



MERCHISTON
EDINBURGH

**SIXTH FORM
CURRICULUM
HANDBOOK
2022-24**



Dear Parent

As we look forward to your son joining us in September 2022, I write now with further information on the next stage of the subject choice process.

This document includes the 2022-24 Curriculum Booklet which is intended to give you some up-to-date detail on different subjects at this qualification level. You may already have discussed subjects in your previous contact with us, but this booklet supplements that.

You will find a set of column choices at the end of this booklet. Only one subject can be chosen from each column and, as stated in the booklet, we recommend starting on four subjects. I appreciate that discussion around subjects is very useful in most cases, and so we want to ensure that you can have that discussion with the ALT and do please contact me if you would like to arrange this.

Please note that a subject may not run if uptake is low.

The suggested process is:

- Review the columns in the context of your son's interests and the contents of the Curriculum Handbook.
- Come to an initial idea on which subjects he would select at this point
(only one subject can be chosen from each column and we advise starting on four subjects).
- Firm up on ideas and submit choices.

I hope this information is helpful for you and I look forward to engaging with you further as we move through this process.

Kind regards

Dale Cartwright

Deputy Head Learning and Teaching

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A Boarding and Day School for Boys aged 7-18.

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Introduction

Choosing your Sixth Form subjects can appear to be a daunting task, particularly when you are trying to balance interest and your abilities across a range of subjects, alongside keeping a keen eye on the entry requirements of university courses and other post-school pathways. The choice can become easier if you have a clear idea of what is involved in each subject in terms of content, structure, and approach.

This booklet describes the arrangements at Merchiston to give Sixth Formers as wide a choice of subject combinations as is possible. The course descriptions it contains, written by the relevant Heads of Department, aim to give an idea of the content of each subject at A Level so that you can consider whether the course is one that you will find interesting and stimulating. Many subjects are approached very differently in the Sixth Form from the manner in which they are taught at GCSE or IGCSE.

Spend time absorbing the information and advice within this booklet and discuss your thoughts with your parents. You may have firm thoughts already, but still take time to reflect on these. We will give you and your parents details of the subject column structure, and will offer opportunities to discuss your thoughts on this: only after this do we ask that you give us a written decision on your Sixth Form choices.

Dr Dale Cartwright

Deputy Head Learning and Teaching

Mr Fraser Newham

Assistant Head Academic

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN MAKING SUBJECT CHOICES

There are many important factors to consider when making choices of subjects to study, but perhaps the most pertinent advice is to discuss your thoughts with parents, teachers, your Tutor and the Academic Leadership Team (ALT).

The Fifth Form Parents' Meeting provided an opportunity for you and your parents to meet subject teachers and discuss your suitability as a Sixth Form student in their subjects. Before the meeting you will already have discussed your ideas about these choices with the ALT; your teachers will also have made their recommendations.

Other points to keep in mind include:

- You should obviously have some ability in the subject, as well as an interest in it. You will find that subjects in the Sixth Form will continue to challenge you; the jump from GCSE to A Level will require you to work hard and read around the subject in your own time. Over the entire two years, you will need to be working increasingly independently and taking the initiative in your own learning.

Because the standard at A Level is much higher than that at GCSE, a secure GCSE result in any one subject is unfortunately not in itself a reliable guide as to how difficult you may find that particular subject at A Level. Enthusiastic teachers, solid revision, or even 'gentle' GCSE examination papers can all help to get you a strong grade, but this is no guarantee that you will go on to find the A Level courses plain sailing. A far better guide is to look at your overall GCSE performance, averaging all your results (including those in subjects you have decided to drop) to find your personal GCSE profile

- The norm when choosing A Levels is four subjects (reducing to three in Upper Sixth). For some pupils we may recommend either three or five A Levels. More information can be found in the "A Level reform" section of this booklet
- It is important to note that certain courses will only be available if sufficient numbers of boys opt for them; very small numbers will unfortunately mean that these subjects may not be viable, and we will communicate this as promptly as possible
- We would generally advise against doing a standalone Science at A Level. Experience tells us that the performance in a standalone Science subject is generally lower than we would expect, perhaps due the fact that there is not another science subject supporting the skills and content covered. There are, of course, exceptions to this, but this requires careful consideration
- If you are thinking of going to university you should be aware that there are often particular qualifications or combinations of subjects required for particular degree courses. The next section is aimed at giving you an overview of certain such cases. However, you should discuss any questions you may have with your Tutor and the ALT. The UCAS search site is also a good source of information (search.ucas.com).

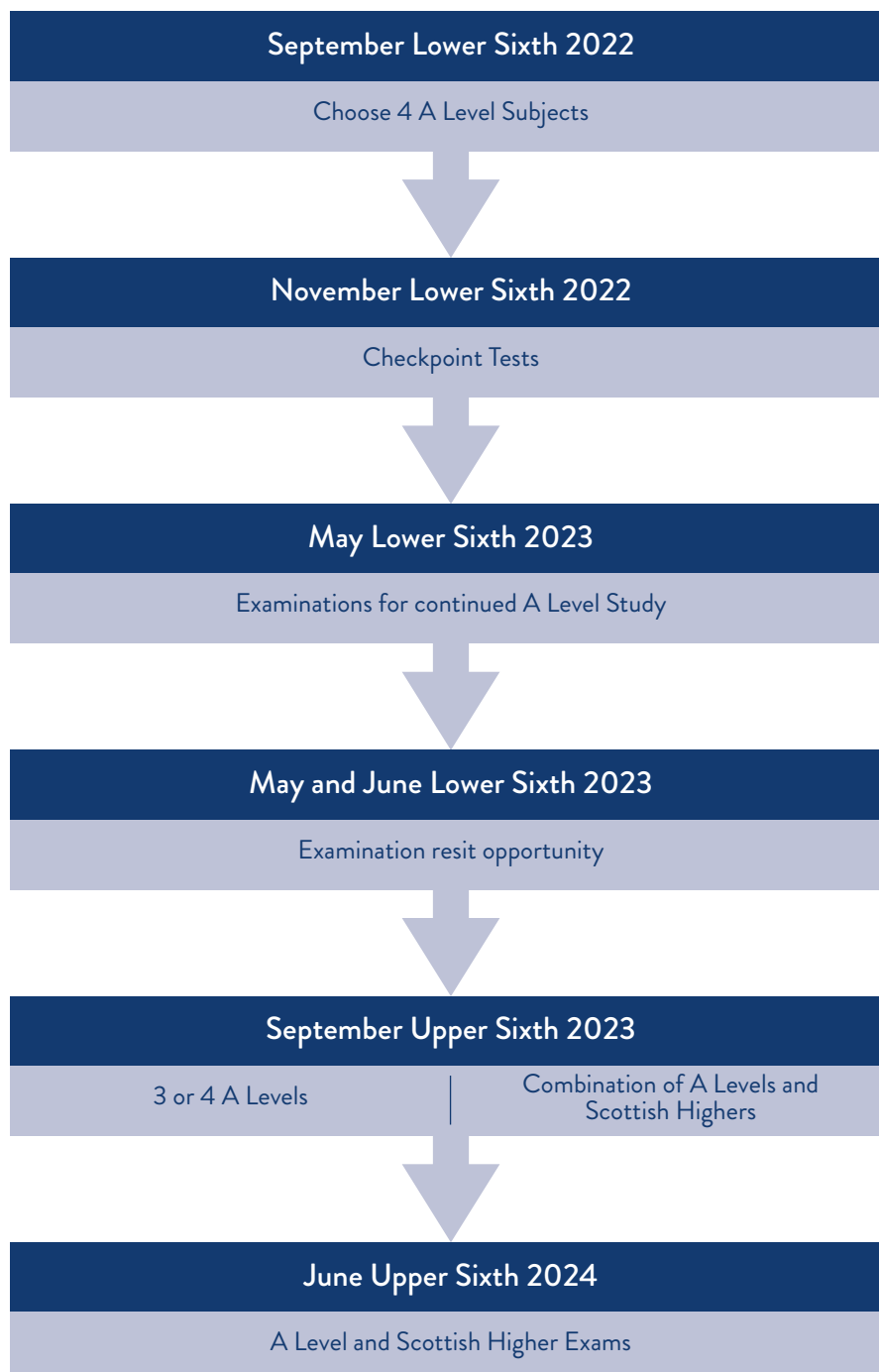
SUBJECT CONSIDERATIONS FOCUSED ON UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS

The selection criterion of Universities is very variable, depending on both the specific University and the degree subject. As such, the most important advice is to seek guidance from a member of the ALT, the Universities Adviser in particular. However, a few general points are noted here as an initial guide.

- Some of the most selective Universities will expect you to be doing the most demanding course that the School offers. In other words, if you are doing Maths A Level and wish to apply to a highly selective University, you should also strongly consider Further Maths.
- Medicine and Veterinary Medicine have highly competitive entry requirements. Pupils should, therefore, have alternative courses in mind when deciding on the combination of subjects at A Level. Chemistry A Level is essential here, and many Universities also like to see a humanities subject, as part of the A Level programme, to show that writing skills are well developed.
- Entry to Universities in other countries (Germany, for example) is very much possible with A Levels. However, they often require a particular blend of subjects, so do seek advice from the ALT on this.

MERCHISTON'S PATHWAYS

Merchiston is committed to providing a pathway for each individual boy to achieve his highest possible academic standards and, after exhaustive research and consultation, has devised the programme shown below. We continue to believe that it is educationally desirable for our pupils to begin Sixth Form study with four subjects so as to maintain breadth and maximise flexibility as they begin to consider Higher and Further Education choices. The move to two year study programmes necessitates formal assessment points at appropriate junctures in the boys' academic journeys and explains both the December and March examinations. We believe that progress into the Upper Sixth Form A Level courses should be dependent on strong performance in the May examinations in Lower Sixth. If the results in these examinations suggest it is desirable, then we will recommend routes to ensure best possible outcomes. Some case studies on this are also shown below.



MERCHISTON'S BESPOKE SIXTH FORM CURRICULUM – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is 'bespoke' about it?

At Merchiston, we are in the fortunate position of being able to offer to our Sixth Form two types of globally-recognised, 'gold standard' qualifications: English A Levels and Scottish Highers. Whilst we are, and remain, principally an A Level school, our bespoke curriculum affords us the opportunity to capitalise on the English and Scottish systems by offering uniquely tailored combinations of qualifications, with outstanding outcomes for our pupils across the board. All Merchiston pupils take (at least) four subjects in the Lower Sixth year and the vast majority will follow the traditional 'three A Levels route' to university. However, in some cases, such as those in which it is the pupil's intention or desire to keep his options open and study a wider variety of subject disciplines, it can be advantageous to pursue a combination of A Level and Higher qualifications in the Upper Sixth year.

