

## **KEY STAGE 4 OPTIONS 2024 - 2026**

*All information on the website was correct at time of printing.*

This term in Year 9 is an extremely important milestone in a young person's career at school. It is now that choices need to be made regarding areas of study in Years 10 and 11.

The guidance on the website is written to give parents and students as much information as possible about the Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) GCSE curriculum prior to the students selecting their courses.

### **What Help Can I Get Making My Option Choices?**

---

To help students to make the right decision at this important stage in their careers they should find out as much as they can about themselves and about the courses. The following people will help to answer any questions:

- Form Tutor - they have an overall picture of your progress at school
- Subject Teachers - they know your strengths and weaknesses in each subject and suitability for the courses on offer in Key Stage 4
- Mrs S Sullivan – Head of Year 9
- Mrs J Gauntlett (Assistant Headteacher) - has overall responsibility for the Options process
- Mrs C Turner (Careers Adviser) can answer specific questions about your choices and future career choices
- Parents or Carers - they know you best as a person
- Specific email address for Options queries – [gcseoptions@psf.wirral.sch.uk](mailto:gcseoptions@psf.wirral.sch.uk)

In addition, a programme of events offering information and advice has been set up to help students and parents make informed choices about the courses on offer.

Further information about GCSE courses can also be found on the Awarding Body websites.

## What Are My Options? Do I Have a Free Choice?

---

No, there are several limits on your choice:

- Some subjects are compulsory and therefore must be studied in Years 10 and 11.
- The optional subjects available are listed later in this document.
- Some limits on your choice are imposed by factors such as the number of teachers, the availability of specialist rooms, like workshops, and the number of students who choose the subject. Wherever possible we will try to ensure students can study their first-choice subjects, however this is not always possible.
- The options process is a guided choice based on negotiation between the school, student, and the home.
- The aim of the process is to match the courses available to the aptitude and interests of each student so that the potential for success in Key Stage 4 is maximised.
- Where appropriate, options choices should also consider ambitions for Key Stage 5 and beyond.

## The Curriculum

---

Pensby High School encourages all students to follow a broad and balanced curriculum in Key Stage 4 and we have endeavoured, with the constraints imposed by the National Curriculum, to offer as wide a choice of subjects as possible. This document explains what these choices are and describes the subjects on offer.

## Compulsory Areas

---

The National Curriculum requires students to study all the subjects from list A & B:

### List A

- Mathematics
- English
- Science (Combined Science – double award)

All the above subjects are externally examined.

In addition, the following areas must be studied from List B:

### List B

- Physical Education
- Computer Studies; this can be delivered through other curriculum areas
- PHSE; which includes Work Related Learning, Sex Education & Careers Education
- Ethics & Philosophy

## Entitlement Curriculum or Options

---

The curriculum in each year must prepare students for the next stage, regardless of their starting points and most importantly it must build effectively on prior learning.

Each student's curriculum is built to allow for the broadest depth of study alongside the development of depth of skills and knowledge that will allow for students to be successful.

This means that students will study the GCSE core subjects of English Language, English Literature, Mathematics and Combined Science (or Triple Science, if chosen as an option). ***Whist we are not directing students to study the full EBacc, students who want to follow an A' Level pathway at Post 16 should consider studying all of the following: Geography/History, Spanish and Triple Science.***

In addition to the compulsory subjects referred to previously, students are also provided with access to an *Entitlement Curriculum*. At Pensby this means they can choose to study **four further subjects** (all leading to a full GCSE qualification) from the following:

- Modern Foreign Languages (Spanish)
- Design Technology (Design & Technology, Hospitality & Catering)
- Arts (Art & Design, Drama, Graphic Communication, Photography, Music, Sports Science)
- Humanities (Citizenship, Ethics & Philosophy, History, Geography)
- Commerce and Society (Enterprise & Marketing, Child Development, ICT, Media Studies)
- Triple Science (leading to qualifications in Biology, Chemistry and Physics)

These areas are not compulsory, but every student has the right to choose subjects from these areas.

