer two different qualification routes. Information about both the courses offered can be found on the Options webpage and in the Options brochure. For these subjects, once pupils have submitted their option choices, the subject teachers will meet and decide on the most appropriate course for each pupil. This decision will be based on consideration of recommended criteria (such as participation in several sports), and consideration of learning style.

We will communicate these decisions to pupils and their parents/carers at the beginning of March. At this stage, if a pupil has queries or is unhappy with the suggested qualification route, a conversation with the relevant subject leader will be arranged to discuss the decision.

If you have a preference over which qualification/course you would like to take, please discuss this at your options guidance interview.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I HAVE SUBMITTED MY ONLINE FORM?

All the options are collected and everybody's option choices are entered into a computer programme. We then use this to work out the 'best fit' model for the classes. We try to get everybody's first three option preferences to fit together. However, every year approximately 10% of pupils will need to use one of their reserve choices instead because

- perhaps not enough people want an option so we cannot make a class
- perhaps too many people want an option and we haven't got enough teachers to put on an extra class
- perhaps somebody has made option choices that are inappropriate for them.

If you need to use a reserve option, we will inform you as soon as possible, and also offer you further guidance in case another alternative subject would be preferred. These discussions take place over March and April.

Once all pupils have been allocated to option classes, then we will send a confirmation email to all pupils. This usually happens in May.

ARE STUDENTS ABLE TO CHANGE THEIR OPTIONS AT ANY POINT/DURING THE COURSE?

Not really, once the course has started. Up until the courses start, there can sometimes be some movement, but we can't guarantee being able to fit someone into a class that wasn't in their initial choices. We therefore recommend that you explore all your option choices thoroughly, and carefully reflect on these options, so you can be confident in your choices when you submit the options form by the deadline of Monday 22nd February.

HOW MUCH TIME DOES EACH OPTION GET?

Each single option choice is taken as six lessons per fortnight.

WHO TEACHES [INSERT SUBJECT]?

We cannot confirm which teacher will be teaching a course until the timetable is finalised in the Summer Term. You should not choose a course because of a particular teacher.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GCSEs AND THE OTHER COURSES OFFERED (L1/2 BTECS OR NATIONALS)?

GCSEs are qualifications where the full range of grades (from 9 to 1) are achievable. Other courses are equivalent to GCSEs but have other titles such as Certificate or Award or Diploma. Some of these can be offered at level 1 (GCSE grades 1 to 3) or level 2 (GCSE grades 4 to 9).

ARE CAMBRIDGE NATIONALS OR BTECS RECOGNISED AND ACCEPTED BY SIXTH FORM COLLEGES?

Yes, they are recognised as a vocational course. BTEC vocational courses are counted as GCSE equivalent by sixth forms, but the number that can be included can vary. Other colleges offer pathways specifically building on BTEC pathways

HOW ARE GCSEs GRADED THESE DAYS?

Gone are the letters A to G: we now talk about 9 to 1 (nine to one). The diagram shows how these compare to the old letter system.

New grade system	Old grade system
9	
8	A*
7	A
6	B
5	
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
	G
U	U

IF A PUPIL IS FINDING THE WORKLOAD TOO MUCH, WHAT SUPPORT IS GIVEN IF HELP IS NEEDED?

We offer guidance and support in managing workload, organising revision and time management, through tutor activities, year group assemblies and PSHE lessons. We will provide extra pastoral support for any pupil who feels that they are struggling and offer further interventions if required. Please do speak to your form tutor, or directly to the Head of Year 9, if this is a concern.

When choosing your option subjects, consider your learning style and strengths. You may find that coursework-based subjects, such as BTECs or Nationals, are more manageable than lots of final exam-only GCSE subjects. Conversely, you may decide that choosing too many subjects with a coursework element, or requiring high levels of independent work, may be challenging if you currently struggle with organisation and meeting homework deadlines. At your guidance interview, you will have an opportunity to discuss this.

ARE THERE TASTER SESSIONS?

Yes, there is a taster session for GCSE Psychology, which can be taken as an additional after-school subject. This lesson with a task for pupils to complete and some videos to watch, so they get an idea of normal lesson might be like. This is not a live lesson, so can be completed remotely at your convenience, using this link:

https://catrustorg.sharepoint.com/:f:/r/sites/CAM-Subjects/PSY/Key%20Stage%203/Taster_lesson

It is highly recommended that pupils should do this taster lesson, if they are thinking about putting psychology as an option.

Other subjects are offering taster activities, as part of normal Year 9 timetabled lessons.

CAN I SELECT FURTHER MATHS AS AN OPTION?

Further Maths is not offered as an options subject however we do offer it as an additional qualification for our strongest mathematicians. Teaching for this qualification is done in core Maths lesson time, in parallel for working towards a grade 8 or 9 in GCSE Maths. Information about this course can be found in the FAQs for Maths on the Options brochure. You can also ask your maths teacher about this.

ARE THERE ANY COMBINATION OF SUBJECTS I CANNOT TAKE?

There are some subject courses with content that overlaps too much, and therefore cannot be recognised as two separate qualifications. An example of this is GCSE Art and GCSE Photography. Please refer to the Options brochure and ask questions at your options guidance interview if you are unsure about a specific combination of subjects.

A guiding principle is to choose a broad range of different subjects, instead of specialising too much at this stage.

WILL FIELD TRIPS AND VISITS STILL GO AHEAD WITH COVID RESTRICTIONS? IF NOT, HOW WILL THIS IMPACT COURSE?

Several subjects offer field trips and visits as part of the course, for example GCSE Geography or BTEC Animal Care, or as an enrichment activity, for example GCSE Art or languages. We have written our Options brochure, assuming we are able to offer the same opportunities as normal.

However, we must adhere to the most up-to-date government advice and restrictions. If this means that a specific field trip or visit cannot run, and this will have a direct impact on the assessment for the course, we will work with the relevant exam board to make alternative arrangements so that our learners are not disadvantaged.