

WHAT IS...

A GCSE

GCSE stands for General Certificate of Secondary Education. Most pupils start studying for their GCSEs in year 10 . Some subjects are compulsory, meaning that they have to be studied but there are some choices to be made. Pupils usually study for their GCSEs for two years so they start at the beginning of year ten and finish at the end of year 11.

This is called the end of Key Stage 4. At the end of year 10 there will be exams set by the school. There will also be exams at the end of year 11, these usually start in May and finish in June. These are called national exams and are set by awarding bodies. These exams are not marked by the teachers in school but by external markers. Each subject is given a grade and pupils must wait until August for their results.

What is Key Stage 4 (KS4)?

Education is divided into 4 key stages. The last of these, Key Stage 4 (KS4), is taught in Years 10 and 11 at secondary school for ages 14 to 16.

WHICH SUBJECTS ARE COMPULSORY IN GCSEs?

The compulsory or core subjects are Mathematics, English and Science along with PE and PHSE (citizenship) although there are no exams in the last two. All other subjects taken at GCSE are optional. Schools usually group subjects together in blocks and pupils can choose one subject from each block.

HOW DO I CHOOSE MY GCSEs?

If you are not sure which GCSEs to choose, try to find out as much as you can. Ask your parents/carers, teachers and your schools' careers staff. Do some research. If you know what career you would like to do in the future, then find out what subjects you need to study that career. If you don't know what you would like to do in the future, then think about what interests you and what you are good at. You will do better if it is a subject that you enjoy. Prospects have lots of job profiles on their websites where you can find out more about jobs and what qualifications you need to do them [Prospects website](#).

How are GCSEs graded?

GCSEs are graded as follows:

- > **Grade 9**
- > **Grade 8**
- > **Grade 7**
- > **Grade 6**
- > **Grade 5**
- > **Grade 4**
- > **Grade 3**
- > **Grade 2**
- > **Grade 1**
- > **Ungraded**



Grade 9 is the highest grade you can get and ungraded means that the exam has been failed.

How long is a GCSE course?

A GCSE course is two years long and you will be taught all that you need to know for the exams. However, there is also coursework for some subjects which is also marked by external examiners.

WHAT ARE 'ENTITLEMENT AREAS'?

As well as the compulsory subjects, there are four 'entitlement areas' for the optional subjects. You can take one course in all four of these if you wish to do so. The four entitlement areas are:

- > **The arts (art and design, music, dance, drama and media arts)**
- > **Design and technology (electronics, food technology, graphics, resistant materials, systems and control, textiles and product design)**
- > **The humanities (geography and history)**
- > **Modern foreign language (French, German, Spanish etc.)**

The optional subjects, the ones that you can choose, can vary for each school.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE GCSEs?

GCSEs are very important as they will affect what you can do for your next steps.

Some courses will ask for certain grades so, it is really important that you work hard and get the best grades that you possibly can. After all, two years is not very long at all.

WHAT'S NEXT?

WHAT CAN I DO AFTER MY GCSEs?

- > Full-time education – A levels or vocational courses.
- > Apprenticeship – you can look for an apprenticeship at Intermediate or Advanced level depending on your grades.
- > Traineeship – if you are not quite ready for an apprenticeship a traineeship may just be the thing for you.
- > Part-time Education – if you are self-employed or volunteering for more than 20 hours a week you can also study part-time as well to support you in further improving your work skills

