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A Levels

Applicant Information Pack

Are A Levels right for me?

Thinking ahead to education after you have finished GCSEs can be daunting. But it's also an exciting time. You get to choose the path of your education for the next two years and beyond.

Think about what qualifications and subjects are offered by other colleges and sixth forms in the area that your current school doesn't offer. While it may seem scary to leave the comfort of a familiar school, in two years you may well be making the much bigger move to university – this can be good practice for those inevitable changes that life brings!

A Levels are important qualifications because they open up new opportunities for you. You will need the right A Level subjects to get a place to study an undergraduate degree, degree apprenticeship, higher apprenticeship, etc.

Because A Levels are internationally recognised qualifications, they can also open up career or further study opportunities outside the UK, giving you access to a whole world of learning.

What is an A Level?

A Levels (Advanced Levels) are traditionally regarded as the 'academic' route to university and will explore largely theoretical approaches to subjects. A Levels are assessed primarily though exams at the end of the course.

Vocational courses (BTEC) are more 'practical' in focus and are 'continually assessed regularly throughout the year and have less emphasis on the 'end of course' exams. Both are widely accepted by universities and employers.

A Levels are assessed through final exams that are held at the end of the second year of the course and your grades will entirely depend on how well you have revised and prepared for the exams. You will have assessments and mock exams during the two years to assess how you are coping with the work, to track your progress and to help you prepare for the final exams.

What you need to know about A Level study

<u>Be realistic, it's going to be hard work</u>**!**

You can expect A Levels to be a significant step-up from studying for GCSEs. Also, be prepared to spend a considerable amount of time per subject outside the classroom – doing set work, reviewing work from lessons, reading, research and revising. As an A Level student, you will be expected to undertake lots of independent study – which will help to prepare you for life at university.

And of course, for A Levels there is a significant revision load towards the end of Year 13, revising two years' work and preparing for your final exams.

<u>Your choice of subjects</u>

Think about choosing subjects you will enjoy. After all, you'll be studying them for two years, in depth. Some of the subjects you can choose may be very new to you and you may not have studied them at GCSE.

Do you know what subjects you would like to study at university? Will your choices of A Level subjects help you to achieve this goal?

<u>Research</u>

Understand what each subject involves – especially any you haven't studied before. Have a good look through the prospectus and have a go at some of the 'taster activities' on the website.

What A Levels might I need for university?

Some universities will be very specific about which A Level subjects they would like you to study, others won't be. There is no simple rule to this, except of course, do your research.

The table below will give you some idea of some typical university subjects and the A Levels that they are likely to be looking for:

University Subject	Essential A Levels	Useful A Levels
Accountancy	Mathematics	
Computing	Mathematics (usually)	Computing, Further Maths, Physics
Economics	Most require Maths	
English	English Literature/Language (sometimes both required)	
Engineering	Maths and Physics (usually)	
Geology/Earth Sciences	Maths and Science	
History	History	
Medicine/Dentistry	Chemistry, Biology (essential)	Maths, Physics
Nursing/Midwifery	Biology (usually)	Psychology, Sociology, Chemistry
Optometry	Biology. And one from Maths, Chemistry or Physics	
Pharmacy	Chemistry. And one from Maths, Biology or physics is often required	Psychology
Physics	Physics and Maths	
Physiotherapy	Biology (Usually)	Further science subject of maths is often useful
Veterinary Science	Biology and Chemistry	Maths or Physics is recommended

Typical A level subject choices that go well together are:

- Computer Science, Physics, Maths
- Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science
- History, Economics, Politics
- Business Studies, Economics, Maths
- English Literature, History and one other
- Law, Politics, Business Studies
- Chemistry, Biology, Maths
- Psychology, Sociology and one other
- Photography, Art, Sociology
- Geography, Economics, Politics

What are 'facilitating subjects'?

If you are unsure as to university course or eventual career paths, keeping your options open becomes important. Some A Level subjects are in demand by universities and employers because they develop transferrable skills and knowledge that are important for a range of courses and jobs. We call these **Facilitating Subjects**. They are:

- Biology
- Chemistry
- English Literature
- Geography
- History
- Maths (and Further Maths)
- Modern and classical languages
- Physics

Some university courses ask for specific A Level subjects as an entry requirement. This will often include one or more of the facilitating subjects, so choosing one or two of these keeps your university options more open.

For example, many pharmacy degree courses require that students have an A Level in Chemistry and either Maths, Physics or Biology.

So, you've decided on which subject combinations. Now what?

Moving from GCSE to post-16 study can be challenging. If you understand your strengths and weaknesses as a learner and your preferred learning style, you are likely to adapt more easily and to thrive.

Prepare for new learning

A Levels are very different to studying GCSEs. Here are some things that Year 12s often find difficult to get to grips with:

Independent learning: GCSE learning is often very structured. At a higher level, you need to be prepared to do extra independent reading and research outside lessons (without prodding from teachers).

Manage your time much more effectively: You'll probably have other commitments to juggle around your studies too, including applying to university, going to open days, writing your personal statement, part-time jobs, learning to drive etc.

How to prepare: Ask successful Year 13 students about how they organise their work schedule and what tips they have that worked for them. For example, did they curb certain activities or commitments during periods of the year, such as standing down from any clubs or picking up fewer shifts at their part-time job?

Active participation: Participating actively in learning in the lessons is much more important, as classes tend to be smaller than for GCSEs and teachers rightly expect more involvement from you.

How to prepare: You'll feel more confident to participate if you've swotted up on any required reading material. And remember – no question is a stupid question! If you want clarification on something, it's likely that your classmates do too.

Concepts: Work is inevitably more complex, whatever the subject. It's a big step up for many, with more time to really focus in on particular topics. At A Level, many of the higher marks come from understanding and applying the knowledge you have learned and not just writing down what you have revised for the exam.

How to prepare: Reviewing work after each lesson will help you to consolidate and understand ideas that you are learning about and ensure you've fully grasped it. Don't be afraid to ask questions, seek help from teachers and work collaboratively with other students.