How GCSEs set you up for your future
This is an exciting time; you get to choose which subjects you wish to study further. Some subjects—such as English, maths, science, PE—will stay a core part of your timetable, but there are some choices that you can make for yourself.

There may also be new subjects for you to choose from, such as business or health & social care.

In Years 9 and 10 you will study ‘GCSEs’.

GCSEs are an important milestone, because they also tell colleges and employers:

- What level of further study or job responsibility is right for you.
- What your skills and strengths are.

Some schools offer vocational qualifications alongside GCSEs. Vocational qualifications offer a mix of practical and theoretical learning that is directly related to a specific area of employment.

This stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education and these are a way of assessing your achievements from school.
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GCSE grades

GCSEs are graded 1-9 and universities will expect students to have achieved at least grade 4 in English and maths. Depending on the course you are applying for, you may also need higher GCSE grades in science, maths or specific GCSE subjects.

Qualification levels

GCSE is a ‘level 2’ qualification. You need ‘level 3’ qualification(s) to get into university. To progress onto level 3 (such as A levels or T levels):

Some further education colleges will ask for six ‘good’ GCSE passes.

Some level 3 subjects may ask for more, e.g. a grade 6-7 in maths for chemistry A level or a grade 5 in English for some humanities A levels.

Grades and levels – what’s the difference?

You may need a minimum of four or five+ GCSEs graded 4 and above.
Ebacc is not a qualification, but a combination of subjects that includes:

- Modern foreign languages
- Computer science
- Humanities (such as history and geography)

Students often make four option choices (three if they take triple science) – you may be asked to select one or two ‘Ebacc’ subjects from the choices on offer.

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Higher ranked universities like to see a broad range of GCSE (Ebacc) subjects, and it has been shown that students following the Ebacc are more likely to stay – and achieve – in education.
If you have a particular passion, or career idea for the future, it may be wise to take a related subject, or your future pathway could be tricky.

Art, languages, IT / computer science and triple science may be among the subjects needed for budding creatives, computer scientists, doctors, vets and dentists.

This explains the greater emphasis on careers from Year 9. If you’re unsure what subjects you may need for the future, and for help to decide if this is the best way to go, make sure you speak with your careers lead in school or ask for a careers guidance appointment to talk things through.
Starting to think about future career plans

Some students know from a young age what they want to do. It is not realistic – or perhaps even desirable – for everyone to choose a career in Year 9!

It is, though, sensible for you to start to do some research into different careers, and the sorts of occupational areas you are drawn to. Using careers websites and other resources to research and reflect can help you understand in which direction you may be headed.

Useful websites include:

- [nationalcareers.service.gov.uk](http://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk) – job profiles
- [icould.com](http://icould.com)
- [careersbox.co.uk](http://careersbox.co.uk)
- [targetcareers.co.uk](http://targetcareers.co.uk)

Your school may also use a careers platform such as ‘Start’ or have a licence for ‘Kudos’...

Careers quizzes, such as the ‘buzz quiz’ on [icould.com](http://icould.com), or questions leading to suggested careers ‘matches’ on Kudos (if your school has a licence for this), can help you to understand your strengths and interests.

For more on this, see Your strengths and interests, and how to make the right decisions for you.
Year 9 roadmap – have I done these things?

1. Looked at information about jobs and careers that I might choose in the future
2. Completed at least one careers quiz to get some insights
3. Read options information given to me at school
4. Checked which qualifications I need to allow me to reach my future goals
5. Spoken with my careers team in school
6. Spoken with my subject teachers
7. Been to options events
8. Spoken with my family
Pathways’ partners: