St Mary Redcliffe and Temple School

## Year 9 Options for GCSE 2026 to 2028 – Frequently Asked Questions

Please find a range of frequently asked questions (with answers!) below. If you cannot find what you are looking for here, please email ChaibiH@smrt.bristol.sch.uk and we will endeavour to answer your query and add it to this list. You can also use this email address to request translations of any of the documents relating to the options process.

### What are the values that drive the Key Stage Four offer at SMRT?

Like everything we do, we start with our Alive values. As a school we value diversity and choice. Our curriculum offer in Years 10 and 11 is designed to reflect this by recognising the diverse needs of our students and giving them the widest possible choice of subjects. This is designed to give students the skills, knowledge and Alive qualities which will allow them to make their unique contribution to the world. We have high expectations of all our of students but recognise that success will come in many forms and so we try and offer a curriculum which meets the needs of all our students. We are committed to offering a broad and balanced curriculum with the English Baccalaureate subjects as its foundation (see question on English Baccalaureate) and with RE at its heart. We are also mindful of our Alive value of creativity and so, unlike many schools we have a strong offer of creative subjects as Art, Music, Photography and Drama, as not only are these popular with our students but they also reflect the local employment landscape. This is also the rationale behind us continuing to offer subjects such as DT, Business Studies, Media Studies and Health and Social Care as well as qualifications in Computing and Hospitality which we believe will leave students well placed to compete in the local job market.

### How many GCSE subjects will students usually study in Years 10 and 11?

Most students will study our core subjects and three options subjects. Our core subjects are:

- Religious Education GCSE
- English Language GCSE
- English Literature GCSE
- Mathematics GCSE
- Combined Science GCSE (counts as two GCSEs)
- Values in Practice (including Careers & Citizenship – not a GCSE and no exam)
- Physical Education (non-GCSE and no exam although PE is available as GCSE option subject)

All of which are compulsory and many of which we have a legal obligation to deliver. As a school which values faith, GCSE RE is at the heart of our curriculum.

Students also choose three options subjects from the following list:

- Separate Sciences - Biology, Chemistry, Physics (see question on Science below)

- Geography
- History
- French
- Spanish
- Art
- Photography
- Music
- PE
- Drama
- Business Studies
- Media Studies
- Product Design
- Textiles
- Child Development
- Health and Social Care
- Computer Science
- Hospitality and Catering

All of these are traditional GCSE qualifications except for Hospitality and Catering, Child Development and Health and Social Care which are technical awards. These are "Level 2 qualifications" which means they have the same status as GCSEs. Combined Science counts as two GCSEs, which means that most students will leave Year 11 with 9 GCSEs (6 core qualifications from the core subjects and 3 from the options subjects).

## How does Science work?

Science is studied either as Combined Science (worth 2 GCSEs) or it can be studied as Separate Science (worth 3 GCSEs: Biology, Chemistry and Physics). Students who do Combined Science can then choose three other options subjects. Students who choose Separate Sciences don't study Combined Science but do "use up" one of their options, leaving them with two remaining optional subjects to choose.

## What combinations of subjects are allowed?

We would love to allow students to choose whatever they liked but obviously we are constrained by rooming and facilities, staffing and government guidance. We also have to have sufficient numbers of students to make running certain courses viable. We think we have struck the right balance of students making exciting choices and the boring practicalities of timetabling!

When students make their choices, they select options from two "tables" of subjects:

| Table A |
| --- |
| Separate Sciences |
| French |
| Geography |
| Spanish |
| History |

| Table B |
| --- |
| Art |
| Photography |
| Health & Social Care |
| Music |
| Business Studies |
| Child Development |
| PE |
| Media Studies |
| Computer Science |
| Drama |
| DT Product Design |
| Hospitality and Catering |
| DT Textiles |

Students need to choose a subject from Table A and then two subjects from either Table A or Table B. Then cannot select three Table B subjects. Students should also choose two reserve subjects, one from Table A and one from Table B. These will be used if we are unable to offer any of the first three options that a student has chosen.