Aren't Highers easier than A Levels and therefore only for the less able?

Unlike the two year A Level, the Scottish Higher is designed to be delivered in a year; but, whilst there may be less content in a Scottish Higher, this must not be confused with it being an easy option, for Highers are robust and challenging pre-university qualifications. Some of our pupils therefore opt for an Upper Sixth programme involving two A Levels and two Highers, one A Level and three Highers, or four (sometimes even five) Highers. This approach gives pupils an extra year to develop in advance of final decisions and avoids the 'two term rush' to Higher, which in many Scottish schools remains the default approach.

Some schools run Highers over two years – why not Merchiston?

We are aware that some similar schools to MCS run a 'two year Higher' programme. We disagree with this approach for the following reasons:

- Merchiston is predominantly an 'A Level school';
- It is more aspirational for students to set off on the full A Level programme;
- Current system of Highers in the Upper Sixth only provides an enormous amount of flexibility;
- In many subjects, there is considerable content overlap between Higher and A Level - time spent on A Level course contributes significantly to the U6 Higher year;
- Pupils have an extra year to develop, in advance of final decisions. This gives all pupils the opportunity to embark on A Levels in the first year, meaning they have a chance to blossom;
- Current system allows departments to identify those who flourish after Sixth Form study following GCSE;
- Providing appropriate challenge in academic programmes;
- Students can attain outstanding UCAS profiles;
- Very difficult for staff to keep up interest in Higher, a course designed for the 'two term rush' over five terms;
- Doing a one year course over five terms could be demotivating for students
- Pupils less well prepared for university study - many Scottish entrants to universities have done Advanced Highers;
- Offers no discernible advantage over current offering (particularly if Highers offering in Upper Sixth is increased);

Isn't delaying Highers until Upper Sixth just a way for you to make more money?

Absolutely not. Merchiston's whole Sixth Form philosophy is built around running a two-year post- GCSE programme which aims to give our pupils the very best post-school pathways which suits his individual needs. Whilst not exclusively, this tends to mean an ability to access high quality courses at excellent universities in the UK and overseas. Our bespoke approach to combinations of qualifications delivers this. It is important to note that we believe this is in the best interests of our pupils from a co-curricular and social perspective, as well as the academic.

We are very proud of our heritage as a predominantly A Level school, but we have adapted our approach over time to help achieve our aim.

Isn't doing A Level in Lower Sixth followed by Higher in Upper Sixth a waste of the Lower Sixth year?

The key to Merchiston's approach is co-teachability. In a range of subjects, our programmes are designed to branch at the end of Lower Sixth, and boys can choose to continue along our enhanced Higher or A Level routes. In many cases, the context of the Lower Sixth course is identical to that covered in Higher (for example, the Lower Sixth A Level Mathematics course covers about two thirds of the Higher course, and the rest is completed in Upper Sixth by our Higher candidates). In subjects where there is perhaps less of a tendency towards syllabus overlap (such as English or History) there is still a huge benefit gained from studying these subjects at A Level in Lower Sixth, as the appropriate skills development (such as essay writing or formulating and assessing an argument) is happening.

My son could go to a local day school in Lower Sixth, take a set of Highers and go straight to university – why not do that?

It is important to be aware of how universities make offers when making this consideration. Universities tend to be interested in which qualifications have been sat in the same year and for the first time and they make offers accordingly. So, for example, a Highers candidate who does not meet his offer at the end of S5 (Lower Sixth) will have to meet a more challenging set of criteria at the end of S6 if applying for the same course. For the most competitive courses, universities nowadays will be expecting to see Advanced Highers, which are taken in S6 (Upper Sixth). There is, therefore, no real advantage to be gained from the strategy of 'putting all one's eggs in the basket' of Highers in Lower Sixth. As such, an increasing number of our students are recognising our approach as an interesting alternative route to their optimal post-school pathways and very many universities (including members of the Russell Group) make offers to such pupils every year.

How does a combination of qualifications improve my son's university chances?

In terms of UCAS points, our bespoke approach to Upper Sixth qualifications leads to excellent outcomes; for example, in 2018, the average Merchiston Upper Sixth pupil's UCAS points tally was 141 (as a guide, AAA at A Level is 144 points and AAB is 136 points).

We are very fortunate at Merchiston to be able to provide genuine and intensive personalised academic support for each of our pupils, and this ability underlies our formidable record of academic success as a school. We have real confidence in this pupil-centred approach, and believe it to be sector-leading.

Are school fees higher if my son takes more than four subjects?

No. The school fees are identical, whether the pupil takes three, four or more subjects. The number of subjects taken is arrived at as a result of discussion between the pupil, his parents and ALT; the only consideration is the optimal number of subjects to suit the pupil's pathway.

Subjects currently offered at Higher in Upper Sixth:

- Biology
- English
- Chemistry
- Economics
- French
- Geography
- History
- Mandarin (also offers Advanced Higher)
- Mathematics
- Music (also offers Advanced Higher)
- Physics
- Physical Education
- Spanish

SIXTH FORM PATHWAY CASE STUDIES

The following are recent examples of pupils having chosen an academic programme in Upper Sixth which has not been based solely on A Levels. Although it is crucial to look at the context of each individual when deciding what would be most appropriate, these show that the outcomes achieved from following such pathways can be more positive than retaining an A Level only programme.

Case Study 1

A pupil in Lower Sixth studying Biology, Chemistry, Geography, and Physical Education was predicted to get a C grade in each. If he had carried on an A Level programme, dropping down to three subjects, achieving these grades would have given him a UCAS points total of 96 points. Discussing his university aspirations led us to suggest that he changed to Higher Biology, Chemistry, and Physical Education, whilst retaining A Level Geography. This gave him the benefit of building on one year's experience in the three subjects he was studying at Higher and, although the Highers still provided a challenge, this relieved some pressure in these subjects so that he could build on his strengths in Geography. Through his hard work on this programme, he secured A grades in all Highers and an A grade in A Level Geography. This gave him a UCAS points total of 147 points and secured him entry to his university of choice.

Case Study 2

A pupil studying Biology, Chemistry, Maths, and Physics A Level was predicted to get a three C and one D grade. He had a long held ambition to study Veterinary Medicine or Zoology. Dropping to three A Levels would have most likely led to a UCAS points total of 88 to 96 points, and unable to access any Veterinary Medicine courses and very few Zoology courses. He converted to Highers in all subjects, and secured one A, two B, and one C grade. This provided him with 102 points, and facilitated access to one of his top-choice Zoology courses.

The above only offer examples of how the flexibility of the Upper Sixth pathways can lead to positive outcomes, and it is important to discuss individual contexts with a member of the ALT.

EXAM BOARD INFORMATION

The exam boards charge a fee for entering exams. These fees are added to the end of term bill.

The exam boards do not offer a refund of entry fees if a candidate withdraws from an examination at short notice. Parents should therefore be aware that the end of term bill will necessarily carry a charge for every exam a pupil has entered, even if he decides at the last minute not to take an exam in that subject.

GCE A Level Exam Boards

Art & Design	OCR
Biology	Edexcel
Chemistry	Edexcel
Chinese	SQA
Classical Civilisation	OCR
Computer Science	AQA
Design Technology and Engineering	OCR
Economics	OCR
English Literature	OCR
French	AQA
German	AQA
Geography	Edexcel
History	AQA
Latin	OCR
Mathematics	OCR
Physical Education	OCR
Physics	Edexcel
Politics	Edexcel
Russian	Edexcel
Spanish	AQA

THE STRUCTURE OF SIXTH FORM

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TEXTBOOKS / CORE LEARNING MATERIALS / ELEARNING

Departments are encouraged to tailor their delivery of learning materials to the requirements of each subject area, including effective use of eLearning technologies. In many departments a proportion of learning materials are now delivered digitally, including textbook-style core notes.

Boys should as a matter of course be able to confidently articulate how any learning materials have been provided and where they are to be found; but any parents with queries should please contact the relevant Head of Department in the first instance.

ART and DESIGN

The best foundation for success in A Level Art is a good grade at GCSE and a keen interest in the subject. If you have an aptitude for the subject and are keen to discover more about how artists work you will probably have the basic skills to succeed. Success in Sixth Form Art requires determination and dedication.

What will I learn on the Art course?

The main purpose of any course in Art is to develop your ability to appreciate the visual world, respond in a personal and creative way and perhaps even contribute to the benefit of others. The skills you will develop will be varied. Among them, you will develop a working knowledge of materials, practices and technology within Art. You will develop the skills to interpret and convey your ideas and feelings using Art, craft, and design. You will develop your imaginative and creative powers and your experimental, analytical, and documenting skills. You will also develop a specialist vocabulary and the knowledge and understanding of the place of art, craft, and design through history and in contemporary society.

During the Lent Term all Upper Sixth Artists are given the opportunity to follow a Life Drawing course at Edinburgh College of Art or Leith School of Art; the course is designed to help students acquire the 'tools' to explore their own visual language for representing the figure with a view to creating strong and confident drawing. Art Schools and Universities offering Visual Art courses usually require evidence of Life Drawing work within an applicant's portfolio; it is for this reason that we are keen to promote these courses.

Overview of A Level in Art and Design OCR (H600-H606)

Students must complete both components to be awarded the A Level in Art and Design.

Content Overview	Assessment Overview	
Component 01: Personal investigation Learners should produce two elements: (i) a portfolio of practical work showing their personal response to either a starting point, brief, scenario or stimulus, devised and provided by the learner or centre; (ii) a related study: an extended response of a guided minimum of 1000 words.	Personal investigation (01) 120 marks non-exam assessment (internally assessed and externally moderated)	60% of total A Level
Component 02: Externally set task : The early release paper will be issued on 1 February and will provide learners with a number of themes, each with a range of written and visual starting points, briefs and stimuli. A response should be based on one of these options.	Externally set task (02) 80 marks 15 hours non-exam assessment (internally assessed and externally moderated)	40% of total A Level

What could I go on to do at the end of my course?

At present most students wishing to take Art further will go on to do a one-year Foundation course in an Art College or College of Further Education before applying to degree courses in more specialist areas of Art. Throughout the year there are a number of Portfolio preparation courses (usually held at either the Edinburgh College of Art or The Leith School of Art) for pupils intending to follow Art at a higher level after School; we strongly encourage such pupils to attend one or more of these courses if they are thinking of pursuing a degree involving some element of practical Art.

Mr Jason Cordingley

Director of Art

BIOLOGY

The 'Science of Life', Biology is inherently fascinating and is relevant to us all. There is little that is so fundamental to academic thinking as 'Where do we come from?' or 'How do our bodies work?' An A Level in Biology will provide many answers to these universal questions. As well as exploring fundamental Biology, our course now enables us to study modern medicine and genetics.

