



Options Presentation Summary - February 2024

The aim of this session is to give you an introduction to the next milestone for our Year 9 students - the GCSE options process. We want you to feel empowered to have informed conversations with your children and will share some new additions to the process this year, that will help us all but especially for those families who may have not been through the process before. Our aim as a school is clear, we want students to choose subjects that they will enjoy and can achieve success in.

The GCSEs are a set of qualifications your child will take in Year 11. These exams play a crucial role in shaping their future academic and career paths. With some of my students, I tell them that their GCSEs are like keys, they let them into the next step of their academic journey, whatever that looks like. Whether they want an apprenticeship in the future perhaps or want to pursue further education, GCSEs unlock those opportunities for them. We also have vocational courses on offer for our students. There is a whole team of colleagues at UHS who are here to support your child in making some of those choices: **Raising Standards Lead (Miss Silva), Mr Malesci (HOL) Ms Kumar their Guidance Leader, Mrs Jarvis** as well as all the subject and form tutor staff.

What happens during the Options process?

- The process has already started. This week, our Careers Lead Mr Heslin has been speaking to Year 9 in assembly about the menu of careers events taking place over the next few weeks. From a careers fair to appointments with a careers adviser, students will be gaining a greater understanding of potential career paths. Students have also been discussing careers with their form tutors this week. We want students to be open minded: students are preparing for roles and jobs that in some cases do not yet exist and we need to be mindful of that.
- **Support:** Every student in year 9 will have the opportunity to discuss their options with a member of staff, whether that is their form tutor, a career adviser, a member of the FLC or the school's pastoral or leadership team - we want to be able to offer personalised

guidance based on their strengths, interests, and future aspirations.

- **GCSE Taster Sessions:** To support with the process, your child's teachers are currently in the process of designing some GCSE Taster sessions. These sessions will run much like a normal lesson so if a student is interested in studying Sociology but wants to understand more about the course content, they can sign up for the taster sessions. A key date for the diary is 11th March. If students would like a flavour of what a course entails and any further information, they will be able to sign up for a session to help steer their decision.
- **Subject Selection:** Based on the information gathered, your child will select a set of subjects to study for their GCSEs, all Level 2 courses. This selection will determine their curriculum for the next two years, impacting their learning experience and future opportunities. It is important to note that we will do what we can to honour student choices but sometimes, resourcing or timetable constraints can occasionally make this tricky. We will engage you throughout the process and enter into a dialogue should we need to revisit option choices. The Options form will be sent out to you on **15th March**. All Options forms need to be returned by **25th March**.
- **Options Review Day:** New to the process this year is the opportunity for you to come in for an Options Review Day so that you are aware of what your students' learning journey will entail and to review the course choices that have been made. Parents will be sent invitations to attend Options Review Day and so a key date for your diary is the **21st June**. We will be sending out further information and a breakdown of the day in due course.
- **Assemblies:** I will be speaking to the students about the options they have available to them in a detailed assembly. All of this information will be supplied to you as an Options booklet and available on the website also from w/c 4th March.
- **Compulsory Courses:** All students will be studying a core set of subjects in line with the National Curriculum: every Year 10 student studies English Language and Literature, Mathematics, Science, Ethics as well as PE and Personal Development.
- **Students then have four choices to make from a range of subjects - on offer a range of GCSE and Level 2 courses.** Those studying for the EBACC, **The English Baccalaureate will select a Language, French or Spanish alongside History or Geography.** The EBACC is designed to ensure that all students have the opportunity to study a broad range of subjects. These subjects allow the opportunity for additional study - whether that is in other GCSEs or vocational qualifications. It's important to note that **we do not recommend students studying more than one vocational course** - traditionally, some students have thought this to be an easier route when that is not the case at all. Vocational subjects are suitable for students who will be motivated to complete what is often a heavy coursework load and can meet strict deadlines. We would like students to elect a balanced mix of subjects: the ones they enjoy as well as

those they do well in.

Again, it's worth noting that if your child is currently in top-set for Languages, we would expect them to continue on this trajectory and elect Spanish or French for GCSE given their aptitude and proficiency in the language.

How can you support your child during this process?

- **Communication:** Talk to your child about their interests and aspirations. Encourage them to explore different subject options and understand the rationale behind their choices. We often tell students, please do not pick a subject because your friends are doing it and please don't pick a subject just because you get on with the teacher.
- **Support versus pressure:** Choosing their GCSE subjects is a significant decision for your child. While you and us can offer guidance and support, ultimately, they will be completing the work and sitting the examinations so please encourage them to choose subjects they are passionate about.

For further questions and queries, please reach us at parents@uhs.org.uk where we will endeavour to reply within 24 hours.