



Year 9

OPTIONS BOOKLET

2021

"It is wiser to find out than to suppose". – Mark Twain

INTRODUCTION

Introduction for Students

Believe it or not, this booklet is one of the most important you will ever read. For the first time in ten years of education, you get the chance to choose some of the subjects you study. It's an exciting time, but also a very important one, because the decisions you make could play a big part in your future progression.

For this reason, you should take your time and talk to people before you decide your options. Talk to your parents or carers; they will have made similar decisions of their own in the past, and will be able to advise you. Talk to your teachers; they will tell you whether they think their subject is suitable for you, and they can answer any questions you might have. Talk to older students, who are already doing courses that you might be interested in; they will know exactly what each subject is like. Talk to your tutors too, who will be able to give you unbiased advice.

Introduction for Parents

This booklet is designed to help your child make the best choice of subjects to study in Key Stage 4. For parents this can be quite a confusing time. You will want to help your children make the right choices, but you may feel that you don't know enough to give them the right advice.

Any member of staff will be more than willing to discuss your child's options. If, after the Year 9 Options events and information, you are still unsure about anything, please don't worry, you will also be invited to a one to one meeting with a senior member of staff from the school to discuss things in more detail.

We hope you find this year's option booklet informative and useful to help you make the best choices with your child. Our aim is to ensure that we get the "right students onto the right courses". We hope that this booklet will help you to support these important decisions.

Important Dates

Option Choices should be made using the Microsoft TEAMS form available on the school website at the address below and completed no later than **Friday 26th February 2021**.

https://www.benfield-school.co.uk/web/year_9_options_2021

Paper copies are available on request from the school office, but must also be completed by **Friday 26th February 2021**.

Individual student interviews with staff to discuss their option choices will begin once schools return after the current lockdown and will be conducted in socially distanced ways. Arrangements can be made for parents to part of these interviews if required.

Questions and Contact Information

If you have any questions about the options process, please contact the **Main Reception** and they will direct you to the person best able to help you.

Alternatively, please email **admin@benfield.newcastle.sch.uk** and include 'Year 9 Options' in the subject line.

THE OPTIONS PROCESS

Aims of the Year 9 Options Process

At Benfield School we aim to ensure all our students can:

1. Study courses that suit their abilities and aspirations,
2. Follow a curriculum that is broad, balanced, stimulating and useful,
3. Build on their strengths and explore new skills,
4. Achieve the best grade in relevant subjects for their future progression.

The Options Process

At Benfield School, we believe in providing a curriculum that is appropriate, balanced and relevant for everyone, and which supports all students to succeed. This booklet provides important information and guidance about the courses and pathways on offer in Key Stage 4. It is important to get these decisions right to ensure that students achieve the best results possible and are provided with a springboard to future post-16 education and a chosen career path thereafter.

Students will have reviewed their progress so far in Key Stage 3, with subject teachers, tutors, parents and the pastoral team. The next stage is to ensure that young people are going to study the most suitable courses and qualifications that are best matched to their strengths, interests and future aspirations.

Throughout Key Stage 3, and in their options pack, your child has received (or will shortly be receiving) the following support to help prepare them for the Key Stage 4 options process:

- An introductory assembly about the options process, the qualification available and progression destinations post-16.
- A range of events, visits and talks about future careers and education options
- Information outlining their learning pathway
- Access to the relevant course information which has been uploaded to the school's website
- The chance at our Key Stage 4 Options Clinic, to discuss the courses they may be thinking of choosing with subject specialist staff,
- A one to one interview with senior staff to discuss and confirm their choices.

Options during COVID-19 in 2020-21

The issues created by COVID in the academic year 20-21 mean that some of the above activities will have to be moved to the summer term, given the disruption to normal school life brought about by social distancing, lockdown and limits on visitors into schools.

Because of this we will ensure that during the summer term – even after students have made their choices – they will continue to receive support, advice and guidance. When students return to school they will have the opportunity to review their choices, and we will also operate a 'Transfer Week' in September so that anyone who feels they may have made the wrong decision can discuss an alternative option where possible.

Students still need to make their initial decisions over February half-term as this information is needed by schools to plan their provision for the following year and have enough time to recruit additional staff if necessary.

THE KEY STAGE 4 CURRICULUM

At Benfield School we are able to offer a broad and balanced range of subjects to our Key Stage 4 students. Some of these are **compulsory** (those that the Government and/or school says you must do) and some **optional** (you choose them).