All the Key Stage 4 subjects are Level 2 GCSE equivalent subjects.

As a school we feel it is important that we use the flexibility of the *Entitlement Curriculum* very carefully and ensure we provide every one of our students with the curriculum most appropriate to their individual needs. Home, school and the individual student need to know from the outset of Key Stage 4 courses that there is the maximum chance of individual success.

Therefore, we feel that a guided option choice is the most suitable way to match students to the most appropriate programme of study.

## **The English Baccalaureate**

---

### What is the English Baccalaureate?

The EBacc is not a qualification in itself. It will recognise the achievement of students who have achieved a 'broad set of academic subjects' at the age of 16.

To achieve the EBacc a student will have to achieve a good GCSE pass in all of the following:

1. English Language or English Literature GCSE, having studied both subjects;
2. Mathematics GCSE;
3. Combined Science GCSE (or the separate sciences - Biology, Chemistry, Physics);
4. A modern or ancient foreign language (at Pensby, Spanish);
5. A humanity (either History or Geography).

When selecting their options your child may wish to follow the EBacc and therefore must take care to select subjects from the EBacc list above.

**Please remember the importance placed in the full EBacc in continued studies.**

## Broad and Balanced Curriculum

---

All the Key Stage 4 subjects are Level 2 GCSE equivalent subjects. Some courses are Cambridge National Certificate or VCert (Vocational) qualifications, however they are still equivalent to GCSE.

As a school we feel it is important that we use the flexibility of the *Entitlement Curriculum* very carefully and ensure we provide every one of our students with the curriculum most appropriate to their individual needs. Home, school, and the individual student need to know from the outset of Key Stage 4 courses that there is the maximum chance of individual success.

The full range of optional subjects available is:

Art & Design	GCSE
Citizenship	GCSE
Child Development	Cambridge National Certificate
Design & Technology	GCSE
Drama	GCSE
Enterprise & Marketing	Cambridge Technical Certificate
Ethics & Philosophy	GCSE
Geography	GCSE
Graphic Communication	GCSE
History	GCSE
Hospitality & Catering	VCert
ICT	eduqas Technical Award
Media Studies	GCSE
Music	GCSE
Photography	GCSE
Spanish	GCSE
Sports Science	Cambridge National Certificate
Triple Science (Leading to GCSE separate sciences)	GCSE

### Course viability

Only viable option groups will run, and parents will be notified if there are issues about certain GCSE / Vocational subjects running.

When making option choices, you must choose one option from each block.

## Course Accreditation

---

Level 2 courses are accredited by GCSE. Vocational equivalence to GCSE gradings is given below

GCSE Grades	Vocational Qualifications
9	Distinction *
8	
7	Distinction
6	Merit
5	
4	Pass
3	
2	
1	

The examination components for vocational courses use the following grading system:

Unclassified

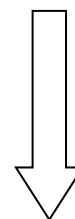
Level 1 Pass (3 - 1 GCSE equivalent)

Level 2 Pass (4 GCSE equivalent)

Level 2 Merit (6/5 GCSE equivalent)

Level 2 Distinction (7 GCSE equivalent)

Level 2 Distinction\* (9/8 GCSE equivalent, but only available as a terminal grade)



## Essential Advice About Choosing GCSEs

---

Over the next few weeks, you have a big decision to make. Choosing the subjects you will study during Years 10 and 11 will affect how you spend your time at school over the next two years. It could also affect the job, college course or sixth form subjects you follow in the future.

Don't panic! Although it sounds scary you can take control by carrying out your research and taking advice from your teachers and parents. You will make the right decisions. Choosing your options will help you find out more about yourself, matching your interests and abilities with subjects you can study.

