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Choosing subjects to study in the UK Sixth Form

The key point is that in the sixth form in UK schools (Years 12 and 13) pupils study far fewer subjects than you have been studying in your own country. This allows you to specialise and study these subjects in much greater depth. The choice of subjects is very important as it can affect which university courses are available to you and also your eventual career path.

The examination system you will follow will normally be A Level.

A few schools in the programme offer either the International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB) or Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers.

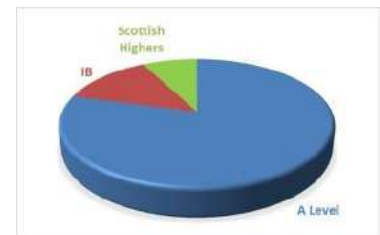
Each system leads to examinations at the end of two years' study which are essential for entry into university. These qualifications are recognised not only in the UK but also internationally. However, to qualify for entry into university in your own country you may be required to take mandatory national examinations.

In the **A level system** you will normally choose 3 or possibly 4 main subjects and you will take examinations in these after two years of study. Almost certainly you will also be encouraged to undertake study in non-examined subjects (such as General Studies) or your school may enter you for what is called the EPQ (Extended Project Qualification), a major piece of independently researched work.

For the **International Baccalaureate diploma** you have a choice of subjects but you must study literature and mathematics as well. You study your chosen subjects to standard (SL) or higher level (HL) depending on which are more important for university entry onto the course of your choice. Broadly speaking, those subjects you study at higher level will be equivalent to the subjects studied at A level. The idea of the IB is to maintain your breadth of knowledge. In this system you are also required to write an extended essay and to study 'theory of Knowledge (TOK)'.

The **Scottish Highers and Advanced Highers** are similar to the A level system in that the Highers require one year of study and the Advanced Highers normally require two years. As the name suggests this examination syllabus is followed in many schools in Scotland although some Scottish schools teach A level courses instead.)

The chart on the right shows the proportion of scholarship places available for A level, IB and Scottish Highers courses.



One year or two years in your UK school

The scholarship offered by schools through HMC Projects is intended to be **for two years** to enable you to complete your courses and take the final examinations for entry into university or college.

Your choice of subjects

Your choice of subjects that you study in your UK school depends on a number of factors:

- Your interest and ability in a subject;
- Your choice of university;
- Your choice of subject you wish to study at university;
- Your choice of career.

There is normally a large range of subjects to choose from in any school but not all schools offer the same range of subjects.

The following points may be helpful:

- Studying English involves studying English literature in depth;
- If you think you might want to choose a foreign language for A level, then you must have a fairly advanced knowledge already. Normally, you cannot start from scratch.

It is also important to be aware that universities may prefer certain subjects for entry onto a particular course. Generally, universities can be rather traditional in the subjects they prefer. Be wary if the subject includes the word “studies”... these are not necessarily for the most able students! You should also be cautious about studying a subject for a BTEC qualification as these may not be recognised outside the UK.

You will be wise to check out what is meant in general terms by sciences, mathematics, arts, humanities....

Table of Subjects

Subjects popular with universities		Subjects offered by fewer schools
Normally offered by all schools	Offered only by some schools	
Biology*	Business Studies	Media Studies
Chemistry*	Economics	Photography
English Literature*	Classical Civilisation	Physical Education
French*	Computer Science	... <i>and many others</i> ...
Geography*	Design Tech (Graphics)	
History*	Design Tech (Product Design)	
Art	Drama and Theatre Studies	
Mathematics*	Latin*	
Further Mathematics*	Greek*	
Music	German*	
Physics*	Psychology	
Spanish*	Religious Studies	
	Politics	

**for helpful guidance on subject choices for university courses, go to <https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>.*

Examples of subject combinations useful for certain university courses in the UK:

Course	Preferred subjects for university
Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Science	Chemistry and Biology are strongly advised (the majority of medical schools require Chemistry). Maths or Physics is desirable.
Natural Sciences	Two or three of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics.
Engineering	Mathematics and Physics are required. Further Mathematics is advised.
Computer Science	Mathematics is required. Computer Science or Physics are desirable.
Psychology	Usually two Sciences are advised, but entry via Arts subjects is perfectly possible.
Economics and PPE	Whilst Mathematics is advised, students should also consider Economics, History, Geography, Politics or Religious Studies.
Business Studies, Management, Marketing	Mathematics can be helpful, but not essential. Business, Economics, Geography, Psychology may be helpful.
Architecture	A combination of Arts and Science subjects; an Art portfolio is essential.
Foreign Languages	Two languages (modern or classical) are desirable but not essential
Law	Any A Levels at the highest grade. English Literature, History or Religious Studies are desirable.

University choices and tuition fees

From the start of 2021 all scholars, including those from EU countries, will have to pay the higher fees paid by all international students to study at a university in the UK. These tuition fees are normally more than double the fees that UK students have to pay. Including living costs this makes study at a university in the UK very expensive. Scholarships and bursaries to offset these costs are rare and difficult to obtain if you are an international student studying in the UK. The competition for such scholarships and awards is fierce. It is highly unlikely that you would be able to afford to stay and study in the UK. It is therefore important that you make the university advisor at your school know that you cannot afford the high fees at UK universities.

All scholars are recommended to consider university options outside the UK. There are universities in some European countries and beyond where the courses are taught in English and the fees are more affordable and access to state funding can bring the costs down to very low level. If you are considering studying at a university in the USA then you need to plan and prepare for this soon after starting at your school in the UK: you should seek advice on this from your school.

For all non-UK university applications, schools may not necessarily be aware of some of the requirements. For example, studying in Germany is a very attractive option for students as tuition is free, but the choice of A Level or IB subjects to study there is very strict. Careful research is needed to explore options in European countries.