

# Middle School Subject Choices Booklet (2016)



## WELLINGTON COLLEGE

Up until this point in our pupils' education, a new school year will have more likely seen the addition of a new subject to their timetables. However, at this stage, approximately halfway through their education, the first opportunities to be selective over which subjects they continue is presented and this trend continues as they subsequently make choices for the Upper School and then for any higher education. This booklet describes the decision making process and sets out basic advice for selecting subjects in the Middle School.

### GCSEs

This yeargroup, who take their GCSE exams in the summer of 2018, will be studying the new GCSE curricula in some of their subjects. These new exams will be graded 1 - 9 (with 9 being the highest grade). The 3 / 4 grade boundary will be aligned with the former D / C boundary and the new 6 / 7 boundary will be aligned with the old B / A boundary. The new 9 grade is to be awarded to the top 20% of pupils who previously scored

New GCSE grades	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Old GCSE grades	D	C	B	A	A*		

Figure 1: The new system for grading GCSEs. OFQUAL are yet to confirm the final grading decisions. Some subjects will still operate on the old grading system.

A or A\*, although OFQUAL is yet to confirm the exact implementation of this for all subjects.

This exam yeargroup will receive some subjects graded on the numerical 1 to 9 scale, while other subjects are graded A\*, A, B etc... indeed they will not be the only yeargroup for which this will be the case. This mixed system of grading will affect the entire national cohort over a couple of years and so there is no reason that this should be a particular problem when considering university applications or future employment.

Core Subjects
English
Maths
Biology
Chemistry
Physics
One Modern Language
Philosophy & Religion
Wellbeing

Table 1: The core curriculum. Philosophy & Religion and Wellbeing are non-examined courses.

## The Core Curriculum

Our pupils have a wealth of choice ahead of them: they may go on to study A Levels or the IB, they may choose to go to university in the UK or perhaps the US. Whilst some pupils may have an idea of what their future choices may be, it is likely that the majority will have no firm ideas and there is no particular reason why they should do so yet. The purpose of the core curriculum is to ensure that all pupils study a sufficient range of subjects that will keep this variety of future options available to them as well as to deliver the broad educational experience our pupils deserve.

All pupils in the Middle School will study Maths, English, Biology, Chemistry and Physics. In English, pupils sit two GCSEs: English Language and English Literature. In addition, pupils should choose at least one modern language<sup>2</sup> amongst their GCSE choices. Although few UK universities stipulate this as an entry requirement any more<sup>3</sup>, it is strongly recommended if entry to US universities is being considered.

We would also recommend that pupils study a humanities subject<sup>4</sup>. If this is done, then pupils will be well placed to go on to study A Levels or the IB.

### Optional Subjects

Pupils may choose up to five subjects from table 2 with one subject from each column. As stated in the previous section, at least one of these subjects should be a modern language. In addition to their core subjects this will give a total of up to eleven GCSEs<sup>5</sup>. This is perfectly sufficient to enable our pupils to access the very best courses in higher education if they have good grades. For some pupils it is more appropriate to replace one of these choices with Academic Support, Language Support or other such options.

In addition to their GCSE options, pupils will be able to opt for the Personal Project and the Interdisciplinary Unit. The chance to do this will be given when the final subject choices are taken at the end of term. Please note that all options are subject to demand.

<sup>2</sup> Certain, rare, exceptions may be made, usually to enable the provision of academic support.

<sup>3</sup> UCL and LSE are notable exceptions

<sup>4</sup> i.e. History, Geography or Religious Studies. 99% of pupils in the current Middle School select this anyway.

<sup>5</sup> Twelve GCSEs if Greek & Latin is chosen as an option.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
Dance	German	Ancient History	French	Art Textiles
Design Technology	History	Art	History	Computer Science
Geography	Music	Design Technology	Geography	Drama
History	Spanish	Geography		Geography
PE	Religious Studies	Greek & Latin		Greek & Latin
Religious Studies		History		Latin
		Latin		PE
		Music		Photography
		Mandarin		Religious Studies

Table 2: The GCSE column structure for 2015/16. Up to five subjects may be selected with only one subject chosen from each column. All subject options are offered subject to demand.

## Choosing Subjects

There are many reasons for pupils to choose different subjects. Pupils may choose subjects because they enjoy them or because they excel in them, indeed these two reasons often go hand in hand. These are certainly valid reasons - pupils are more likely to work hard in subjects that they enjoy and are therefore more likely to enjoy success in them. Equally, choosing subjects in which they excel may seem obvious, however, it is worth noting that choosing an overambitious set of subjects and ending up with lower grades could be more of a hindrance to further study than better grades in a more sensible set of subjects.

A common query is about the academic merits of various subjects and whether or not a pupil's chosen options are sufficiently rigorous or not. On the whole, it is unlikely that a set of subject choices will preclude further study of subjects in the Upper School. This is because the core subjects maintain sufficient breadth to support most further courses of study. In addition, if a student is interested in a particular subject, it is likely that they will choose that subject for GCSE in the first place; it is unlikely that a student would wish to take up a subject in the Upper School that they have previously dropped at GCSE.

### Considerations when choosing subjects

*keeping options open*

*breadth of study*

*possible higher education or career aspirations*

## The Subject Choices Process

### The timeline for making choices

Pupils have experienced most of the various subjects on offer<sup>6</sup> and are now equipped to start thinking about their decisions. It is important that they discuss this decision with their parents, teachers, tutors, housemasters and housemistresses.

The Third Form parents' conference is a useful time for parents to

<sup>6</sup> NB the final carousel of non-elective Arts subjects starts in the second week after half term.

discuss decisions with teachers. There is then time over half term for further discussion. When pupils return after half term, they will be asked to submit some preliminary subject choices. These decisions are not binding but will help for future timetable planning. Pupils will be asked to submit their final subject choices in the last week of term, ensuring that they have experienced their final non-elective Arts rotation, and these decisions will be sent to parents for confirmation.

### *Changing Subject Choices*

While we hope that pupils and parents have reached a well thought through decision that they want to stick with, changes are inevitable. Late changes, however, will be subject to space in sets and the timetable structure that is set out in order to accommodate those choices made before the deadline. While it cannot be guaranteed that all changes after the deadline can be accommodated, it should be noted that the vast majority of changes in the last few years have been possible. Changes to subject choice decisions will be dealt with during term time, however, during holiday periods changes will be delayed until the start of the next term. This is because it can take a few weeks to fully process and approve changes during holidays whereas the same can usually be achieved during term time within a few days. There will be a window of opportunity after the summer exams to make changes in light of these results, thereafter changes will be processed at the beginning of the following term.

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## *Important Contacts and Dates*

Queries relating to the possible combinations of subjects and the timetable should be directed to Dr Heathcote. Subject specific queries may be better answered by the Heads of Departments, whose contacts can be found in the calendar.

Table 3: Useful contacts for the subject choices process. NB all email addresses are @wellingtoncollege.org.uk.

Useful Contacts	
Asst. Deputy (Academic) <i>Timetabling etc.</i>	Dr WH Heathcote (whh@)
Deputy (Academic)	Mr MJ Oakman (mjo@)

Table 4: Important dates for the subject choices process.

Important Dates	
Third Form Parents' Conference	11th February 2016
Preliminary Subject Choices	22nd February 2016
Final Subject Choice Deadline	21st March 2016