We have therefore divided our Key Stage 4 Curriculum into two parts:

1. The Core Curriculum
2. Option Subjects

The Core Curriculum

The core curriculum includes those subjects that are compulsory for all students at Key Stage 4:

- English Language
- English Literature
- Mathematics
- Science
- Core PE
- Registration

All students in school also follow a program of activities to help them track and improve their academic performance and experience a broad range of activities including RE, PSHE, CEIAG and Enterprise etc. At Benfield School we deliver this through our daily Tutorial programme, and themed drop-down days throughout the year.

The Option Subjects

To ensure that all students can study a range of courses and qualifications that best suit their ability, learning styles and future ambitions, we strongly recommend that students follow one of the pathways which have been designed to combine the range of subjects and qualification types that individual students will need.

Option Choices should be made using the Microsoft TEAMS form available on the school website at the address below and completed no later than **Friday 26th February 2021**.

https://www.benfield-school.co.uk/web/year_9_options_2021

Students should aim for a well-balanced range of courses to leave options open for when they reach school leaving age and have further choices to make.

If students have a strength/interest in a particular subject they should consider that option carefully. Employers, Universities, Sixth Forms and Colleges are not necessarily interested in the quantity of GCSE qualifications a student possesses. Instead they will look at how suitable the qualifications chosen are for courses at a higher level, the grades achieved and what other extra-curricular activities a student has undertaken.

CAREERS EDUCATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Future Destinations

The choices students make now are designed to ensure students have the necessary qualifications to move onto a range of educational destinations when they leave Year 11. Those destinations will include:

- Post-16
 - Sixth Form
 - College
 - Apprenticeship
 - Employment (With some training included)
- Post-18
 - University
 - Successful Careers

Post-16 Options

Key Stage 4 Options are the first key decision point most young people will face in their lives. The next key decision point will be when they choose what type of education destination to choose after Year 11. Although this may seem a long way off, the best way to make sure you can do what you want in the future, is to give it some thought now and make sure the choices you make now leave as many options open to you as possible. After Year 11 you will have four main learning pathways.

These are:

- Sixth Form
- College
- Apprenticeships
- Employment with Training

During the course of Year 11 you'll have to decide:

- What do I want to do next?
- Where and how can I achieve this?
- What will be available?

It's a good idea to begin planning early to make sure you make the right decision.

Think about some of the following:

- How clear are you about the career you want?
- Do you want to choose a course that leaves your options open?
- Do you want to start training/studying for a specific job?
- How do you learn best? In a practical, working situation or being taught in school or college?
- Do you need specific qualifications or do you have to go to University?

People who can help you to decide

- Careers Coordinator
- Form teacher/tutor
- Subject teachers
- Parents/Carers

There are some fantastic resources to help you make your choices now and at post-16 listed on the Careers sections of our school website.

Thinking Ahead to the Sixth Form...

For your post 16 education we sincerely hope that you choose to stay with us here at Benfield School and continue on to become a sixth form student here with us studying a range of A Level and Level 3 BTEC courses with established progression routes to some of the country's top universities.

Benfield School Sixth Form is a vibrant, committed and inclusive sixth form community within the school that you already know well. We offer a varied programme of study where we aim to meet the needs of every one of our students.

If you choose to stay at Benfield School you will be part of a sixth form that values its students and that helps them to fulfill their potential and achieve highly. Whether preparing you for University, further education or the wider world of work, we do everything we can to help you achieve the goals that you set for yourself.

There will be a place at Benfield Sixth Form for all students who achieve the required grades at the end of Year 11 and who have demonstrated the focus and commitment to succeed.

Considering University

It may seem like a long time away, but if you are considering applying to a competitive university and especially a competitive course, it is important that you consider all the aspects of the entrance requirements, including the GCSE requirements.

The summary below gives an idea of the GCSE requirements that you might come across for certain degree courses. Remember that these are only examples. It is important to check university websites for detailed requirements before applying.

- Applicants to study Medicine are usually required to have very good GCSE results in Maths, Science and English
- For a degree in English, universities often look for applicants to have a GCSE in a Modern Foreign Language
- A grade B in Maths and sometimes Science is often required for a degree in Psychology
- What subjects at A Level give me the most options?

Many courses at university level build on knowledge which you will gain whilst studying at Benfield School. Where this is the case, universities need to make sure that all the students they admit have prepared themselves in the best way to cope with their chosen course. For this reason, some of the top university courses may require students to have studied a specific subject at A level prior to entry, others may not.

There are also a range of universities in our regions and across the country who require GCSE and BTEC grades from Year 11 and will make offers to students based on a range of A level and BTEC Level 3 courses at the end of Year 13.