We teach the Edexcel A Level Specification B. This course is linear so there is no AS exam and it is examined by three papers taken at the end of Upper Sixth. The content of these papers is outlined below. There is also no marked coursework element to the course but there is a strong practical element which will be explored in classes throughout the course. Students will however be rigorously tested with internal tests throughout the course to check progress.

Advanced Biochemistry, Microbiology and Genetics: Paper 1 – 1hr 45 min - 90 marks (30%)

- Topic 1: Biological Molecules
- Topic 2: Cells, Viruses and Reproduction of Living Things
- Topic 3: Classification and Biodiversity
- Topic 4: Exchange and Transport
- Topic 5: Energy for Biological Processes
- Topic 6: Microbiology and Pathogens
- Topic 7: Modern Genetics

Advanced Physiology, Evolution and Ecology: Paper 2 – 1hr 45 min - 90 marks (30%)

- Topic 1: Biological Molecules
- Topic 2: Cells, Viruses and Reproduction of Living Things
- Topic 3: Classification and Biodiversity
- Topic 4: Exchange and Transport
- Topic 8: Origins of Genetic Variation
- Topic 9: Control Systems
- Topic 10: Ecosystems

General and Practical Principles in Biology: Paper 3 – 2hr 30 min - 120 marks(40%)

The paper may include multiple-choice, short open, open-response, calculations and extended writing questions.

- The paper will include synoptic questions that may draw on two or more different topics.
- The paper will include questions that target Mathematics at Level 2 or above. Overall, a minimum of 10% of the marks across the three papers will be awarded for mathematics at Level 2 or above.
- The paper will include questions that target the conceptual and theoretical understanding of experimental methods.

The broad areas studied are the same as those studied at IGCSE; with the main difference being that topics are studied in much more detail.

Biology combines naturally well with Chemistry, Geography, Physics, Maths and PE as well as providing an interesting science subject to demonstrate a broad interest if taken as a lone science along with Arts subjects. Students who wish to study Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine or any organic or Biological science subject must have studied Biology A Level.

Mr Andrew Jackson

Lead Teacher Biology

CHEMISTRY

Chemistry is everywhere and one can't fail to be more amazed by the world around us with a core understanding of the subject. Our entire Universe is built from fewer than 100 substances; the chemical elements. Knowledge of the outer electrons of these atoms allows us to understand material science and predict the outcome of every chemical process. At its most exciting these include the reactions that underpin life itself and the manufacture of advanced materials such as superconductors, batteries and advanced alloys. At its most practical it has provided fertilisers to feed the world, fuels to power progress and pharmaceuticals to combat virtually every disease.

The A Level Chemistry course is linear and is taken over two years. A Grade 7 at IGCSE would be highly desirable for onward study in Chemistry at A-level. Strong mathematical skills such as processing data, extracting information and manipulating formulae are essential and allow students to access the highest grades.

In the first year nine topics are studied. These cover the core principles of the subject and put the key ideas into a real-life context. Practical work is a major part of the course and there are a number of Core Practical Tasks throughout the year.

In the second year eight topics are studied. These build on the theoretical concepts learned in the Lower Sixth and develop the student's understanding of the feasibility, rate and extent of chemical reactions. Organic Chemistry is developed further and the student will end with a detailed knowledge of the synthesis, properties and analysis of pharmaceutical products. Practical work is again central to the course and is incorporated in the same way as in the first year. In common with all linear subjects, any marks awarded for practical work do not count towards a final grade.

Assessment is therefore based 100% on the final exams. These are made up of three papers. Paper 1 (Inorganic and Physical Chemistry) and Paper 2 (Organic and Physical Chemistry) are both worth 30% and are 1h 45min papers. Paper 3 is a 2h 30min synoptic assessment, worth 40% of the marks, covering all aspects of the course including questions on core practical experiments.

The course is suitable for those students who wish to continue with the subject beyond school as well as those whose chemical education will cease after Upper Sixth. The study of Chemistry is necessary for those students who wish to read subjects such as Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry, Chemical Engineering, Forensic Science, Pharmacy and Agricultural Science at University. A Level Chemistry is complemented by subjects such as Biology, Physics and Mathematics, although it is by no means necessary that these subjects are taken.

Mr Robin Greenwood

Lead Teacher Chemistry

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

This A Level explores the foundations of Western culture, by examining aspects of the Greek and Roman worlds. No prior knowledge of the classical world is necessary, and no study of Latin or Greek language is involved.

Modern-day life owes a huge debt to classical antiquity: while the Romans were engineers and a redoubtable military force, the Greeks were thinkers, giving us philosophy, economics, theatre and a belief in freedom of thought and speech. They also fundamentally shaped our political structures and assumptions about democracy. It is no exaggeration to say that the Greeks had a totally new conception of what human life was, and showed what the human mind was for.

This course is designed to provide an interesting and enjoyable study of the ancient world and its literature and ideas, as well as to develop an awareness of the influence of the classical civilisations on our world today. More generally, students will gain sensitivity to societies whose spiritual and moral values contrast with those of the modern western world.

The three units are:

- **The world of the hero** (40%): studying Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid* will allow you to explore Greek and Roman codes of heroism, reputation, honour and revenge against the background of some of the most enduringly popular stories ever told: battles, monsters, travels, duty, love and glory. You will also consider the role of the gods and of women in these poems, and their place in ancient society.
- **Greek theatre** (30%): a study of two tragedies and one comedy looks at one of Greek literature's most important legacies to western thought – drama. The Greeks sought in their tragedies to establish the limits of human freedom, examining the extent to which we can be held responsible for bad things which happen. Their comedies are a heady mix of political satire, physical slapstick, biting wit and rude jokes.

Greek plays are often performed today; we take every opportunity to see live productions, including in major London theatres. We also make a trip to the British Museum in London to examine material evidence for the theatre. A trip to Rome is part of the plan for the next two years.

- **Beliefs and ideas** (30%): a study of a politically turbulent period of Roman history, where bloodshed and bribery became commonplace as the 'traditional ways' of politics were replaced by a type of politics that appealed to the ordinary citizen rather than the Roman elite. Focussing on three outstanding statesmen – Cato the Younger, Julius Caesar and Cicero – we explore the conflicting political values that contributed to the end of the Roman Republic.

"Studying Mediterranean antiquity superbly equips individuals to think socio-politically and to persuade other people orally, visually and in writing. It hones transferrable skills like source criticism and culturally relativist analysis. It's a perfect A Level to do with any other subject because the Greeks invented all academic disciplines including Medicine and Material Science. It gets school-leavers and graduates great jobs and gives them nourishing and beautiful brain-food for non-working hours for life." Edith Hall, Kings College London

Mr Matthew Hillier

Head of Classics

COMPUTER SCIENCE

Computer Science is a fascinating and demanding subject in terms of its combination of academic challenge and practical engagement. It is relevant to today's world, and the world of the future as technology becomes further integrated in everyday life. Students will learn to apply the academic principles learned in the classroom to real-world systems. They will develop an intense creativity, combining the art of invention with the science of problem solving through the elegant use of algorithms and mathematical logic. A-Level Computer Science teaches a unique set of skills which can be applied to a wide variety of academic and technological fields and which are highly sought- after in numerous areas of employment and for University undergraduate programs.

The aims of this qualification are to enable learners to develop:

- An understanding and ability to apply the fundamental principles and concepts of computer science, including: abstraction, decomposition, logic, algorithms and data representation
- An understanding of how computers operate at an electronic level, and how communication between devices is possible through networks and the Internet
- The ability to analyse problems in computational terms through the practical experience of solving such problems, including writing effective and efficient program code
- The capacity to think creatively, innovatively, analytically, logically and critically
- The capacity to see relationships between different aspects of computer science, combining multiple disciplines into a cohesive set of skills
- The mathematical and computational thinking skills required to analyse “big data” efficiently

A Level Units	Method of Assessment	Unit Overview	Weighting
Paper 1	On-screen exam (2 hours 30 mins)	Tests a student's ability to program practically, as well as their theoretical knowledge of programming including data structures, algorithms and computational thinking.	40%
Paper 2	Written exam (2 hours 30 mins)	This paper tests a student's theoretical knowledge of data representation, computer architecture, functional programming, networking, databases and Big Data.	40%
Project	Non-Exam Assessment (Approx. 72 hours project work)	The non-exam assessment assesses a student's ability to use the knowledge and skills gained through the course to solve or investigate a practical problem, following a systematic approach.	20%

Prior Learning: A background in GCSE Computing would be advantageous although not essential. Candidates wishing to take this course would benefit from having Maths and/or a Science GCSE at Grade 6 or above.

Content Overview: The characteristics of contemporary processors; Input, output and storage devices; Software and software development; Exchanging data, Data types, data structures, algorithms; Legal, moral, cultural and ethical issues; Elements of computational thinking; Problem solving and programming; Algorithms to solve problems and standard algorithms; Analysis, design, development and evaluation of a programmatic solution to a real-world problem.

Mr David Thomson
Head of Computing

DESIGN TECHNOLOGY and ENGINEERING

Design Engineering and Product Design

Design Technology and Engineering at Merchiston offers boys two different endorsed titles at A Level: **Product Design** and **Design Engineering**. Both titles prepare learners for 21st century tertiary education and/or work-based study and practical-based training in the design, creative, engineering and manufacturing industries.

Similarities exist within the two titles: namely, in elements of the iterative design process including taking design risks to develop innovation and enterprise; experiencing a range of processes and materials; problem solving and critical-creative thinking; employing science and maths in design decisions as well as fulfilling requirements that support learner progression. Central to the content of both of these Design and Technology titles is the requirement for learners to understand and apply iterative design processes - specifically, 'explore' consumer needs, 'create' solutions and 'evaluate' outcomes against the specified needs.

There are also significant, distinct features between the titles, as detailed here:

Design and Technology: Design Engineering (H404)

The Design Engineering title focuses on contemporary engineered and electronic products and systems. The in-depth analysis of such products and systems in terms of function, operation, components and materials is key to learner understanding of their application for commercially viable outcomes. Knowledge, understanding and skills also encompass consideration of wider issues that inform design decisions.

Design and Technology: Product Design (H406)

Product Design is focused towards consumer products and applications where the in-depth analysis is in terms of materials, components and marketability. Such a consumer-oriented focus develops learners' better understanding and critical comparison of design decisions, and the uses of industrial and commercial practices of product development.

