



## **Year 9 Options for GCSE 2024 to 2026 – Frequently Asked Questions**

Please find a range of frequently asked questions (with answers!) below. If you can not find what you are looking for here, please email [ChaibiH@smrt.bristol.sch.uk](mailto: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 of 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)
- Physical Education (non-GCSE)

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.

We also offer non-examined study of Computing, Information Technology and Digital Literacy through our pastoral curriculum “The Pulse”

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. They 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 fifteen 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 are the possible Twilight GCSEs?**

We want to find out whether there is interest from students in studying for additional, twilight GCSEs in Spanish, French and German as well as Classics. These would probably run after school for five hour long sessions over a fortnight and will be studied in addition to the existing offer of core and three option subjects. The session times and the days will be confirmed later in the process once we have established staffing and numbers. We will only be able to run these courses if we get sufficient numbers of students and we have staff who are willing to work flexibly to teach these classes. We offer these subjects to maximise students' access to the EBacc.

## 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, German 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. That is the reason why we have added additional Languages GCSEs as twilights to allow students to continue to study languages without missing out on other subjects which they may be more passionate about or which may be more relevant to their chosen career path.

## 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 of our students continue to access the full curriculum offer but at a level which is appropriate to them. To that end we hope to be running some smaller groups in Maths, English and Science with the possibility of Level 1 certification rather than full GCSEs. We have also engaged with the Unit Award Scheme and have trialled this in Art and Photography with a couple of students who have struggled to access the full GCSE. We also use Entry Level qualifications where appropriate. 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 March 4<sup>th</sup> to March 18<sup>th</sup> and can be found on the [Year 9 Options page](#)

## 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 will also make the decisions about whether we can run Twilight subjects at this point. 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 of 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 is 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.