

Choosing A Level Courses for September 2023: An Overview

Introduction

Your son or daughter will be starting their A Level studies in September 2023. Option blocks for Year 12 will be constructed, as far as possible, taking into account the demands of the students. The process is as follows:

- Students choose their **3 or 4** preferred subjects online by the deadline of **Thursday, 2nd February**
- Option blocks are then constructed with the intention of offering all prospective Year 12 students (who have submitted their choices by the above deadline) their preferred subjects

Timeline

Wednesday 11th January: 5.30pm Auditorium	Year 11 Options and Higher Education Evening Further information will be given about this evening in due course. Specific course information will be available on the Dubai College website by scrolling down to and clicking on the Sixth Form block: http://www.dubaicollege.org/academic/curriculum
Monday 28th November – Friday 20th January	One-to-one guidance interviews commence with senior members of staff
Wednesday 18th January: 7pm	Careers Convention Evening
Friday 20th January	Option choices go 'live'. Further information about this process will follow next term.
Thursday 2nd February: 12.00 noon	A Level Option Choices Deadline: 12.00 noon

Guidance Interviews

Each member of Year 11 will have a one-to-one interview with a senior member of staff regarding possible A Level choices and options for the future. This member of staff will be a point of contact for the students throughout Year 11 if further information or advice is needed.

Options and Higher Education Evening

Students and parents will be given a brief overview of the options process and an insight into university applications.

Careers Convention Evening

Students will have the opportunity to attend a variety of sessions with a Dubai College alumni, where possible, who will give a brief overview of his or her career path and undertake to answer career specific questions.

Unifrog

Each member of Year 11 will have access to Unifrog, an online tool that assists students in researching careers and university courses around the world. The tool is rich in data and allows students to prioritise factors that are important to them in their selection of courses and universities, as well as guiding students in structuring their personal statement and US college essays.

Students and parents need to note the following:

- Whilst every effort will be made to meet students' choices, **it may not be possible to provide for every combination requested by students. We also reserve the right to not offer a course if there is insufficient demand for it.** If either of these scenarios occur, students will be told as soon as possible after the options deadline and offered appropriate advice
- Students who miss the deadline of 2nd February may not receive their preferred choices
- Students *may* change their minds about option choices at a later date; however, they will only be allowed to change if their new choice fits in with the constructed option blocks **and** there is sufficient space available in subject sets. If there is insufficient space, then the student will be added to a waiting list for that subject.
- No student will be allowed to drop his or her 4th A Level till after half term in October

Possible Pathways in the Sixth Form (in order of popularity)

	Y12	Y13	Notes
1	4 A Levels + EPQ	Drop down to 3 A Levels + EPQ	3 A Levels to be taken at end of Y13; EPQ to finish at end of term 1 of Y13
2	4 A Levels	Drop down to 3 A Levels	3 A Levels to be taken at end of Y13
3	4 A Levels	Continue with 4 A Levels	4 A Levels to be taken at end of Y13
4	4 A Levels + EPQ	Continue with 4 A Levels + EPQ	4 A Levels to be taken at end of Y13; EPQ to finish at end of term 1 of Y13
5	3 A Levels + EPQ	Continue with 3 A Levels + EPQ	3 A Levels to be taken at end of Y13; EPQ to finish at end of term 1 of Y13
6	3 A Levels	Continue with 3 A Levels	3 A Levels to be taken at end of Y13

Available Option Choices in Year 12

The subjects that we are currently planning to offer are shown below:

Subject ¹	Minimum GCSE Requirements
Art and Design	None. However if the student is not currently taking GCSE Art, they should initially discuss this with Head of Art who will set a drawing assessment.
Biology	None
Chemistry	None
Computer Science	Grade 7 or higher at GCSE
Design And Technology	Students must have previously studied GCSE DT
Drama And Theatre Studies	Students must have previously studied GCSE Drama
Economics	None. GCSE Economics is not necessary.
English Literature	Grade 7 or higher in GCSE English Literature; students who expect to receive a lower grade should discuss this option choice with the Head of English prior to entering option choices.
Extended Project ²	None
French	Grade 8 or higher at GCSE. Students who obtain a grade 7 <i>may</i> be considered at the discretion of the Head of French, following a recommendation from their GCSE teacher who will consider the levels of commitment, enthusiasm and skills on an individual basis.
Geography	None. GCSE Geography is not necessary.
History	None. GCSE History is not necessary.
Latin	Grade 8 or higher at GCSE. Students who obtain a grade 7 <i>may</i> be considered at the discretion of the Head of Classics.
Mathematics	Grade 8 or higher at GCSE.
Further Mathematics ³	Grade 9 at GCSE. Students who wish to join from other schools may have taken early entry Mathematics. If they have completed an additional course, then a minimum of a grade 8 must have been obtained to demonstrate progress during Year 11.
Music	Students must have previously studied GCSE Music
Psychology	None
Physical Education	Grade 7 or higher in Biology or Chemistry. GCSE PE is not necessary.
Physics	There is no entry requirement for A Level Physics. Students who do not take A Level Mathematics will find the subject very challenging.
Politics	None
Spanish	Grade 8 or higher at GCSE. Students who obtain a grade 7 <i>may</i> be considered at the discretion of Head of Spanish, following a recommendation from their GCSE teacher who will consider the levels of commitment, enthusiasm and skills on an individual basis.