The specification overview

For each title, there are two written exam components and one non-exam assessment (NEA). The three components outlined below are set out generically to explain the structure of assessment within both these titles:

<p>This paper is set out through four sets of questions that predominantly cover technical principles within each endorsed title. Learners will be required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● analyse existing products; ● demonstrate applied mathematical skills; ● demonstrate their technical knowledge of materials, product functionality, manufacturing processes and techniques; ● demonstrate their understanding of wider social, moral and environmental issues that impact on the design and manufacturing industries. 	<p>Paper 1</p> <p>Principles of the subject: Written paper 1 hour 30 minutes 80 marks</p>	<p>26.7% of total A Level</p>
<p>This component has a series of longer answer questions that require learners to demonstrate their problem solving and critical evaluation skills. Learners will be required to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● apply their knowledge, understanding and skills of designing and manufacturing prototypes and products; ● demonstrate their higher thinking skills to solve problems and evaluate situations and suitability of design solutions. 	<p>Paper 2</p> <p>Problem Solving in the subject: Written paper 1 hour 45 minutes 70 marks</p>	<p>23.3% of total A Level</p>

<p>The 'Iterative Design Project' requires learners to undertake a substantial design, make and evaluate project centred on the iterative processes of explore, create and evaluate. Learners identify a design opportunity or problem from a context of their own choice, and create a portfolio of evidence in real time through the project to demonstrate their competence.</p>	<p>Paper 3</p> <p>Iterative Design Project Non-exam assessment Approximately 65 hours 100 marks</p>	<p>50% of total A Level</p>
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Dr Clare Nugent

Head of Design Technology and Engineering

ENGLISH LITERATURE

English Literature at A-Level is not simply about reading widely and ambitiously but about developing an understanding of the human condition. Lessons will encourage you to look beyond the simple narrative of a text and analyse, question and make connections between the texts' historical, social and cultural contexts. The course will help to develop your powers of analysis, will sharpen your ability to develop a clear argument and help you explore, and so better understand, different critical perspectives.

English Literature at A Level is a demanding, but very enjoyable, course, involving the detailed study of challenging texts chosen from a range of historical periods spanning the 13th to 21st centuries.

A strong GCSE performance, particularly in English Literature, provides helpful training for the A Level course, but an enthusiasm for reading and a capacity for independent thought are central requirements for anyone wishing to pursue this subject. Many students choose to join the Senior School Book group to extend their enjoyment of reading and hone their critical skills. Pupils are charged for the set texts issued as part of the course (the average charge has been £50-£75).

Component One: Shakespeare and Pre-1900 Poetry and Drama

- 2.5-hour exam (40%)
- Shakespeare plays in the past have included: Hamlet and The Tempest
- Poetry has included Chaucer's Merchant's Prologue
- Drama has included Ibsen's A Doll's House
- The exam will consist of two written tasks on the Shakespeare play, one of which will involve close reading, and a comparative essay on poetry and drama.

Component Two: Comparative and Contextual Study

- 2.5-hour exam (40%)
- Candidates will be examined on at least two texts in a specific genre: The Gothic.
- Texts in the past have included Dracula (Stoker), The Bloody Chamber (Carter) and The Picture of Dorian Grey (Wilde)
- The exam will consist of a close-reading task looking at an unseen passage and a comparative essay on two set texts from the chosen topic.

Component Three: Literature Post-1900

- 3000-word coursework folder (20%)
- Candidates will study three texts for two essays; the texts will include one prose text, one poetry text and one drama text. All texts will be post-1900 and at least one will have been published or performed after 2000. Texts have included A Streetcar Named Desire (Williams), On Chesil Beach (McEwan), Jerusalem (Butterworth) and High Windows (Larkin). Students are also allowed the opportunity to propose their own texts if they have a particular interest.
- One essay will be a close reading of a passage and the other a comparative essay

Extra-curricular English

Edinburgh is fortunate in its theatres, and English students will attend a number of theatre-trips during the Sixth Form. We try to ensure that you encounter as wide a variety of dramatic traditions as possible: these trips are seen as integral to the study of English at Sixth Form level. In addition, A Level pupils are given access to the English Department's digital subscription to:

- The English and Media Centre's emagazine - which includes access to an archive full of rich critical and contextual material, as well as exam-specific revision resources
- Massolit - a bank of lectures by global experts, aimed specifically at A-Level pupils, on the authors and texts studied on the course
- Digital Theatre Plus - a streaming service providing students with access to a range of world-class productions of the different plays we study.

The English Department administers a number of Merchiston's academic prizes (for creative writing, reading aloud, verse composition, and recitation) and there is a Sixth Form category in each prize; entry to these is not, however, restricted to those pupils who have chosen to continue studying the subject after GCSE.

Each summer we take Lower Sixth A Level pupils to Stratford-upon-Avon for three days to see performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company and to tour the town's Shakespearean properties, including the Birthplace Museum, Hall's Croft,

and Mary Arden's House. This tour will enhance your understanding of the social and historical context of the Shakespearean drama you have seen and studied during your School career.

Prospects

English Literature is a flexible subject which, although often taken as part of a humanities package, can just as profitably be combined with a science programme. The A Level course not only prepares students for degree courses in English Literature or in subjects that require literary analysis (such as Classics, Modern Foreign Languages, and Theology); but is also advisable for those considering Law, History, Media/Cultural Studies, and Philosophy. However, it is a strong core subject that is viewed favourably by universities for any course and that develops skills that will apply to any form of further academic study, developing research skills alongside interpretative abilities in addition to honing powers of written and spoken communication.

English is extremely helpful for any career in which communication and analysis are important.

Dr Calum Mechie (Dr Kate Anderson from 1 September 2022)

Head of English

ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE (EAL) AND IELTS

The EAL Department provides continuing and appropriate support and tuition for VI Form pupils who are non-native speakers of English.

EAL classes are designed to improve the pupils' general level of English, to support their academic subjects and to help them prepare for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) examination, which is required by many British and other English-speaking universities. IELTS is internationally recognised by thousands of institutions worldwide. This includes not only educational institutions but companies, professional bodies and government agencies.

In addition, EAL staff work in partnership with subject teachers to provide subject and prep support on an individual basis as required.

A fixed charge is made per term for EAL support, which covers the cost of all teaching. A separate charge for IELTS textbooks, workbooks and examination fees is applied if appropriate.

Mrs Susan Hardman

Head of EAL

GEOGRAPHY

Geography A Level can be taken by those who have not studied Geography at GCSE. Having not taken GCSE Geography does not disadvantage the pupils that choose this course.

A Level Geography has changed dramatically in recent years. The Edexcel syllabus we follow is a cutting edge and dynamic analysis of the many challenges and conflicts that shape our world today, including the decline of the USA, the rise of China and India, water conflicts, energy insecurity, understanding globalisation and its impacts, world inequality interventions and rights, as well as the increasing significance of challenges faced due to tectonic hazards, and the world's increasingly threatened coastlines.

Studying such a cutting edge, dynamic and global subject requires pupils to use a wide range of materials in their learning. Regular reading of The Economist, keeping up with The News on a daily basis, and using the internet to keep up with contemporary developments in current day world events, along with a range of specialised A Level resources, are all integral.

Final assessment is by three written examinations sat at the end of the second year (80%), and a piece of coursework completed during the first year (20%).

A Level Geography Content:

Topics being completed over the two years:

- Understanding globalisation and its impacts
- Assessing the need for, and managing, the regeneration of places
- Understanding the world's increasingly threatened coastlines
- Understanding the increasing challenges of tectonic processes and their hazards
- The changing new world order (Superpowers, BRICs and MINTs)
- Water conflicts (the water cycle and water insecurity)
- Energy Insecurity (the carbon cycle and the need for energy security)
- World health, human rights and geopolitical interventions

Assessment:

Paper 1	105 marks (30%)	Tectonics, Coasts, Water Conflicts, and Energy Insecurity
Paper 2	105 marks (30%)	Globalisation, Regeneration, The Changing World Order, Human Rights and geopolitical interventions
Paper 3	70 marks (20%)	Questions based on an unseen resource booklet, addressing course themes for a part of the world.
Independent Investigation	70 marks (20%)	Write-up of field-based research into a chosen question from the course themes.

The value of Geography A Level

Fieldwork and skills acquired:

Fieldwork and research are essential parts of both years of the course. This includes a number of local field trip days including to the Lothian Coast, Leith, and other relevant sites and establishments.

This course provides opportunities for the pursuit of a wide range of key skills. Students work in groups for data collection and develop their IT skills in processing, presenting, synthesising, analysing and interpreting research findings. Literacy, numeracy, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, problem solving, decision making and other intellectual skills are key elements and fully developed by the requirements of the course. All these transferable skills are important to future employers.

Subject combinations:

A wide range of useful subject combinations are possible, as Geography has the considerable advantage of being recognised by universities and future employers as both an Art and a Science. This means that should a pupil be interested in reading for a science degree (BSc in any subject including Medicine or Veterinary Science), then Geography may be counted as one of their Science subjects. If, instead, a pupil is interested in reading for an Arts degree (BA in any subject including, for example, History, Law, or International Business), Geography will instead be counted as one of their Arts subjects.

In recent years, popular combinations have been to combine Geography with Economics, Geography with Politics, Geography with History, but also Geography with any of the sciences, and also with D&T, PE, Languages, or Maths. All combinations convey meaning to university applications, and future employers.

University courses and careers:

A Level Geographers also develop one of the broadest ranges of transferable skills for university study and beyond, in that studying the subject also promotes analytical rigour and a sense of scientific enquiry.

A good proportion of our pupils continue to read for a Geography-related degree at University (such as BA / BSc Geography, Human Science, International Relations, Development Economics, Political Ecology, Political Economy, Environmental Sciences, Environmental Management, Development, Sustainable Development, Land Economy, International Business, Land Management, Natural Sciences, Earth Sciences, Geology, Resource Exploration, American Studies, and Urban Planning).

Geography graduates are valued for their flexibility of thought and skills to deal with complex, multidisciplinary issues at the local, national, regional and global scale. Geography graduates have amongst the highest rate of employment on leaving university compared with the sciences and other social sciences/humanities.

Dr Tanya Bower

Head of Geography

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY & PPE

A LEVEL HISTORY / A LEVEL POLITICS / A LEVEL ECONOMICS / BTEC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A faculty is the name for a family of subjects. The distinct subjects of History, Politics and Economics have joined forces to create a faculty of History & PPE, and Entrepreneurship has become a part of that, too.

PPE stands for Politics, Philosophy and Economics. It is a very flexible, very popular degree subject that many Merchiston boys apply for at university, and if you're thinking about it then you need to make sure you take at least two of our subjects. (We teach Philosophy as an intrinsic part of the A Level Politics course, not as a distinct subject.)

On a deeper level, however, we think that having our disciplines work together will benefit Merchiston boys who choose to take any of the three subjects. Our vision as a faculty is for you to develop as individuals who are engaged with and interested in the forces that formed the contemporary world and continue to shape it. We are the subjects that do this really well. History explains why the world has developed in the way that it has, while Politics and Economics help to explain its power structures and the ways that human beings have used its resources to relate to one another.