For the most competitive universities and courses the following are some subjects that are required more often than others. These subjects are:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| ○ Maths and Further Maths | ○ English (Literature) |
| ○ Physics | ○ Geography |
| ○ Biology | ○ History |
| ○ Chemistry | ○ Modern Foreign Language
(like French or Spanish) |

The information above is taken from a leaflet '*Informed Choices*' (2011) issued by the Russell Group of top universities, which provides guidance to students about how their GCSE subjects can affect their course choices at some universities. When applying to a competitive university and especially for a very competitive course at a competitive university, it is important that you consider all the aspects of the entrance requirements, including the GCSE or other standard level requirements. The link to this document can be found at:

<https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>

Useful Careers Advice

Consider subjects you think you will be good at and will enjoy. You may wish to explore possible careers, however a balanced range of subjects will ensure as many options as possible are open to you. Ask yourself:

- Which subjects interest me?
- Which subjects do I like and why do I like them?
- Which are my best subjects and how do I know?
- What do my teachers say my strengths are?
- Would I prefer a course with examinations or coursework?

Few employers expect specific GCSE passes with the exception of English, Maths and Science.

Your GCSE subject choices and the grades you achieve can affect your ability to study some subjects at sixth form, college or an apprenticeship, so speak to the sixth form and college staff who will be there on Options Evening. It always helps to have your questions ready before the event so you know exactly what you want to discuss.

In some subjects like History and Geography, it may be possible to study these at A Level without having first taken them at GCSE. However, this does not apply to all subjects, for example; Sciences or languages, to be sure check entry requirements with the sixth form staff.

Career Websites

You can find information on job sectors and specific careers using the 'Career Tools' and then 'Job Profiles' on the National Careers Service website. Go to www.direct.gov.uk/NationalCareersService

An apprenticeship is where you are learning through hands on experience of a job and gaining a nationally recognised qualification. To find out more information and to view vacancies, register online at www.apprenticeships.org.uk

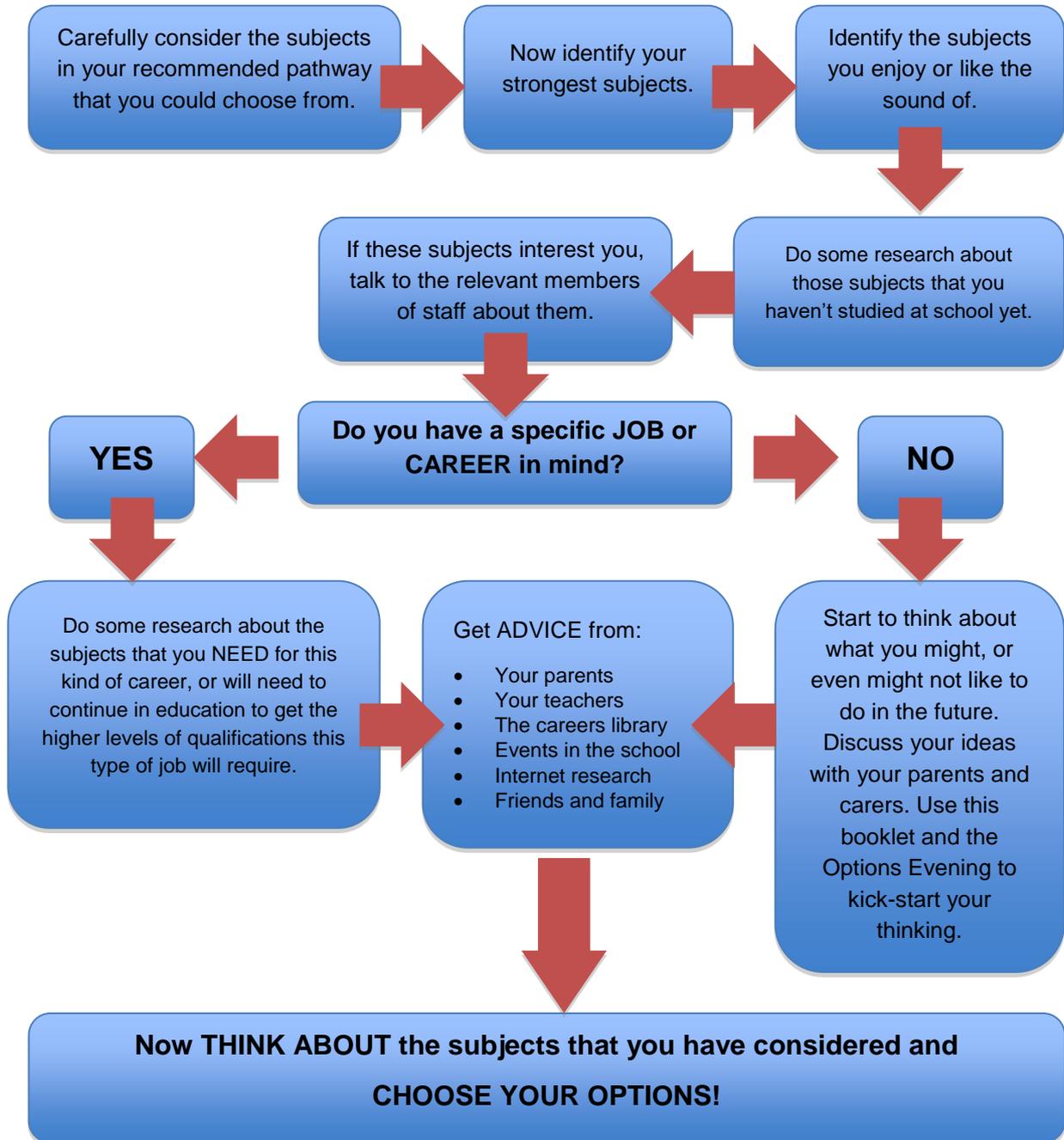
If you are considering university or completing a degree course, then research and explore entry requirements. Go to www.ucas.ac.uk

