



Year 9 Options FAQs

1. Which GCSE subjects are compulsory?

All students must study English Literature, English Language, Mathematics and Combined Science and Games (non-examined subject)

2. What happened to the English Baccalaureate (EBACC)?

In November 2025, the UK government announced that the EBacc is being scrapped to give students more variety in what they study. For years, the EBacc forced schools to focus on a small group of "academic" subjects, which often pushed out creative and practical options. Under the new rules, arts subjects like music and drama are being given the same importance as history and geography.

A new system called "Academic Breadth" will replace it, allowing students to pick from a wider mix of subjects.

Here is the structure:

The Core (Must take these)

English: Language and Literature.

Maths: GCSE Mathematics.

Science: Double Science

Games: Non-examined

The "Breadth" Slots (Choose from 2 out of 3 groups)

Creative Subjects: Art & Design, Music, Drama, Textiles, Photography

Humanities: History, Geography, and Religious Studies (RS).

Languages: French or Spanish

The "Open" Slots

Any other approved GCSEs or technical qualifications. As long as they are not repeated from the subjects chosen above.

Please use the Option booklet attached [here](#) to see what we offer at Hollyfield.

3. How do the subjects you pick at GCSE affect your choice of subjects at A level?

As students will study a variety of different subjects at KS4, the vast majority of subject choices will keep most doors open for post-16 studies. If you happen to have an idea of particular subjects that you would like to study at A Level/BTEC, we recommend that you check our [Sixth Form Entry Requirements](#) prior to selecting your Year 9 Options.

This will help you to decide which subjects you might need to consider taking if you wish to pursue them post-16. There will be on-going guidance on this.

4. What is the difference between a BTEC and a GCSE? If I take a BTEC subject, can I not do A Levels?

The main difference is that a BTEC subject is more vocational, meaning that it often leads to a specific career pathway. A BTEC subject also involves more coursework than formal exams, and is therefore more suited to those students who perhaps struggle with exam pressure and prefer a more practical, hands-on approach to their studies. BTECs are just as valued as GCSEs and are recognised equivalencies.



Historically, some students often find that they prefer the learning style of a BTEC subject and do go on to successfully complete a BTEC pathway at post-16. However, choosing a BTEC subject at KS4 does not necessarily mean that you must study a BTEC course post-16. Please see our [Sixth Form Entry Requirements](#) for the full range of BTEC/A Level courses on offer.

5. When must I choose my Options?

The personalised Options Meetings will take place with a member of the Senior Leadership Team and will begin in January 2026. You will receive the time/date of your appointment nearer the time via your tutor. In this meeting you will be given further guidance and advice, and share the subjects you are thinking of taking. Please note that you should have a good idea of what it is you would like to do and have had conversations with the relevant teachers before your Options meeting. This meeting will not be your final option selection.

If needed, you can make changes to your choices until Friday 27th February 2026. After this date you will not be able to change your Options as the timetabling of subjects will begin.

6. How will I know whether I can take Separate Science?

If you gain a grade 6 in the January exam, you have the chance to select Separate Sciences as an option which results in 3 GCSEs. Because this is an option subject, it will mean that you have one less choice. However, this is not the case for the Combined Sciences, which results in 2 GCSEs but still covers all three science disciplines (Biology, Chemistry and Physics). All students will take Double Science.

You can still study Science A-Levels if you complete the Combined Science course, provided you meet our [entry requirements](#).

7. If I change my mind and the deadline has passed, what should I do?

The deadline (Friday 27th February 2025) is there to ensure that we have time to design the new KS4 timetable to best fit the needs of all pupils. If you do not meet this deadline, you might not get your first choice options. To avoid disappointment, please stick to the deadline and make sure that you thoroughly research your subjects before sending in your final choices.

8. Is there a chance that the subjects I have picked won't work when timetabled?

We design the timetable with great care to ensure that the vast majority of options choices are accommodated for. However, the school timetable is a bit like a jigsaw puzzle, in that on rare occasions one or two pieces won't fit. If this were to happen we would look at the reserve options that have been chosen and select alternatives from there. If this still does not work we will get in touch as soon as possible.

9. Do I have to study the same language from KS3?

Yes, simply because a Modern Foreign Language GCSE is a 5 year course, so KS3 study at Hollyfield is compulsory to ensure that you have the best possible chance at achieving your very best.

10. How many GCSEs should I do?

The vast majority of pupils at Hollyfield will do 9 GCSEs/BTECs including English, Maths and Science. This is in line with other schools in the local area (including the grammar schools) and the vast majority of schools nationally. Universities and colleges will look for quality of GCSE/BTEC results and not quantity. A breakdown of the 9 GCSEs can be seen below:



Broad and Balanced Curriculum

Subject	GCSEs
GCSE English Language & GCSE English Literature	2
GCSE Mathematics	1
GCSE Combined Science	2
GCSE Humanities/Languages/Creative (a subject out of one of these categories)	1
GCSE Humanities/Languages/Creative (a subject out of one of these categories)	1
Pupil GCSE choice 1	1
Pupil GCSE choice 2	1
Total	9

Separate Science (Triple Science) will make these 3 GCSEs, but needs to be picked as one of your 'free' GCSE choices.

Students in top set Mathematics will also sit our GCSE Further Mathematics course at the end of year 11. The course is built into the Scheme of Learning over Year 10 and Year 11

11. Am I able to study a home language? Can I take this instead of Spanish or French?

If you are able to speak, write and verbally understand a language that has an official GCSE, then we are able to enter you for this qualification. This would be an additional GCSE for some students. Please note, there would be no official teaching of this qualification in school and students would just sit the exams. Students are advised to take a home language GCSE as an extra GCSE rather than as a replacement for French / Spanish. Before this decision can be made, you must discuss this with Ms Opie, who will make a decision based around your proficiency in the language chosen.

12. Can I take both history and geography?

Students can take both history and geography, and the subjects can complement one another, but they should be aware of the level of content involved in both subjects and that this can be a demanding combination.

13. Food and Nutrition GCSE

The Food and Nutrition GCSE is not just about cooking. It involves a significant amount of food science knowledge. Students spend half their time learning about food chemistry, microbiology, and nutrition, and the other half practicing culinary skills.

14. Music GCSE & Music Technology

You can choose to study Music or Music Technology at GCSE level, or even both! If you enjoy performing, GCSE Music is the perfect choice, as it allows you to showcase your musical talents and contribute to coursework. For those interested in the technical side of music, NCFE Music Technology offers a comprehensive course equivalent to a BTEC or GCSE. Both GCSE Music and NCFE Music Technology provide excellent foundations for further studies in A-Level Music or A-Level Music Technology.

15. How many BTECs can I take?

The ideal number of BTECs to take alongside GCSEs depends on individual circumstances and educational goals. Remember that BTECs combine coursework and exams, so staying on top of coursework is essential to avoid falling behind.

Typically, one or two BTECs can complement a core set of GCSEs. This can offer a practical, vocational focus, particularly for students who prefer hands-on learning. However, it's crucial to balance BTECs with traditional GCSEs to ensure a broad range of skills and knowledge.