There is a lot of overlap between the subjects and, importantly, we have seen over the years that boys who take more than one of our subjects *consistently* do better in them all. The overlap comes not only in the skills required: all need you to develop your skills as a writer, to argue a case, to support it with evidence and to convince your audience. However, the overlap also comes in the subject material: to give only one example, boys studying the American Revolution in A Level History have a head start when learning about the philosophy of Liberalism in the A Level Politics course, and they are in a better position to explain free market theory in A Level Economics.

Doing any of our subjects will also give you the skills better to work independently and ambitiously. You will be better prepared for the modern workplace and you will be a more desirable candidate for whatever walk of life you want to go into.

You will find an explanation of the content of each subject in the next few pages. Each of our three subjects is a fantastic A Level in its own right, but you'll probably find you enjoy them even more if you take more than one.

Mr Simon Thompson

Faculty Head of History and PPE

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY & PPE

HISTORY

A Level History gives students the opportunity to engage with three periods where the world was turned upside down; one of them close to home and two of them thousands of miles away. The course consists of three modules:

Unit 1 – Breadth Study: Britain under the Tudors 1485-1603

This is one of the most exciting periods of not just British but world history. You will study some of the most iconic and titanic figures ever to walk across the stage of British History. You will get to know some of Britain's most famous monarchs and larger than life figures, such as Henry VIII, Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell, Elizabeth I, and Mary, Queen of Scots. However, you will also engage with the seismic forces that were tearing Europe apart throughout the Sixteenth Century – most notably the Protestant Reformation – and some of the great European figures who responded to them, such as Francis I of France, the Emperor Charles V, and King Philip II of Spain. You will find out about huge processes and controversial issues, such as the dissolution of the monasteries or the Spanish Armada, but also the personal stories behind the big names, such as the six wives of Henry VIII or the reasons why Elizabeth I could not decide what to do with Mary Queen of Scots. You will get to know some historical individuals that you will never forget, and you will understand why the Tudors are still the most talked-about royal dynasty that Britain has ever had.

Unit 2 – Depth Study: The Birth of the USA 1760-1801

At the same time you will have the chance to engage up close with one of the most significant events in the history of the Western World: the American Revolution. This depth study will take you from the dingy taverns of Boston's North End to the Governors' mansions, and on to the battlefields of Manhattan, Saratoga and Yorktown. As you go, you will see how high ideals combine with the rougher politics of the street, and how a ragtag band of rebels pull together and ultimately - for better or for worse - defeat the most formidable military force in the world at the time. It is the dawn of the modern age, with consequences which continue to define Britain and the United States to this day, and is crucial to any real understanding of the contemporary world.

Unit 3 – Course work essay: The causes of the Russian Revolution 1825-1917

At the end of the Lower Sixth year you will also study for a coursework essay on the reasons why the Tsar's regime collapsed in February 1917. You will study a century of Russian history in a short space of time, taking in processes and events like the Decembrist Revolt, the Crimean War, the rise of the Bolsheviks and the impact of the First World War, and you will formulate and support your own view on the most significant reasons for the collapse of Tsardom. This is the only piece of coursework in Sixth Form History, and it will be handed in by October of Upper Sixth.

A Level History looks in depth at periods with which boys may not necessarily be familiar, but which we are sure they will enjoy. It will interest students who are curious about the past and want to learn more about the forces which have shaped the world we live in. Students take in the big sweep of British, European and World History from the late 15th to early 19th centuries, as well as studying key figures and movements in depth. Students will also get to know some enormously significant historical figures, and follow trends and patterns over time, making connections and judgements which both interpret the past and help to make sense of the present. The course will be assessed with two exams at the end of Upper VI, one for each unit, plus a coursework essay to be completed in the first term of Upper VI.

Nowadays, History is more valued than ever by both universities and employers. It teaches skills which are key for the workplace, as well as for modern life as whole; such as problem-solving, prioritising the significant from the trivial, organising material and arguing a case, and presenting information in a way that makes sense to others. It is useful for pursuing both the Arts and Sciences: Merchiston Historians have gone on to study a vast range of subjects at university, including fields as varied as Law, Medicine or, of course, History itself. It is also a good preparation for a career in business and for leadership in the corporate world.

The main requirement for this course is enthusiasm: it is not necessary to have studied History before Sixth Form.

Mr Simon Thompson

Faculty Head of History and PPE

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY & PPE

POLITICS

Politics is about power, in all its forms. A Level Politics gives students the opportunity to study how power works, first of all in Britain, and then in the wider world.

First of all, students will learn about British Politics. You will learn about the British Constitution (yes, it does exist!) and the powers it gives to different bodies, such as Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Judiciary. In parallel with this, you will learn about how Politics affects people and how they participate in it. You will study how British democracy works, including but not limited to elections, and you will learn about the central ideas of all the major British political parties, north and south of the border, including how they have changed over recent years. You will also learn about pressure groups and the impact they have on how the public participates in Politics.

In parallel with this, you will study some of the big ideas that have shaped politics in Britain and much further afield. Conservatism, Socialism and Liberalism are ideas that have been central to western democracy for centuries, and you will study the major thinkers behind them, the policies they have formed, and how they stand in today's world. You will also study Ecologism, a much more recent idea, but one which has become very influential in policy-making decisions in the modern world. More fundamentally, Ecologism goes to the heart of certain questions about what it is to be human, and of what our relationship to planet Earth should be.

At the same time we broaden the focus to look at Global Political issues. You will study some of the big issues and forces that shape the world of International Relations, including Power and where it lies, International Organisations, Human Rights, and Globalisation. Case studies range from North Korea to Islamic State, via the EU and the Climate Change Talks. The course will open your eyes to some of the ways that international diplomacy works, and it will help you to interpret the state of today's world in an exciting but informative way. This course is very similar to the first year of an International Relations degree, and is the best possible preparation for someone who is thinking of going down that route at university. Politics is also enormously useful for somebody considering studying PPE (Politics, Philosophy and Economics), a very popular and extremely competitive Oxbridge option.

Politics is an A Level course that is highly respected by universities, and studying it for A Level will help to prepare you for any humanities-based course at university. There are no specific entrance requirements for A Level Politics, and you do not have to have studied History in order to take it. However, it is not simply a subject designed to improve your dinner party conversation, and it is most definitely not an easy option: you will need to work hard at it and you will find it academically stretching. The subject revolves around a lot of disagreement and debate, but positions must be taken from a position of academic rigour, and successful candidates will approach their arguments with knowledge of the theory and application on both sides. Politics is suitable for somebody who wants to specialise in the Arts and Humanities, but it is also good for those who are keen to go down the Science/Mathematics route but would like to keep a Humanities subject under their belt at the same time.

Politics is assessed via three exams at the end of Upper Sixth. There is no coursework. We regularly have visiting speakers, and every year Lower Sixth students have the opportunity to attend First Minister's Questions at the Scottish Parliament.

There has never been a more relevant time to study Politics, especially in Scotland. Everyone is talking about it and everyone has an opinion about it, so take your place alongside them, and make sure your opinion is well informed.

Mr Simon Thompson

Faculty Head of History and PPE

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY & PPE

ECONOMICS

Ever wondered why you make the decisions you do, why some people get paid so much money or why airlines have so many different classes of travel? Economics is a vast subject with many different areas of study, but at the heart of the subject is understanding why individuals, firms and governments make the decisions that they do, and how events across the world, from Brexit to a natural disaster, will impact us all.

Those interested in pursuing this subject should be aware that Economics is not a study of how to make money or become rich, neither is it a subject that teaches you how to run a firm or be a businessman: stock markets, for example, are very rarely mentioned in A Level Economics.

However, if you are curious about how real-world events impact individuals, firms and governments then you will find Economics an interesting and rewarding subject to study. Economics uniquely draws on a variety of skills that you have already begun to develop in other subjects like Maths, History and Geography. We expect all of our economists to leave the two-year course with not only an enhanced knowledge of how the world economy works, but also the ability to evaluate and analyse information and then articulate their own thoughts in a concise and compelling way.

Course structure

The course will follow the OCR A Level specification with three exams at the end of the two-year course. There is one exam on Microeconomics, one on Macroeconomics and an applied synoptic paper.

Microeconomics

The study of microeconomics encourages learners to consider the behaviours of individuals, firms and governments, and how individual markets such as the housing market and the labour market operate. Through understanding why consumers and producers behave as they do, the learners will develop an understanding of how different economic systems from the free market in the USA to the centrally planned economy of North Korea allocate their resources. Once this knowledge is established the learners will investigate how the behaviour of economic agents can be influenced through actions such as pricing, marketing campaigns, and government policies such as taxation.

Macroeconomics

This component provides learners with the technical and analytical tools required to understand how the economy as a whole functions on both a domestic and global level. The content of this component encourages learners to adopt a critical approach to their study of economic policy thoroughly understanding the implications of decisions made by domestic governments and institutions such as the Bank of England, foreign firms, and global organisations such as the International Monetary Fund. By evaluating different perspectives on these decisions, learners will enhance their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Mr Simon Thompson

Faculty Head of History and PPE

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY & PPE

BTEC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Students of Entrepreneurship will have the opportunity to learn about the processes, challenges and practice of entrepreneurship in the world today.

Offered by Pearson, this fresh and exciting BTEC course is widely recognised by universities, earning UCAS points in the normal way - there are options equivalent to A Level and AS/Higher (the top grade in the two-year BTEC Extended Certificate is equivalent to an A* at A Level), and the qualification is treated as such in university applications.

Students who take the course for two years will study four modules:

1. Enterprise and Entrepreneurs
2. Developing a Marketing Campaign
3. Personal and Business Finance
4. Entrepreneurship and Intrapreneurship in Practice

Of these four modules only 'Personal and Business Finance' is assessed by external exam, at the end of the first year - the other modules are assessed either internally or through externally controlled assessments (equivalent to coursework). Additionally, unlike A Level, it is still possible to resit the external element in the second year, a valuable advantage for those keen to achieve the best outcomes.

As such the course offers exciting opportunities for those who would relish a hands-on approach, whether as a part of an academic programme for those on a Russell Group trajectory or as a launchpad to the world of business.

In short, whether you are simply fascinated by modern day heroes like Bezos, Zuckerberg and Musk or looking in due course to join the club yourself, this could be the course for you. Why not think about how it might form part of your academic programme next year?

Mr Simon Thompson

Faculty Head of History and PPE

LATIN

Latin A Level is where all the hard work you have put in begins to pay off, as you experience in the original Latin some of the greatest and most influential texts in Western Literature: the monumental Aeneid of Virgil, the devastatingly clever and witty political speeches of Cicero, the dark and mordant history of Tacitus, Ovid's sophisticated and ironic verse—the list goes on.