Things you need to consider when choosing your options are:

### Enjoyment

Choose courses which:

- You think you will enjoy; this means researching content closely and asking teachers and others who know you well for advice
- You know you can do well in
- Reflect your interests and personal qualities
- Help you learn in the best way for you – check out the assessment as well as the course content.

### Aptitude

Choose subjects which you think you will be good at - you will be more likely to enjoy them as well. Think about why you might enjoy particular subjects and how committed you feel – e.g. Drama: Have you enjoyed performing previously? Do you like working collaboratively? Are you committed enough to rehearse for GCSE performance work in the evenings and maybe at weekends?

### Prospects

Think seriously about future ambitions. If you already have a university course in mind, check entry requirements for specific courses at university and work back from there.

Choose courses that fit your plans. If you:

- Want to continue to do A levels – find out what subjects you could do and whether you need to take certain courses at KS4 to help you achieve your aim.
- Have a clear idea about doing particular work-based training or a job after Year 11 – find out the most appropriate course for it.
- Have a general idea of the broad area of work you would like to go into at 16 or later – find out whether you can do any KS4 courses, which would start you on your way without stopping you from doing other things if you change your mind.

### Balance

If you have no idea what you want to do in the future, it doesn't matter. Just choose a range of subjects which fit your interests and qualities and make sure that your options provide a broad and balanced programme.

## Independence

Don't choose based on what your friends are doing (they are different from you and have different strengths and interests) or on the basis of favourite teachers (you don't know which teachers will be teaching the group in Year 10). Make your own decisions.

### REMEMBER!

- You will have more routes to achieving your goals than your parents/carers had.
- Think carefully about your next steps and follow your strengths and interests.
- Seek advice from teachers, parents, older brothers and sisters and others you think would be of help when making these important decisions. Good luck!

## How the Options Process Works

---

- Students and their parents speak to subject staff to find out more about their subject / GCSE course at Options Evening on Thursday 8 February 2023.
- Students and their parents complete the Options Form online using ***SIMS Options Online*** (see separate instructions at the end of this document) and select the subjects they would like to study. **The form must be submitted by Friday 8 March 2023.** We then assess course viability.
- It is important to note that it is unlikely that every student in Year 9 will be able to receive all of their first choice Option Subjects. This is why it is important to state reserve option choices.
- The two main reasons why your child's option choices might not be possible are: (a) too many students want to study a particular popular subject or (b) he/she wants to study a combination of subjects that are not compatible with the way subjects are grouped in the Option Blocks.
- In the event that it is not possible for your child to be placed in his/her first-choice subjects, the following process will be used: (a) subjects will be allocated on the basis of the preference order expressed on the Options Form (b) reserve subjects will be used.
- In the event of your child's options not being possible, the staff at the school will talk to him/her to ensure that the final option choices are the best that can be offered and, where necessary, parents will be directly contacted to discuss options.
- Please note that changes in subjects after September are allowed only in **very** exceptional circumstances.



## Summary

---

- A student will study one subject from each of the four option columns/blocks.
- **Triple Science can only normally be taken by students who are on track to achieve a grade 6 or better in all three sciences. School will make the final judgement.**
- A student **must** choose/study at least one of the following subjects:

**Geography**

**History**

**Spanish**

- A student **CAN ONLY select ONE subject from** Art & Design and Graphic Communication as they are in the same subject family.
- A student **CAN** select Photography **with** Design & Technology **and with** Art & Design / Graphic Communication as these are 3 different 'subject families'.
- A student may choose **A MAXIMUM OF TWO vocational subjects:** Child Development, Enterprise & Marketing, Hospitality & Catering, ICT or Sport.
- Parents/Students must enter their first, second and third choice subjects for each of the four option columns/blocks (as shown below)

***Please note that option subjects will only run if there are viable student numbers taking that subject – Parents/Carers will be notified if there are any changes to the option pattern.***

