

# Supporting Choices for Key Stage 4

A guide for parents and carers



What's it  
all about?

What qualifications  
will they take?

Options

Information  
and advice



**Norfolk** County Council

# What's it all about?

This year, your son or daughter will be making decisions about the subjects and courses they will take in Key Stage 4.

This guide aims to give you some basic facts about:

- The options and qualifications in Key Stage 4
- 16-18 choices
- Sources of information and advice for you and your son/daughter



## Where to study?

- Most young people will stay in their current school.
- Some young people may spend a day or two each week out of school at a local college, at a different school or with an employer for a work related course.
- Some young people in Norfolk may wish to move school at 14. They can also apply to study at the University Technical College Norfolk (UTCN) in Norwich. As well as the main GCSE subjects, the UTC specialises in advanced engineering and energy skills courses.

## What will they study in Key Stage 4?

Your son or daughter will study a number of **compulsory subjects** including:

- English
- Maths
- Science

They will also choose a number of **option subjects**. Most will be familiar from years 7-9, although there may be new ones such as business, psychology or engineering.

## The English Baccalaureate

Your son or daughter's school may encourage your son/daughter to choose a combination of GCSEs which make up the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). The EBacc is not a qualification in itself but

recognises students who achieve good GCSE passes (9-5/4) in English, maths, history or geography, two sciences (which may include computer science) and a language.

# What qualifications will they take?

## GCSEs have changed

In Key Stage 4, most young people will study for GCSE qualifications. GCSEs are mainly assessed by exams in the summer at the end of the course.

GCSE subjects now have new syllabuses and a new grading system of 9 to 1 with 9 being the highest grade and 1 the lowest. A grade 5 is considered to be a 'good pass'.

The new grading system compares with the existing one as follows:

Ofqual

Grading new GCSEs from 2017

New grading structure	Current grading structure
9	A*
8	A
7	A
6	B
5	B
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	F
1	G
U	U

**GOOD PASS (DfE)**  
5 and above = top of C and above

**AWARDING**  
4 and above = bottom of C and above

New GCSEs in maths, English language and English literature started in September 2015. More new GCSEs were introduced in September 2016 and the last phase of revised GCSEs will start in September 2017 (with the exception of less taught languages which start in September 2018).

For your son/daughter all their GCSEs will be graded from 9 to 1 (with the exception of the less taught languages).



## Vocational (work-related) qualifications

Some schools offer courses in subjects such as business, IT, health & social care or engineering amongst their GCSE choices. These qualifications develop their knowledge about particular industries such as hospitality or tourism. They are also known as technical qualifications.

## Personalised programmes

Some young people may not be ready to study GCSEs and may need more time to develop their skills, build confidence and gain qualifications that help prepare them for their next step at 16. They may be offered alternative qualifications.

These programmes combine learning in vocational subjects such as catering, hairdressing, construction, childcare or animal care with qualifications in the core subjects of English, maths and IT, and personal development activities such as team building, job search skills and decision-making.

These programmes help young people to progress at their own pace and to build up knowledge and skills at Entry Level, Level 1 or 2 over a period of time.

## Questions for your son or daughter to consider when choosing subjects

- Which subjects are they good at?
- Which subjects do they enjoy?
- How is the subject taught?
- Does it involve writing essays?
- Does it involve using research or statistics?
- Do they have a future career in mind?

## Other important points

- The core subjects of English, maths and science are important for most careers they may consider in the future
- Do not choose a subject just because they like the teacher or their friends have chosen it
- Choose subjects they will enjoy - this will help motivate them to learn
- Think about their longer term career or higher education goals, and start to research entry requirements and training that may be involved. It is worth checking entry requirements carefully as some careers and some courses will specify certain qualifications and may ask for specific grades.



# Options after Year 11

Many young people will have no firm career plans in year 8 or 9 when they choose their subjects for Key Stage 4. Even so it is important for them to start thinking about subjects which might affect their choices at 16. In general, whatever subjects they choose for Key Stage 4 there will still be a range of options open to them after Year 11.

However, for some A level courses, such as maths, French or science, your son/daughter will need to have achieved a certain grade in the same subject at GCSE in order to continue with the subject at A level. Furthermore, some university courses will specify certain GCSE grades in their entry requirements, particularly for maths or science degrees.

## What are the options at 16?

By law, all young people need to participate in education or training for at least two years until they are 18 years of age. Their options after Year 11 are:

- 1. Full-time education at school, further education college or sixth form college**
  - Academic qualifications such as A levels
  - Vocational (technical) qualifications including BTEC and City & Guilds
  - Foundation level learning programme
- 2. Apprenticeships and traineeships**
  - An apprenticeship with training and paid work
  - Traineeships with work experience, literacy, numeracy and employability skills
- 3. A flexible package of work or volunteering and learning**
  - Part-time education or training, combined with paid work or volunteering

Your son or daughter will not be limited to continuing with the same subjects or type of course they have taken to the end of Year 11. For example, someone taking GCSEs may decide to progress onto A levels or may take an apprenticeship or technical qualification. The learning options diagram on page 14 of 'Choices at 13/14' shows how young people can progress between qualifications at different levels.



# Sources of information and advice

All schools have a duty to provide impartial careers guidance for young people who need it in years 8-13 and your son or daughter will receive lots of information from school about their Key Stage 4 subject choices. They will also need your encouragement and support to make good progress at school, to deal with the pressures and to make the choices that are right for them for after Year 11.

## People to talk to:

- **School Careers or IAG Coordinator/Adviser**
- **National Careers Service** – provide a free telephone and webchat service between 8am-10pm on **0800 100 900**

## Special educational needs and/or disabilities?

If your son/daughter has special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), they will receive extra support in planning their next steps after school or college through the SENCo and the Local Authority. For further information speak to the school SENCo or go to Norfolk's SEND Local Offer website [www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/send-local-offer/preparing-for-adulthood](http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/send-local-offer/preparing-for-adulthood)

## Sources of information

- School website and options booklet
- [www.helpyouchoose.org](http://www.helpyouchoose.org) – Norfolk's 14-19 careers information, advice and opportunities website for young people
- [www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide](http://www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide) – information about becoming an apprentice
- [www.icanbea.org.uk](http://www.icanbea.org.uk) – information for young people on career opportunities across Norfolk and Suffolk
- <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk> – careers information with over 800 job profiles
- [www.icould.com](http://www.icould.com) – career videos with advice on choosing GCSE options
- [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) - education & learning, financial support information
- [www.parentalguidance.org.uk](http://www.parentalguidance.org.uk) – information for parents/carers



**If you need this information in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or language please contact us on 0344 800 8020 and we will do our best to help.**

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