Building on the language skills you acquired at GCSE, you will begin to get inside these extraordinary texts and appreciate for yourself what gives them their lasting power. Your knowledge and understanding of Roman history and culture will grow as your acquaintance deepens, and your increased command of the language will take your involvement to a new level.

Linguistic work continues to be important, and there is still plenty of satisfaction to be gained from decoding a knotty piece of syntax or from finding the perfect English word or phrase for a particular Latin expression.

As at GCSE, there are four examination papers: two in language and two in literature. The language papers are Unseen Translation and Comprehension (of content and linguistic structures). For literature there are separate prose and verse papers.

Why study A Level Latin?

Some might want to read Classics at university; it is important to remember that this is an option open to everyone, whether or not you have Greek. Others will already know that their interests lie elsewhere, but are still keen to continue Latin for a little longer: these students will find Latin a useful addition to their A Level portfolio. Latin A Level is highly regarded by universities and employers because of the intellectual discipline involved in studying an inflected language and for the analytical, linguistic, and critical skills it provides. There is a reason for so many lawyers and diplomats having studied Classics!

Latin makes a good complement to subjects such as English Literature, History, Classical Civilisation, and Modern Languages. It also appeals to scientists as a way of retaining an analytical Arts subject.

Mr Matthew Hillier

Head of Classics

MATHEMATICS and FURTHER MATHEMATICS

Merchiston offers A Level Mathematics and, for the specialist, A Level Further Mathematics. Sixth Form Mathematics will appeal to those who are proficient at algebra and trigonometry and who enjoy solving problems.

Mathematics is a very demanding course, requiring real ability. It encourages learners to think logically, using mathematical skills and forms of communication to analyse situations within Mathematics and elsewhere. Therefore, Mathematics is a key support for pure and applied Sciences and more and more for Social Studies as well.

The courses we offer provide a broad and widely applicable base of mathematical knowledge, including rigorous treatment of calculus and proof alongside Statistics and Mechanics, and prepare learners for a wide range of destinations in Higher Education and employment.

A Level Mathematics is entirely assessed by examination; at the end of the second year students sit three two-hour assessments, with Pure Maths representing two-thirds of the content and Applied Maths (Mechanics and Statistics) one-third.

Very able Mathematicians can also do Further Mathematics, which offers the opportunity to explore concepts in greater depth and to encounter some results developed by several of the most well-known mathematicians in history. Further Mathematics, as taught at Merchiston, is examined in four 90 minute papers, each worth 25% of the final grade: two of these cover Core Pure Mathematics, while the others are Statistics and Mechanics. Each aspect of the course builds on the knowledge and skills developed in A Level Mathematics.

Some Further Mathematicians have ambitions to go to the most selective universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, and so they sit the additional 'STEP' (Sixth Term Examination Paper) in the Upper Sixth.

All the exams will contain some stretch and challenge questions to support the awarding of the A* grade. Scientific and graphical calculators will be permitted for all papers. In the new A Level Mathematics and Further Mathematics, technology permeates the teaching and learning, to facilitate the visualisation of abstract concepts and deepen learners' overall understanding.

Prospects

The techniques taught in the Sixth Form are not only useful in Mathematics, but also in many branches of Science and Engineering. Whilst it is true that the analytic skills may be valuable in all disciplines, it is the problem-solving abilities of Mathematicians that make them so prized in industry and commerce.

Dr Naomi Steen

Head of Mathematics

MODERN LANGUAGES

The study of Modern Languages in Sixth Form is less about acquiring new skills and more about using them.

You will continue to learn and be assessed in the four skills - reading, listening, writing and speaking

- and will become steadily more fluent. Opportunities will be given to liaise with others, develop communication and negotiating skills and enjoy focussed trips to exploit and develop your foreign language knowledge.

Sixth form language learners spend a lot of time watching films, reading texts, exploring and debating current affairs and cultural history. As part of this, you will increasingly choose your own topics.

In the A-Level, candidates choose an area of in-depth study, which can allow you to build on other A-Level subjects or apply personal areas of interest. In the speaking element of both A-Level and Higher, personal choice of topics is part of your independent learning.

Organisations such as the CBI are currently encouraging young people in Britain to learn languages, which they see as essential to a productive workforce and successful economy. In many careers, ability in another language is a great asset - the diplomatic service, currency trading, international law, sport and leisure industries etc. Spanish, French, Mandarin, Arabic and German are the key languages to learn in post-Brexit Britain. Research has also shown that language skills bring opportunities for promotion; workers in the City of London who have more than one language are more likely to be in senior positions.

Languages are seen as desirable on UCAS applications, whatever your subject choice, as they demand steady commitment and an openness to the world; the Russell Group includes Modern Languages among its 'facilitating subjects'. For those wishing to continue at university level, languages can be studied alongside Law, International Relations, Business Studies, Accountancy, Sports Management, Engineering, Journalism etc. as part of a combined degree programme. Such combined programmes can offer attractive work experience or study abroad options.

Choices:

- French, Mandarin and Spanish are all offered as a matter of course.
- German and Russian are available on demand.
- Other languages are sometimes available - please speak to the Head of Department or a member of ALT.

Dr Clare Flanagan

Head of Modern Languages

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

As of September 2008 Sixth Form students at Merchiston have been able to study a full A Level in Physical Education. Given the complexity of the syllabus, it is desirable, although not essential, for students embarking on this course to have achieved a pass grade at GCSE Physical Education, Biology and Mathematics.

A Level Physical Education

The A Level Physical Education specification content is divided into four components. Each component is further sub-divided into topic areas and the detailed content associated with those topics.

Components 1-3 are assessed via written examination papers. Component 4 is NEA, and is internally assessed, externally moderated.

The written papers are designed in manageable bite-size chunks rather than massively long papers, thus aiding learning and teaching.

		Marks	Duration	Weighting
Component 1	Physical Factors Affecting Performance	90	2 Hours	30%
	Anatomy and Physiology Exercise Physiology Biomechanics			
	Section A	10		
	10 marks, short-answer questions on any topic			
	Section B	60		
	3 x 20 mark questions 1 question per topic – the 20 marks will be broken down into part questions			
	Section C	20		
1 x 20 mark extended response 'synoptic' questions which links two or more topics				
Component 2	Psychological Factors Affecting Performance	60	1 Hour	20%
	Skill Acquisition Sports Psychology			
	Section A	10		
	10 marks, short-answer questions on any topic			
	Section B	40		
	2 x 20 mark questions 1 question per topic – the 20 marks will be broken down into part questions			
	Section C	10		
1 x 10 mark extended response 'synoptic' question which links two or more topics				

		Marks	Duration	Weighting
Component 3	Socio-cultural and Contemporary Issues	60	1 Hour	20%
	Sport, society and technological influences			
	Section A	10		
	10 marks, short-answer questions on any topic			
	Section B	40		
	2x20 mark questions on any part of this component. The 20 marks will be broken down into part questions.			
	Section C	10		
1x10 mark extended response 'synoptic' question which links two or more topics.				
Component 4	Performance within Physical Education	60	NEA	30%
	1 - Performance or coaching practical	30		
	2 - EAPI	30		

Mr Craig Harrison
Head of Physical Education

PHYSICS

The study of Physics in the Sixth Form is a worthwhile experience. It develops both strong problem solving as well as the ability to explain ideas clearly and concisely. Physics students are highly prized in a wide range of areas from computing, engineering, architecture and medicine to finance, business and data science. The aim of the course is to help students develop an understanding of our physical world and our interactions with it, the skills and attitudes required for scientific investigation and communication, and an understanding of the applications of Physics. An A Level Physics pass is an essential requirement for entry to many university and college courses in Science, Engineering and Architecture.

In order to be successful students should have achieved at least a grade C in IGCSE Physics, or equivalent. A sound grasp of Mathematics is essential for pursuing Physics in the Sixth Form; parallel study of Mathematics is therefore desirable, but not essential. Students must be able to grasp ideas and visualise 'models' and must enjoy problem solving.

A Level

The A Level Physics course is taken over two years and develops many of the concepts introduced at IGCSE, in addition to introducing entirely new areas of the subject. The course places a heavy emphasis on practical work, Mathematics and working as a physicist.

The Lower Sixth year covers Mechanics, Materials, Electricity, Waves and the Particle Nature of Light. The Upper Sixth year covers Further Mechanics, Electric and Magnetic Fields, Nuclear and Particle Physics, Thermodynamics, Oscillations, Nuclear Radiation, Space and Gravitational Fields.

There are 16 core practicals throughout the A Level which are assessed on a pass/fail basis and are a prerequisite to completing the course. Examination is in the form of 2 papers both 1hrs 45 minutes in length, which assess the course content, in addition to a 2hr 30minute synopsis paper which also assesses practical competency.

Higher

We usually offer Higher physics as an alternative route in the Upper Sixth Form. It offers a qualification that will allow students to progress to university study based on a single year of study. The higher course has many parallels to the first year of the A level, however, there are also a number of new topics that need to be covered including semiconductor physics and special relativity.

The course consists of three units: Our Dynamic Universe, Particles and Waves, and Electricity. The course is assessed by a project and 2 exam papers totaling 3 hours.

Dr James Mayoh

Physics Lead Teacher

HIGHER EDUCATION APPLICATIONS

Going to university is both exciting and also a little intimidating: the three or four years we spend as a student form one of the most important and life-changing periods of our lives. The application process can similarly seem daunting, but Merchiston will help you to make informed decisions and will guide you through the mechanism of submitting your application form.

All Sixth Form students have a Tutor who, as well as regularly monitoring progress and discussing reports, is one of the many resources available to you for advice on Higher Education. Tutors, Housemasters, academic teaching staff, the Universities Adviser, and the Head of Careers all work alongside each other to provide the necessary support and guidance you will need to make a successful Higher Education application.

The selection procedures used for entry into Higher Education mean that, if an informed decision is going to be made about the right course at the right university, you will need to plan well ahead. An important theme of the Lower Sixth is planning what to do after School, whether this is entry to a career, to Higher Education, or to a gap year followed by Higher Education. You are encouraged to talk to your Tutor about your aspirations and hopes for the years after Merchiston. You should ask yourself, your Tutor, and the Careers department about the different courses on offer, whether you are likely to gain the kinds of grades usually required for these courses, and which careers these degree-courses might lead you towards. You should also talk to friends, brothers, and sisters who are at university to find out as much as you can about what is involved in applying for Higher Education.

It is important to visit universities, particularly those you are considering before a firm decision is made. Open Days are prominently advertised on university websites and all course information is available readily online – you should consult as appropriate.

