



Frequently Asked Questions about KS4 Options Year 9 (JWR)

1. How many qualifications will my son or daughter study?

The vast majority of students will study 9 GCSEs or technical awards in Years 9 to 11. They will be awarded five GCSEs in the core subjects - English Language, English Literature, Maths, Science (equivalent to 2 GCSEs). They will also study 4 qualifications in their 4 option subjects. (One of which may be separate science which will lead to an additional science GCSE).

2. Will my son or daughter have a better chance of applying to the top Universities if they study additional GCSE subjects out of school?

No. Universities are far more interested in the quality of qualifications achieved than the quantity. They would prefer higher grades than 12 average/low grades at GCSE.

3. Can students choose any subjects that they like?

No. In line with Government expectations, The Gilbert School is keen that students study a **balance** of subjects. Keeping their options as open as possible will help students later on.

The following subjects are too similar and cannot be studied together:

- both GCSE Art and GCSE Textiles – both are classed as Art courses and students can only do one.

4. Does one of the option choices have to be Geography or History?

Yes. This is a guided choice. Students **must** choose either Geography or History. The only students who are exempt from this are those who have been invited to study STEPS. This is to ensure that all students study a balance of subjects.

5. Does one of the option choices have to be French or German?

We **encourage** our **academic students** to choose either French or German so that they fulfil the Ebacc. The Department for Education sees the Ebacc as a “Gold Standard”. Students will be competing against others with this if they apply for university.

(The English Baccalaureate is a suite of 8 GCSE passes consisting of: English and Maths; 3 GCSE English Baccalaureate qualifications (Science or Computer Science, French or German, History or Geography) and 3 other GCSE or equivalent high value qualifications.

6. Can any student choose STEPS as one of their option choices?

No. If Miss Parker (SENCO) believes that your son or daughter would benefit from the STEPS course, you will have been contacted.

7. Can any student choose PACE as one of their option choices?

No. If tutors, Miss Parker (SENCO) or Ms Wren (HoY9) believe that your son or daughter would benefit from the PACE course you will have been contacted. This course is suitable for those students who are less academic and would benefit from studying one less option subject.

8. What if English is my child's second language?

If your child has a home language other than English or has lived in another country and become proficient in another language, it may be possible to enter them for a GCSE in this language. This is usually done in Year 10. The majority of these exams are assessed in the four skills of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing, so it is essential that your child can read and write the language. Whilst we are unable to offer teaching towards the exams, and the responsibility will be on the student to ensure their language skills are practised, the department will offer sessions to help students to understand how to gain the best from the examination papers.

If you would like any more information, please contact the Curriculum Leader of Modern Foreign Languages, Mrs Gailey: rgl@gilberd.com

9. How can I tell if the options I have chosen are a suitable preparation for A-level subjects or other post-16 courses?

The broad curriculum offered at The Gilberd School will be suitable preparation for most post-16 courses. If you have a specific query about this, please speak to Mrs Percival, Deputy Headteacher.

Do visit the Sixth Form and other providers' websites to download their brochures to see the subject requirements for entry to A-level courses. In addition, there are details of the entry requirements for the courses delivered at Colchester Institute. If you are interested in an Apprenticeship, then details can be found at www.apprenticeships.org.uk. This is a national website providing up to date apprenticeship vacancies.

10. What happens if the Government or exam boards make any curriculum changes that affect the courses that my child has chosen?

The school will choose an alternative "best fit" course and keep parents and students informed if any such changes need to be made.

11. What are Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications?

All qualifications are approved and fit into the National Qualifications Framework. Each qualification is allocated a level.

- Level 1 courses – offer a qualification equivalent to GCSE grades 4-1 (old D - G).
- Level 2 courses – offer a qualification equivalent to GCSE grades 9-1 (old A* - C).
- Level 3 courses – equivalent to A-level.
- Level 4 & above – university level qualifications.

All GCSE and Technical courses cover Level 1 & Level 2.

12. What happens if my child wants to change subject once Year 10 has started?

We will look at individual cases where a student is not happy studying a course and we will try to accommodate any requests. This will only happen within a reasonable timescale. However, it may not be possible to change if another option is full or if the timetable does not allow this. Contact your child's Head of Year in the first instance.

13. Once the Options Form is submitted, does it guarantee my son/daughter can study the subjects he/she has chosen?

No. Sometimes subjects will be undersubscribed, and it will not be viable to run a subject if too few students opt to take it. If this is the case, students will be allocated another of their 6 choices. We obviously try to limit the impact of such changes. It is important that students think carefully about the priority order of their subjects, as we attempt to build the timetable around their choices.

If a subject is oversubscribed, we would investigate the possibility of adding another class. If this is not possible students will be allocated another of their 6 choices. Students who prioritised this subject highest will be given the first places.

Once the forms have been submitted and the number of classes have been calculated the classes are distributed in the option blocks. This is dependent on the numbers of students who have chosen each subject, the priority they have given and the rest of the timetable. If it is not possible to allocate a student their top choices, they will be allocated another of their 6 choices.

14. What is the deadline for return of Options Forms?

All forms must be handed in to your child's form tutor by 20th March 2026 (X Pop) and 27th March 2026 (Y Pop).

15. When do students find out which subjects they will be studying?

Students should find out which option subjects they will be studying sometime in mid-June, once the timetable has been written. If for any reason there are changes to a course, we will contact parents and students.