## Using SIMS Options Online

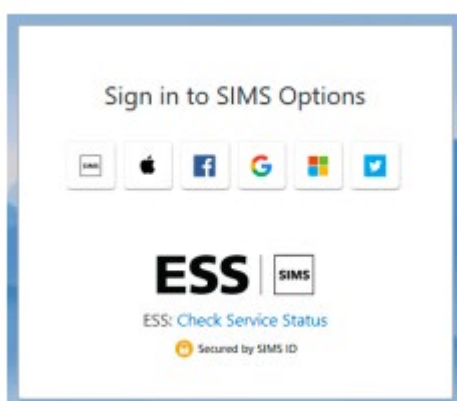
---

We use a software package called **SIMS Options Online** which integrates with our timetabling system to collect options choices from students. Parents and students can log into Options Online to select their child's choices.

**Step 1:** In order to log into Options Online you need a SIMS Online Services account. Parents will have received a registration email from [noreply@sims.co.uk](mailto:noreply@sims.co.uk) which contains an invitation code. If you have not received a registration email, please check your junk folder before contacting the school. Follow the instructions in the registration email, by clicking the "Accept invitation" link inside the green box.

**Step 2:** Once you have registered and created a SIMS Online Services account (as detailed in step 1) you need to go to SIMS Options Online (<https://www.sims-options.co.uk/>)

The screen below will open, and you need to click on



Enter your email address and the password you chose at registration. You will be asked to enter the date of birth of your Year 9 child. Please be patient while the account is created, the screen may look blank for some time.

**NOTE:** Once you have set up your SIMS Online Services account, you will receive an email like the one below. **Please ensure that you validate your email address** so that you can reset your password if necessary.

Dear

You have successfully registered a SIMS ID account. It is necessary to validate your email address so that you may receive password reset emails should you become locked out of your account or forget your password.

Please click the link below to verify your email address and log in to your SIMS ID account.

<https://registration.sims.co.uk/Home/ValidateEmail/?Code=RTZFQzAyQ0QtNjMxOC00RjQ1LTIBRTUtMEY1Tz>

Kind Regards  
The SIMS ID Team

**Step 3:** The Options screen will open up, showing your child's name and this page:

### Option A

You must pick **ONE subject** from the list below.

If you wish to choose separate/triple science, please select **BIOLOGY**. This will mean you will automatically select chemistry & physics as well.

You have chosen 0 of 1 courses and 0 of 1 reserves from this list

<b>Biology</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option C</small>	<b>Drama</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option C</small>
<b>Geography</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in other lists.</small>	<b>History</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in other lists.</small>
<b>ICT</b> VTCT L2 Certificate <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>	<b>Media Studies</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option C</small>
<b>Photography</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>	

### Option B

You must pick **ONE subject** from the list below.

You have chosen 0 of 1 courses and 0 of 1 reserves from this list

<b>Art</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option D</small>	<b>Graphic Communication</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>
<b>Geography</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in other lists.</small>	<b>Hospitality &amp; Catering</b> Level 1/2 Certificate <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>
<b>History</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in other lists.</small>	<b>Sport Science</b> Cambridge Nationals Certificate Level 1 & 2 <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option D</small>
<b>Spanish</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option D</small>	

### Option C

You must pick **ONE subject** from the list below.

If you wish to choose separate/triple science, please select **BIOLOGY**. This will mean you will automatically select chemistry & physics as well.

You have chosen 0 of 1 courses and 0 of 1 reserves from this list

<b>Enterprise &amp; Marketing</b> BTEC Award Level 2 <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>	<b>Biology</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option A</small>
<b>Citizenship</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>	<b>Drama</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option A</small>
<b>Geography</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in other lists.</small>	<b>Media Studies</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span> <small><span style="color: #00aaff;">i</span> This course is also available in Option A</small>
<b>3D Design &amp; Technology</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <span style="float: right;">Reserve</span>	

#### My Choices in Order of Preference

(Total Choices: 0)

To change your order of preference select a choice and click the position in the list you would like to move it to.