We don't recommend that students study both Art and Photography or do more than one DT option but beyond that if students (or parents and carers) are unsure about the wisdom of a particular combination we hope that the Options Evening and the time before the application system closes, will allow plenty of time for guidance and discussion.

## Will students get their first choices of options?

The answer to that is "hopefully". We do everything we can to make this happen but once the applications are in we go through a complicated process of putting the different subjects into option "blocks" which ultimately form the basis of the timetable. We use a computer program to create these blocks in a way which maximises students' first choices. Inevitably, this means not everyone can get their first-choice subjects, but most students do. Last year, for example, only twelve students did not get all three of their first-choice subjects. Of those, all were able to choose their first reserve subject. Clearly, if we do not get sufficient numbers of students choosing a course or, if we get huge numbers choosing a course, this will impact on our ability to offer first choices, although I make a point of having a face to face discussion with all students who might be affected by this and will also contact parents and carers to keep them in the loop.

## What is the EBacc.?

The following subjects make up the English Baccalaureate, if they are passed at grade 5 or above

- English Language or English Literature
- Maths
- Combined Science or
    - two from Biology, Chemistry and Physics
    - (but be entered for all three)
- A language - French or Spanish
- A Humanities subject - Geography or History

The EBacc is made up of the subjects which are considered essential to many degrees and open up lots of doors. A study by the UCL Institute of Education shows that studying subjects included in the EBacc provides students with greater opportunities in further education and increases the likelihood that a pupil will stay on in full-time education. Sutton Trust research reveals that studying the EBacc can help improve a young person's performance in English and maths.

There is no EBacc. certificate for students and unlike some schools we don't insist on students studying all of the EBacc. subjects, as our values of diversity and, choice, faith and creativity are stronger drivers for our Key Stage Four offer. That said, we recognise the value of the Ebacc. and do encourage students to include these subjects in their choices.

## How will the curriculum be modified for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities?

We are blessed with an incredibly diverse intake, which is one of things that makes this such a great school to be a part of. We want to ensure that all our students continue to access the full curriculum offer but at a level which is appropriate to them. To that end we will be looking at how we can best meet the needs of all our learners. Making sure our Key Stage Four offer is accessible is one of the key drivers for us as a school and we will be in touch with individual parents and carers over the coming weeks to discuss this in more detail.

## When can I submit options choices?

The form for submitting choices will be available on the Year 9 Options Page from 1 March to 31 March.

## What happens after I submit my choices

During Term 5 (April and May) we create the option blocks based on student choices and make the timetable and draft the staffing. We also hold discussions with students and parents and carers where first choice subjects are not possible and then send out a letter with the final confirmation of subject choices.

## How do you make sure things are fair?

Wherever possible we give people their first choices. We use a computer to put the choices into option blocks which give the maximum number of students their first choices. However, sometimes we only have enough students to run one class of a subject, and this will therefore only appear in one option block which may result in a clash with another subject in which there is only one class, that a student has chosen – in this instance the student would have to choose an alternative subject. On rare occasions, there might be too many students wanting to study a particular subject we will ask if anyone is willing to swap. If there are still too many, we will allocate a number to all the remaining students and then use a random number generator to choose students until the course is full.

## What if I discover I have made the wrong choice?

Once the confirmation letters have gone out it is difficult to change students' options. However, we know that sometimes students make mistakes! If, after the choices have been finalised, a student wants to try and change they can email Mrs Chaibi to see if a swap if possible: this will be determined by whether there is space in the subject and if the swap works with other choices that the student has made. We will always require parents or carers to agree any changes. Once Year 10 has begun, it is possible to request changes up until the end of term 1, although these will be dependent on group sizes and the at the discretion of the subject head. By the start of term 2, we only allow changes in exceptional circumstances (e.g. there is a medical reason why PE is no longer a suitable GCSE option) as too much content has been covered by that point for students to catch up effectively.