There are also a range of websites to help you explore careers and subject choices on our school website at https://www.benfield-school.co.uk/web/careers_information_advice_guidance_1/523279.

MAKING CHOICES - ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Choosing Your Options Flow Chart

Below is a simple flow chart to help guide you through choosing your option subjects:



Do's and Don'ts When Choosing Your Option Subjects

DO:

- ✓ Consider studying a broad range of subjects
- ✓ Consider subjects that you have enjoyed in KS3
- ✓ Consider which subjects you are successful at
- ✓ If you already have clear ideas about your career/ future take this into account
- ✓ Ask for advice.

DON'T:

- X Pick subjects to be with your friends
- X Pick or not pick subjects because of the teacher
- X Pick subjects because you think they are easy options – they aren't

Making Choices – Advice for Students

1. **Take time** – Don't choose your courses straight away. Take time to consider your options and discuss these with the people who can advise you.
2. **Collect information and advice** – Do some research into the jobs you may be interested in when you leave education, and which qualifications and subjects you may need to study. You need to follow this up with conversations with your subject teachers to find out even more. Teachers, tutors and Year 10 or 11 students you know who are already studying the courses will all be able to help you. You can also access a range of resources to help you find out more about future careers, sixth forms, colleges and university on the careers pages of the school website.
3. **Look back and reflect** - Think about what you have done already and about your strengths and areas for development. Build on your strengths but do not ignore your areas for development. You will need to work on these too.
4. **Choose for yourself** - Do not be influenced by what your friends are choosing or by which teacher has taught you this year. Next year will be different and you will have your lessons in different teaching groups.
5. **Work Hard** - It is important that whatever options you choose for Key Stage 4, that you do your best in during the rest of this year. You need to work hard in all your subjects now so that you make good progress when you start GCSE or BTEC courses. This will provide you with a firm foundation for the beginning of Key Stage 4 and help you make the best start possible.
6. Option Choices should be made using the Microsoft TEAMS form available on the school website at the address below and completed no later than **Friday 26th February 2021**.

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Making Choices – Advice for Parents and Carers

At Benfield School, our aim is that all students should receive the best advice they can when choosing their subjects for Key Stage 4. They should have a guided choice from within the subjects that the school will recommend, that best matches their abilities, achievements and ambitions, with the benefit of guidance and information from school staff.

You as parents/carers also play a vital role in this decision making process and at Benfield School we hope to support you as best we can. We hope therefore that you will find the questions below helpful when discussing options for next year with your son/daughter:

Your child

1. How does your child see themselves?
2. How does your child see the future?
3. What ambitions does they have for the future?
4. Are these ideas influencing their choices now?
5. What are your child's interests and abilities?
6. Which subjects would best use and develop these?

Your child's future

1. What careers and courses will be available if your child follows the subjects they like and learns well?
2. Is this a limited range of opportunities?
3. What courses and careers will not be available?
4. For the careers your child has in mind, which subjects are necessary or useful?
5. Which subjects or qualifications will give them the best chance of success at the highest grades to support their progression to post-16 or university destinations in the future?

Yourself

1. What ambitions do you have for your child?
2. How are your ideas influencing your child?
3. Are you encouraging your child to choose the right subjects for them?
4. Do you know whether academic or vocational courses are most appropriate for your child's talents and aspirations and which will lead to their choice post-16 course or future career.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I choose which subjects to take?