Your Tutor and other staff will assist you with the process of making the final UCAS applications, and in crafting your Personal Statement. Very often, the earlier you make your application in the Upper Sixth, the greater your chances of being offered places on the courses you have selected. In any event, the deadline is usually in early January for nearly every course, although Oxbridge applicants and those applying for Medicine do need to apply by mid-October. You will always be notified of school deadlines. The UCAS form is completed electronically.

The UCAS Tariff

For a number of years UCAS has allocated numerical scores to the grades achieved in public examinations at this level, thereby allowing universities to make offers to applicants on the basis of points rather than specifying particular combinations of grades required. Since September 2017, the tariff has been as below.

From 2017 -	58	48	40	33	32	27	24	21	16	15
A Level	A*	A	B		C		D		E	
Advanced Higher	A	B	C		D					
Higher				A		B		C		D

Oxbridge

Entry to the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge becomes steadily more competitive year by year. Both universities make offers based on the calibre of the UCAS form, performance at interview, and on the final grades achieved at A Level. For most courses a formal entrance exam now contributes significantly to the outcome of an application.

Oxbridge candidates are given 'mock' interviews and will receive advice on reading and preparation for their College interviews in December, but they should also be prepared to exercise maturity and academic initiative in reading around their chosen subject for themselves. We would encourage this process to be underway by the summer term of Lower Sixth, for example by entering one of the prize essay competitions run by the Oxbridge Colleges.

LNAT, BMAT, UKCAT and TMUA

The LNAT (National Admission Test for Law), BMAT (Bio-Medical Admissions Test), UKCAT (Clinical Aptitude Test) and TMUA (Test of Mathematics for University Admission) are tests designed to help university Admission Tutors for Law, Medical, Dentistry and Maths degree courses distinguish between the large numbers of applicants for these subjects who are now presenting with a clean sweep of A grades. Some of these tests adopt a multiple-choice question format, and may be administered on-line; some are taken on a fixed test date, others at a date/time of the candidate's choice; some take place in schools, others in designated regional test centres around Britain.

Pupils intending to apply to courses in Medical, Bio-medical, or Veterinary sciences should be aware that some tests are taken in the **Autumn Term**; accordingly, such applicants need to form a clear idea of their Higher Education courses at the very start of the Upper Sixth year in order to ensure that they do not miss the test dates.

US Universities

There are separate booklets available for students interested in applying to American Universities. Please contact the ALT office if you wish to have a copy.

CAREERS EDUCATION and GUIDANCE

It is often said that one of the main purposes of education is to prepare pupils for the next step of their journey. In a fast-paced world, in terms of technological advancement and changes to both education and the world of employment, it is perhaps more apt to say that it should prepare our pupils for the challenges of adapting to, and the shaping of, this world.

Developing this adaptability requires both an educational element; providing an environment in which self-awareness can be developed, leading to a focus on developing a range of transferable skills and attributes, and a guidance element; being aware of the choices to be made at each stage of education, having good quality information to hand to aid this, and the implications of the choices made.

As such, the main aim of Careers Education and Guidance at Merchiston is to enable our boys to make informed choices at relevant stages. At the core of this lies the development of skills and attributes relevant to lifelong learning and career progression.

Lower Sixth (Year 12)

There is a continued emphasis on the investigation of interests identified in Year 11. In addition to this, advice is given on how to complete application forms, how to write cover letters and an effective CV. This is in preparation for organising and undertaking a period of work experience, usually over one of the holiday periods.

Thoughts turn more formally to university destinations and courses, under the guidance of Tutors and the Universities Adviser.

Upper Sixth (Year 13)

This is, obviously, a crucial year academically, and so the emphasis here is on guidance rather than education, and includes raising awareness of relevant opportunities relating to work experience, internships or gap years.

This year group attend a Higher Education conference in the Autumn Term under the guidance of the Universities Adviser, and the focus at this time is on UCAS applications with tutors and many others supporting and feeding into this process as applicable.

Guidance is provided post-exams on how to make the most of the first year at University, including the importance of continued work experience and development of skills and attributes.

Pupils in Sixth Form continue to have access to Career Cafés and a Careers Convention in school, as well as being made increasingly aware of external opportunities, through a monthly careers newsletter.

Work Experience

Work experience has always been valuable for the awareness of career areas it brings and for the skills it helps to develop. There is, however, another dimension to it which is becoming increasingly important: it is estimated that approximately 37% of graduate vacancies with the Top 100 graduate employers were filled by candidates with some experience in the company (<http://www.highfliers.co.uk/>). Work experience should be undertaken by all at some point across Sixth Form, most usually during a holiday period. Tutors and the Head of Careers will support in arranging this.

Careers Cafés, Careers Convention and Careers Newsletter

Careers Cafés offer the opportunity to discuss career areas with a visiting professional. These are targeted at small groups of boys using information gathered from the careers discussions in Year

11. The Careers Convention takes place in the Lent Term, and provides an opportunity for the boys to meet representatives from a number of companies operating in areas of interest.

Mrs Karen Coyne

Head of Careers

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

SUPPORT FOR LEARNING

Every teacher is responsible for meeting the needs of all learners in his or her class. Most pupils entering Sixth Form will already know if they have any additional support needs, and the Support for Learning department works with the boys to provide information and advice to all school staff on how to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching. Many boys who have had formal Support for Learning lessons previously no longer need them, and others may benefit from some support to help cope with the level of study skills and organisation needed for Sixth Form. Advice from Support for Learning is available to all boys in Sixth Form by dropping in to Harvey Hub, or emailing the Head of Support for Learning.

Some pupils may need additional support in examinations (access arrangements) and this can be discussed and appropriate assessments carried out. This process involves input from the boys, subject teachers, the Head of Support for Learning, the Exams Officer and guidance and regulations from the relevant examination boards, to ensure that pupils receive the right accommodations – such as extra time, the use of a reader, a scribe, or the use of a word processor.

As pupils prepare to move on, advice is given to those with additional support needs on how to apply for resources and access arrangements at university. It is likely that they will need an assessment from an educational psychologist who will provide advice for universities.

Mrs Carole Weaving

Head of Faculty of Support for Learning

LIFE SKILLS (PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION – PSHE)

All Sixth Form students have timetabled periods of Personal, Social and Health Education under the title of Life Skills. We cover a range of topics including citizenship, equality, sexual health, cyberbullying and online safety, mental health awareness and a wide range of moral, emotional and health issues. In addition, outside speakers contribute to the course on a wide variety of topics including but not exclusive to: healthy relationships; employment law and social media; entrepreneurship and business education; mindfulness: coping with stress; various charities; safe driving; personal finance: budgeting and debt; and blood donation. Sixth Form students also participate in MVP (Mentors in Violence Prevention) sessions, where they develop the skills and confidence to empower themselves as bystanders in difficult yet common situations to challenge negative behaviour and attitudes without ever putting themselves in harm's way. Mentors in Violence Prevention is a concept that was developed in the USA to reduce violent crime by changing attitudes at a much lower level using what is called the 'bystander approach'. Students can also opt in to becoming a trained Mentor and deliver similar sessions to the younger pupils. In addition, pupils will increasingly make use of the UniFrog online platform to help them record their experiences and learning.

Mr Stuart Buchanan

Head of PSHE

THE CECIL STAGG SOCIETY

Cecil Stagg, who was Headmaster from 1915-36, saw Merchiston through the sorrows of the First World War and managed the logistical and emotional challenge of the move to Colinton from the old Castle site.

The aim of the Cecil Stagg Society is to add to the academic and scholarly opportunities that are already available through the academic departments. Specifically in the Sixth Form, the focus is on preparing pupils for application to Oxford, Cambridge, and other competitive universities, including in Lower Sixth the opportunity to complete a personal research project in an area of interest - many find this part of the process very rewarding, and it is intended to be a highlight of an able pupil's academic career.

Meanwhile the first Cecil Stagg Sixth Form Academic Tour to Florida took place in February 2020, providing a further opportunity for members to develop as academics outside of the classroom, as part of an ambitious and collegiate academic cohort.

Membership of the group is open to all - pupils simply need to select Cecil Stagg Society as their Friday afternoon activity at the start of the Autumn Term. In general, most Scholars become members, and other boys are also included after discussion with their teachers or the ALT.

Mr Fraser Newham

CO-CURRICULAR MUSIC AND INSTRUMENTAL TUITION

Merchiston offers wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to become involved in practical music-making. A variety of choral and instrumental groups are available, from large groups (such as Choral Society, Orchestra, Chapel Choir and Wind Band) to smaller ensembles that include Folk Group, Jazz Band, Close Harmony Groups, and Chamber Music groups.

In addition to this many Sixth Formers at Merchiston receive personal instrumental tuition. The Music Department currently offers: accordion, bagpipes and chanter, bassoon, cello, double bass, drumming (bass, side, snare, and drum kit), flute, French horn, oboe, piano, recorder, trombone, trumpet, viola, violin, percussion, guitar and voice. Tuition in other instruments may be provided after consultation with the Director of Music.

Mr Stephen Dennis

Director of Music

COMBINED CADET FORCE (CCF)

Merchiston runs a popular Combined Cadet Force (Army Section only) unit, and pupils who are new to the School in the Sixth Form are warmly welcome to involve themselves with the CCF each Wednesday afternoon, provided that they already have had some experience in this area.

Mr Alan Ewing

DEBATING

Merchiston has a wide and varied debating programme. We participate annually in a wide range of national debating competitions, including the English Speaking Union Mace Competition, the national 'Debating Matters' Competition, and the Donald Dewar Memorial Debating Tournament (run by the Law Society of Scotland). Our best speakers also participate in the ESU National Public Speaking Competition. We also enter several short prep competitions run by the various university Union Debating organisations including Edinburgh and St Andrews Union Debating.

Senior Debating takes place as an in-house activity, meeting every Monday evening to discuss topical motions and prepare for competitions. We also run a Senior inter-clan Debating programme to allow novices the opportunity to engage in this worthwhile and highly enriching activity which annually unearths a good deal of new talent: many of these senior boys go on to become involved in representing the School at national level.

DRAMA

Drama at Merchiston provides for a range of theatrical styles, including musical theatre as well as more 'serious' plays. Main roles in these are usually given to pupils in the Fifth Form and above, so that a number of main roles are filled by those in the Sixth Form. Nonetheless, the main annual production is a whole School affair and is seen as an important coaching opportunity for junior pupils. Ensemble acting is crucial; our aim is that all pupils will have appreciated the result of a tremendous team effort by the end of any production. In addition Sixth Formers are encouraged to use their talent, maturity, and leadership to guide younger boys through a production; recently each production has been aided by a team of Assistant Directors, Choreographers or Producers from the Sixth Form.