No courses selected.

#### My Reserves in Order of Preference

(Total Reserves: 0)

To change your order of preference select a reserve and click the position in the list you would like to move it to.

No reserves selected.

**Option D**

You must pick **ONE** subject from the list below.

You have chosen 0 of 1 courses and 0 of 1 reserves from this list

<b>Art</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in Option B</small>	Reserve	<b>Child Development</b> Cambridge Nationals Certificate Level 1 & 2	Reserve
<b>Ethics &amp; Philosophy</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course	Reserve	<b>History</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in other lists.</small>	Reserve
<b>Music</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course	Reserve	<b>Sport Science</b> Cambridge Nationals Certificate Level 1 & 2 <small>This course is also available in Option B</small>	Reserve
<b>Spanish</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in Option B</small>	Reserve		

**Step 4:** Follow the instructions on the screen. You must pick one subject from Option A, one from Option B, one from Option C and one from Option D. Select a subject as your option by clicking on the name of the subject and your choice will transfer to the right-hand side of the screen into "Priority Choices".

**Option A**

You must pick **ONE** subject from the list below.

If you wish to choose separate/triple science, please select **BIOLOGY**. This will mean you will automatically select chemistry & physics as well.

You have chosen 1 of 1 courses and 0 of 1 reserves from this list

<b>Biology</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in Option C</small>	Reserve	<b>Drama</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in Option C</small>	Reserve
<b>Geography</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in other lists.</small>	Reserve	<b>History</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in other lists.</small>	Reserve
<b>ICT</b> VTCT L2 Certificate	Reserve	<b>Media Studies</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course <small>This course is also available in Option C</small>	Reserve
<b>Photography</b> GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course	Reserve		

**My Choices in Order of Preference** (Total Choices: 1)

To change your order of preference select a choice and click the position in the list you would like to move it to.

1 **Drama**  
GCSE 9 - 1 Full Course Option A

**My Reserves in Order of Preference** (Total Reserves: 0)

To change your order of preference select a reserve and click the position in the list you would like to move it to.

No reserves selected.

If you make a mistake, or change your mind, you can click on the subject again and it will reverse your choice.

You don't have to select the subjects in Option Block order. The first subject you select will register as your highest preference subject. These shown on the right-hand side. To change your order of preference select a choice and click the position in the list you would like to move it to.

**Step 5:** You can choose up to 4 reserve subjects – 1 from each Option Block. If you have already chosen a subject, you can't also choose it as a reserve choice.

For example, if you choose Drama in Option A you are not able to choose Drama as a reserve choice in Option D.

To choose a subject as a reserve, click the "Reserve" section of the subject name.

The screenshot displays the 'Option A' selection interface. It includes a list of subjects with 'Reserve' buttons: Biology, Drama, Geography, History, ICT, Media Studies, and Photography. A blue arrow points to the 'Reserve' button for Drama. To the right, two summary panels are visible: 'My Choices in Order of Preference' showing 'Drama' as the first choice, and 'My Reserves in Order of Preference' showing 'Geography' as the first reserve.

You can also change the order of preference of your reserve subjects, in the same way as your first-choice subjects.

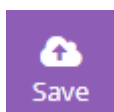
**Step 6: IMPORTANT!**

When you have completed your child's choices, you must

- tick the Parent/Carer Approval box at the bottom of the page

A purple header box with a downward arrow and the text 'Parent/Carer Approval'. Below it is a white box containing an unchecked checkbox and the text 'Parent/Carer Approval'.

- click on the "Save" cloud above your name at the top left corner of the page.



[There is no submit button or confirmation email.]

You can revisit the Options Online website and change your subject choices until the deadline of **Friday 8 March 2024**, when your options will be locked.

If you have any difficulties logging in or using the site, please see Mrs Gauntlett, or email [gcsoptions@psf.wirral.sch.uk](mailto:gcsoptions@psf.wirral.sch.uk).