We recommend that you study subjects that you enjoy and feel that you will be successful in. If you have a career in mind you should think about and research which subjects you may need to pursue that career. However, we would recommend you study a wide range of subjects rather than specialising if you are not sure because you may change your mind in the future. Make sure that you talk to your subject teachers if you are thinking of studying their subject at GCSE or BTEC so that they can answer your questions further.

2. What GCSE or BTECs will I need to get a good job in the future?

All employers/universities require you to have taken GCSE English and Maths and have demonstrated good personal skills. To study an A level or similar course you will need five GCSEs at grade 4/5 or above as a minimum. Many A Level courses require a grade 6 or above. To find out about specific career entry requirements go to the school Sixth Form website for advice on A Level and BTEC Level 3 entry criteria, or visit some local Sixth Form / FE college websites for information about vocational college courses and apprenticeships.

3. What if I change my mind?

Once you have completed your option form you can still change your mind, but the latest this should happen will be May as the new timetable will be starting in June before the summer. Once you have started the course you may still be allowed to change your option if you have a good reason up until half term in October. Changes will be discussed with students and parents/carers and will only be made after we have considered your future progression destinations, and students have shown that they have tried to make the subject work. The increase in difficulty of courses in Key Stage 4 sometimes means that students want to drop a subject without really trying, and with a little support and encouragement, they can settle in quickly and succeed.

4. Will I be in the same group as my friend?

Not necessarily. It is a bad idea to choose a subject just because a friend will be choosing it too. It is quite common for there to be more than one class of each subject and therefore it is very unlikely that you will be in the same group as your friend.

5. Does my GCSE choice affect my A level or sixth form choices?

All the pathways and courses offered at Benfield will lead you into our sixth form, or a college course/apprenticeship that will then lead to university or a range of careers. Even if you haven't studied a subject at GCSE, it may still be possible to take that subject in the sixth form if your other results show that you have the ability and attitude to work required to be successful. These issues will be discussed as part of the application process to sixth form in Year 11, but you can ask any questions you have about 16+ study as part of any interview you have in the next few weeks .

6. How many lessons do I have a week for my option subjects?

The majority of students' timetables will be made up of Maths, English, Science and the statutory core curriculum subjects of PE and Registration. Each optional GCSE and BTEC is studied for three hours per week throughout Years 10 and 11.

7. Are there things I can't study?

All students are placed onto pathways that contain the subjects which provide the best opportunity for students to achieve the best grades they can and have the widest range of options available to them in the future. These pathways have proven effective in the past and the Year 13 students who have just left the school were able to enter university from all of the pathways we have on offer in Key Stage 4.

8. What is a BTEC?

BTECs are vocationally related qualifications, where learners develop knowledge and understanding by applying their learning and skills in a work-related context. They engage young learners in taking responsibility for their own learning, and develop essential work-related skills, such as working to deadlines and presenting information effectively.

BTECs are mainly assessed through project/coursework which is marked and moderated internally, before being sent off for external moderation. All new BTEC courses are required to have at least one examined unit.

A BTEC First Award is equivalent to one GCSE.

BTEC qualifications may suit students who are organised, driven and like working independently. It may suit students who prefer coursework to exams.

N.B. Too many coursework/project based subjects can create workload problems at certain crunch points especially in Year 11.

9. What is the English Baccalaureate (EBacc)?

The English Baccalaureate was introduced as a performance measure by the current Government in the 2010 performance tables. It is not a qualification in itself. The measure recognises where students have secured a 4/5 grade or better across a core of academic subjects – English, Mathematics, History or Geography, the Sciences and a language.

The subjects with the EBacc are designed to ensure that all students have the opportunity to study a broad core of subjects, ensuring that doors are not closed off to them in terms of future progression. Some universities have voiced support.

The Ebacc is not compulsory, but it is being strongly pushed by the current Government and so it may be a disadvantage for some universities or careers not to have it in the future.

Many top universities would prefer students to have studied the EBacc subjects, and this may be a factor when applying to highly competitive degree subjects or employment opportunities.

10. Who can I ask for advice?

There are a wide range of people you could ask for advice to help you make your choices including:

- Form Tutor
- Subject Teachers
- Year Manager
- Achievement Leader
- Mrs Goddard
- Parents/Carers

Don't wait until the options evening to have these conversations, you can start asking questions and thinking every day to help you make the right choice.

11. When will my Key Stage 4 courses start?

Many subjects will take the opportunity to begin next years' courses in June once the summer exams have finished. This reduces both the 'settling-in' period in September, and the 'slowing-down' for summer' time in July. Enrichment activities will still be happening during the summer term. **It is therefore vital that students do not miss any time at the end of the summer term.**