Productions are staged jointly with St George's School for Girls, with additional opportunities for acting available in St George's own productions. Recent productions have included; *The Boyfriend*, *The Real Inspector Hound* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A View from the Bridge*, *West Side Story*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Doll's House*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

Activity options or training sessions are available throughout the term for stage management and for sound and lighting. These not only provide an introduction to technical and management skills but also provide unique leadership opportunities. Pupils involved are able to participate in various productions during the year and at other School events, and are also given opportunities to coach younger boys in these skills, helping to nurture the next generation of talent.

DUKE OF EDINBURGH AWARD SCHEME

We strongly believe in inspiring your son to become an independent, resourceful and resilient young man, eager to take on a challenge, able to accept and manage risk, and aware of his own strengths and weaknesses. The Duke of Edinburgh Award helps us to do just that and the Gold Award can be taken as an activity throughout the Sixth Form. Candidates who have not previously undertaken the Silver Award will be subject to slightly longer timescales.

Although the administration of the Award scheme falls under the Outdoor Education umbrella, only one quarter of the scheme is actually about expeditions. The remainder comprises the Volunteering, Physical and Skills sections and, in the case of Gold, a week-long Residential. The imaginative array of activities undertaken to fulfil the criteria of these sections is remarkable, from sailing expeditions to cookery courses. Full details of the requirements can be found on the DoFE website (<https://www.dofe.org/>)

The venues for the expeditions tend to change on an annual basis and we try to target some of the most beautiful and wild places in the UK: Kintail & Knoydart, the Cairngorms, the Borders, the Lake District and the Peak District.

Mr Danny Rowlands

KOINONÍA: MERCHISTON'S COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMME

'serving alongside each other ... teamwork in the Community'

Although pupils are encouraged to take part in many forms of Koinonía in their time at school, it is only when they are in Lower Sixth that they do so on a regular basis. On Wednesday afternoons (or at another appropriate time) they can participate in one of the projects or in CCF. Depending on what they feel they can offer, they can choose from projects such as:

- visiting Davidson House in Colinton and joining in the Wednesday afternoon club: this normally involves playing board games with elderly residents; visiting local retirement cottages;
- Braidburn School for physically disabled children is located close to Merchiston: our pupils help in the Braidburn nursery class and computer laboratory;
- helping in the Spawforth Library at School;
- coaching junior sport; rugby training at Longstone Primary
- mentoring in one of four Edinburgh primary schools, as part of our own in-house citizenship programme;
- working at the Salvation Army Foodbank on Gorgie Road.

MASTERCHEF

The Masterchef department aims to teach basic cooking skills to Sixth Form boys so that they feel confident in cooking for themselves when they go on to the next stage of life.

Students are organised into groups of six and each group attends six sessions in our Masterchef kitchen. These sessions are intended to be relaxed and informal. Students can team up with a friend or work on their own. They are introduced to basic cooking skills, food hygiene and, hopefully, to the enjoyment of cooking and eating with friends. The sessions are scheduled just before lunch or dinner so that students can make their meal and then eat it in the adjoining dining room.

The programme we follow is constantly evolving and improving. The boys will receive a copy of the recipes we have made at the beginning of their Masterchef programme so that they can use the recipes they have learned and maybe even try them out at home for their families.

Mrs Mairi Lucas

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Outdoor Education forms a significant part of the co-curricular programme at Merchiston and your son will be encouraged to participate at every opportunity. The benefits of being outside and experiencing nature in all its wonder are well documented, and mental wellbeing is irrefutably linked to one's ability to get out into the natural world. It matters very little whether your son is on a week-long adventurous trip or having a Physics lesson in the grounds of the school hauling different masses up and down in the trees to investigate forces: the simple fact of being outside and of learning in a different environment is invaluable and as a Department, the Outdoor Education staff are keen to connect with as many of the academic subjects as possible.

Rock climbing

Climbing is a popular activity helped by easy access to the indoor facility at Ratho and at Eden Rock. It is run as a weekly activity on Thursday afternoons and/or as a series of Sunday trips. In the Summer and Autumn Terms there are trips to outdoor venues across the South of Scotland and the North of England.

Mountain biking

Mountain biking outings will often include a trip to the justifiably famous Glentress, near Peebles, with its excellent selection of graded trails and skills courses.

Hill walking & camping

Most Merchiston boys' hill walking and camping experience is through D of E expeditions or in-House hill walks and trips. Winter trips to areas such as Glencoe also run on an annual basis, usually in February. An October trekking trip to Morocco has also been added to the calendar.

Canoeing & kayaking

Destinations for canoeing have included the River Tummell and the River Tweed.

Hill running

A weekly outing every Sunday morning takes place in the Pentland Hills for any boys keen enough to drag themselves out of bed on a Sunday!

Sailing

This is available in the Summer Term as an activity option and also through Sunday trips to Port Edgar Water Sports Centre.

Merchiston is ideally situated to take advantage of the surrounding countryside. We have easy access to the Pentland Hills and the Water of Leith for mountain biking, walking and hill running, and we are only a short drive from the Lammermuir Hills, Glentress and the Borders. The Edinburgh International Climbing Arena (the largest indoor climbing wall in the world) is a 15-minute drive away and there are two other indoor climbing venues close to the school: Eden Rock and Alien Rock. We also have access to two outdoor crags within 45 minutes of the School and good transport links to bigger climbing venues in the Lake District and Northumberland. Sailing and paddling activities take place on the nearby Firth of Forth, whilst hill walking and winter mountaineering trips see us cross the Forth Bridge and head up to the Highlands.

Many of the above activities are provided by qualified full-time members of the School staff. In some cases, we contract out to relevant AALA-licensed providers.

If you have any questions about the Outdoor Education provision at Merchiston, please feel free to contact Mr Danny Rowlands, Head of Outdoor Education.

Mr Danny Rowlands

Head of Outdoor Education

SENIOR ACTIVITIES AND SPORT

Each Friday afternoon, Sixth Form pupils have the opportunity to take part in a wide range of sporting and non-sporting activities; this activity programme provides an opportunity for diversity in their curriculum. It is possible for pupils to explore activities beyond those on the published list. Senior boys also have the opportunity to help lead activities, working with younger boys in the School.

At Merchiston we strive to achieve excellence in our three major games: athletics, cricket, and rugby. Games afternoons are Monday, Tuesday and Thursday, with regular interschool fixtures on Saturday. There is a very strong tradition of boys representing the School and also going on to achieve district and national honours.

Merchiston also offers a wide range of other sports, including badminton, basketball, cross-country, football, golf, hockey, rugby fives, skiing, sailing, shooting, squash, swimming, and tennis, along with a range of Outdoor Education activities. These are offered on a Monday afternoon, during the half-days, at weekends, or as part of the Senior Sports programme.

Merchiston also offers two sector leading specialist Golf and Tennis Academies. Both of these programmes do require an assessment prior to entry.

Mr Rory McCann
Director of Sport

APPENDIX 1: MERCHISTON'S 'ABLE' AND 'VERY ABLE' PUPIL POLICY

The Merchiston Castle School Mission Statement shows our commitment to leading students towards 'personal excellence'. Our Additional Support for Learning provision has long recognised the needs of boys with specific learning difficulties; however, we also believe that able pupils have their own requirements and we are keen that academic Departments and individual teachers adapt their curricula in order to provide these pupils with the additional academic stimulus that they need. Although our performance in public examinations is very strong, we recognise that the able pupil very often needs to be presented with more demanding challenges than national syllabuses alone can provide.

Identification

We begin the process of identifying boys with learning strengths and weaknesses before they join the school. Parents and feeder schools are asked to inform us of particular academic aptitude; our prescreening procedures, Entrance and Scholarship Examinations supply us with concrete evidence of the ability of a potential pupil. We do, however, accept that examinations are only one part of helping us to build an accurate picture as, depending on the pupil's age, these may only test for a certain range of academic abilities.

Once a pupil has joined the School, we formally follow up our findings by means of our system of internal Report cards (on which boys receive a comment and grades for both effort and achievement from their subject teachers) and biannual internal examinations. Each pupil at Merchiston is assigned a personal academic tutor whose role is to oversee academic progress. The InCAS, ALIS, and MidYIS systems benchmark pupils against the national cohort and provide further indications of appropriate academic targets for able pupils.

We value the opinion of parents about their children but do caution that this cannot be our sole method of identification. All parents consider their children to be special and often believe them to be displaying exceptional academic ability; however, our experience enables us to judge to what extent this ability is similar to that displayed by many other of our pupils.

Provision

The work of individual Departments is key to our provision for able students. Our policy of setting pupils by ability (up to the start of the Sixth Form) ensures some degree of differentiation. Additionally, internal examinations at every level contain differentiated material to provide opportunities for able pupils to be challenged.

Individual departmental classroom strategies may also include negotiated individual targets for an able pupil, group work (allowing pupils with similar strengths to challenge each other), and 'higher order' or open-ended tasks. Our concern here is always that the able child should not 'tread water' by repeating material he already understands fully or become bored by moving through the curriculum at too slow a pace.

One part of any able pupil provision is a range of Extension activities. Currently our extra-mural initiatives include entry for the Mathematics and Physics Challenges and Olympiads, Mathematics Clubs, English Speaking Board exams, foreign language exchange trips, Arkwright Scholarships (Design and Technology), entry of pupil artwork in external exhibitions: our audits of departmental provision give fuller details of what we offer. In the Sixth Form we enter pupils for the STEP exams in Mathematics and, although we are aware that Oxbridge is only one aspect of academic success, we are proud of our pupils' performance in this area. The Cecil Stagg Society provides further opportunities for more academic pupils to meet and be challenged, including the opportunity to tackle a Cecil Stagg Research Project in Lower Sixth.

In short, although Merchiston's Able Pupil Policy is always evolving, we challenge our able pupils to the very outermost limits of their potential; indeed, to the point of failure.



MERCHISTON

EDINBURGH

Subject Choices for boys entering Lower Sixth 2022-23

I confirm that I am happy for my son to embark on the following courses, subject to availability, in the Sixth Form.

Please indicate subjects of your choice. Only one subject may be chosen from each column. Please note that a subject may not be offered if uptake is low.


Name of Pupil: _____

Pupils normally choose four subjects (reducing to three in Upper Sixth). For some pupils we may recommend either three or five subjects.

A	B	C	D	E
Chemistry	Biology	English Literature	History	Art
Classical Civilisation	Computer Science	Economics	Latin	English Literature
Design	Politics	Geography	Mathematics	Entrepreneurship
Mandarin	Spanish	Physics	Further Mathematics	French
			Physical Education	Geography
				Mathematics
				Further Mathematics

Name: _____

(Parent/Guardian)

 Signature: _____

(Parent/Guardian)



MERCHISTON
EDINBURGH

A BOARDING AND DAY SCHOOL FOR BOYS AGED 7-18

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MERCHISTON.CO.UK



Charity number: SC016580

