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PARENT  
KNOW  
HOW

# Making **subject choices at 14**

**11-16**

department for  
education and skills

# AT A GLANCE



## Helping your teenager choose subjects in Year 9

- The choices that your child makes now will determine what opportunities are open to them later in life – whether they want to carry on studying after school or not.
- It's important that they take time to consider the different options carefully so that they make choices that are right for them. You can play an important part in supporting them as they come to a decision.
- Most young people will want to keep their options open. But some will need to choose specific subjects.
- There are some subjects everybody has to take. Others are optional.
- Some subjects lead to qualifications. Others do not.
- Every school offers different options. Ask what is available to your child.
- Take time to talk to your child about their decisions, so that you can help them if they are struggling.
- If you're still not clear about certain points, ask for help using the contact details on the back of this booklet.

### Did you know?

**Helping your child choose the right subjects now could be really important to them when they are older. It's worth spending time looking at the options sooner rather than later.**

# Choices, choices, choices

If your child is in Year 9 at school, they will soon face one of their first big decisions in life – what subjects to study in Year 10 and Year 11. Having to make this choice can be really difficult because it can affect the route your child takes when they are older.

Even if your child thinks they will leave school at 16, they will need to learn new skills and acquire knowledge throughout their working life. They might even have to do more formal study. Or perhaps your child has already decided that they want to go to university. Whatever they want for the future, it's important that they make the right subject choices now so that they have the best possible opportunities later in life.

Making the right subject choices at this stage of your child's education is important. This booklet will help you make sense of what lies ahead and covers:

- where to start – things you and your child may want to think about
- compulsory and optional subjects
- practical limitations
- helping your child decide.

## Where to start?

Nobody expects your child to know exactly what subjects to choose straight away. They will want to think about their decision over a period of time. If they are feeling confused, they might want to talk through the different options with you.

- They will need to choose a range of subjects.
- They should think about whether they get better results from subjects with lots of coursework or those that have exams.
- They should ask what their choices will lead to in the future – further study, training or work.

## Keeping their options open

Most employers expect young people in the job market to have qualifications in English and maths. They will also look for employees who have:

- studied a range of subjects between the ages of 14 and 16
- got good grades
- been enthusiastic about what they have studied.

There are exceptions. If your child is thinking about a scientific or medical profession, for example, they might have to take certain GCSEs to gain access to a particular A level programme.

But in most cases, it's a good idea for young people to keep their options open and study as broad a range of subjects as possible – subjects they enjoy. This way, they will have more choice when it comes to deciding on courses and jobs in the future.

### Remember...

**... not all subjects have to be directly related to work. Pure enjoyment is a good enough reason for choosing to study something.**

## What are the options?

The National Curriculum provides your child's school with the flexibility to allow pupils to study a range of subjects in Year 10 and Year 11. Some courses offered by the school will lead to a qualification, and others will not. Either way, there are some subjects that every child has to study and others that they can do if they want.

## The National Curriculum at Key Stage 4 (Year groups 10 and 11)

From September 2004, the Key Stage 4 National Curriculum changed. Under the new arrangements, the following subjects are compulsory:

- English
- citizenship
- maths
- physical education (PE)
- science
- religious education (RE)
- information and communication technology (ICT)
- careers education
- work-related learning
- sex education

Schools are no longer required to teach modern foreign languages and design and technology to all pupils. Instead, new entitlement areas cover the arts, design and technology, the humanities and modern foreign languages. Students within Key Stage 4 can follow a course of study in a subject within each of the entitlement areas if they wish to do so.

Your child may also get to choose from a range of other optional subjects such as Young Enterprise courses, courses with community groups and classes to help with basic skills.

Most schools offer pupils work experience and some have links with local colleges which can help give young people work-based learning.



## Staying practical

Of course, every parent wants their children to do as well as they can at school. And schools want to do all they can to meet parents' high expectations. But there are two practical issues every child choosing subjects will have to face.

## Different qualifications might be offered for different subjects

There are several types of qualification, but your school might not be able to offer them for all subjects. That's not necessarily bad news – your child will still have a good range to choose from. Your school knows what kinds of qualifications suit its pupils and teachers, and offers a wide range to meet the needs of different children.

## Your child might not get all their first-choice subjects

Your child's school will work hard to make sure that as far as possible your child gets to study the subjects they are interested in. But in rare cases, some children don't get all of their first-choice subjects. This might be because there are clashes in the school timetable, for example. If you think this has happened to your child, talk to them and their teacher to see if they know of any solutions to the problem. There might be other subjects that your child is just as interested in.

### What does your child's school offer?

If you're worried you don't know enough about what's on offer at your child's school, try speaking to your child's form teacher. They should be able to give you more details about specific subjects and qualifications.

## Helping your child decide

If you want to give your child a helping hand, there are practical ways of supporting them as they make up their mind about the subjects they will study.

- Encourage them to start thinking about the kind of person they are. What interests them? What do they want to do in the future? For example, are they creative, technically minded or a good support for other people? Talk about how this might affect their choice of subjects and, later on, work.
- Help them make a list of the subjects they enjoy and those they think would take them in the right direction for the work they want to do.
- There are many places young people can go to for information and advice. Point your child in the direction of your local Connexions centre (see back page) and encourage them to speak to teachers and do some research on the internet.
- Of course, there might be instances when you disagree about what subjects your child should take. Try to listen to the reason they give for choosing a subject, and support their long-term goals. If you are keen for your child to go into a specific kind of work, ask yourself if it is really right for them.

## Problems?

- Check that your child isn't choosing subjects because they think they won't involve much work. The reality is that there is no easy option – if they want to get a qualification they will have to work hard, whatever the subject.
- Ask what subjects your child's friends are taking. Some young people choose subjects to stay in the same class as friends. But there's no guarantee that they will stay together – your child might well be split from their friend for a particular lesson.



## Want to find out more?

Connexions offers advice to young people on a range of issues. It also produces a guide, *Parents and Carers*, which provides more information on helping your teenager with their subject choices.

You can see an online version at

**[www.connexions-direct.com/parentcarer](http://www.connexions-direct.com/parentcarer)** or request a copy from:

DfES Publications

PO Box 99

Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 2SN

**Tel: 0845 602 22 60**

Fax: 01787 375 920

Email: **[connexions@prolog.uk.com](mailto:connexions@prolog.uk.com)**

*Which way now?* is a workbook that gives your child practical advice on choosing subjects in Year 9. If your child doesn't already have a copy, you can download an online version from

**[www.connexions-direct.com/whichwaynow](http://www.connexions-direct.com/whichwaynow)**

### Can't get onto the internet at home?

Visit your local library which will have computers and internet access.

Copies of this publication can be obtained from: DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.  
Tel: 0845 60 222 60 Fax: 0845 60 333 60 Email: [dfes@prolog.uk.com](mailto:dfes@prolog.uk.com) Please quote ref: PKHSM5

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