Notes

- ¹ A Level subjects are timetabled for 6 periods each week. French and Spanish A Levels have an additional conversation lesson each week.
- ² The Extended Project is timetabled for 1 period each week from November in Year 12 to December in Year 13.
- ³ A Level Further Mathematics should, in addition to the stated entry requirement, only be considered with prior discussion with the Head of Mathematics. This must be taken in conjunction with Mathematics.

In addition to the courses above, the following form part of the curriculum for Sixth Formers:

Arabic A (Arabic as a First Language)

Students who hold a passport of an Arab nation **must** take Arabic as a First Language to Year 13. Due to timetable pressures, these students will only be able to study for 3 A Level subjects. However, they *may* elect to study either AS or A Level Arabic in conjunction with their study of Arabic as a First Language as their 4th A Level following a discussion with the Head of Arabic A.

Games

Games are a compulsory part of the Sixth Form programme and aims to broaden and develop the skills of the students as well as to promote a healthy lifestyle. Students choose from a menu of different activities in both Year 12 and 13.

Islamic Studies

Islamic Studies is a compulsory timetabled part of the programme for all Muslim students in Year 12 and Year 13.

Moral Education

Moral Education is a compulsory part of our Sixth Form programme for all students and will be delivered through our pastoral programme.

The Extended Project

The EPQ is an A Level qualification but its tariff is worth half an A Level. Students will attend an introductory course in the second half of term 1 in Year 12, with the formal course starting in term 2, leading to final submission in the January of Year 13. We would urge all students to seriously consider including the EPQ as part of their curriculum, over and above choosing 3 or 4 A Levels, as it offers significant breadth to their studies.

One of our academic aims at Dubai College is to develop students' critical thinking skills and to encourage academic challenge to all of our students. The course is designed to develop skills in research, analysis, presentation, ethical enquiry and philosophical argument; it will give a rigorous academic training as well as a great source of academic achievement for students. The acquisition of these skills are unique to the EPQ and are not delivered by any other A Level.

Students are mentored by staff to research a question of their own choosing. They then embark on the research, planning and writing of a 6000 word dissertation, before giving a presentation to an audience with a question and answer session that is also assessed. Instead of a dissertation, students may elect to undertake an investigation or the production of an artefact or deliver a performance.

We believe that the skills gained on the EPQ will be of huge benefit to students if they choose to go to university and that those skills will improve the marketability of students in their future lives as well as having an intrinsic value of their own. The EPQ is valued by many universities and some universities reduce their A Level offer if students achieve a good grade in their EPQ as a 4th A Level. Even if the EPQ is not part of the offer, it can be used in students' personal statement or interview to demonstrate their interest in the subject.

TopUP (Top University Preparation)

The aim of the TopUP programme is to provide academic enrichment beyond the A Level specification whilst preparing students for a university mindset by promoting higher order thinking and advanced subject-specific knowledge. The programme acts as a springboard for students' independent super-curricular exploration of the field they hope to study at university and there is one dedicated TopUP lesson per week on each Sixth Form student's timetable.

- Term 1 of Year 12 comprises a lecture series aimed at developing students' critical thinking and study skills, supporting their transition into A Level studies
- From January of Year 12 until December of Year 13, the programme is subject-specific: students choose the TopUP subject they want to attend. The weekly sessions act as a bridge to university-level material with students discussing and dissecting topics, problems and texts that are not constrained by the A Level curriculum
- TopUP also guides students in their selection of university courses, providing them with reading ideas, personal statement support and super-curricular avenues to explore
- In the first term of Year 13 there are focused sessions for students whose course applications require admissions assessments and/or interviews

This four-term programme gives students an insight into their chosen subject, provides them with a robust and well-supported university preparation programme, and forms the basis of a student's own exploration of the subject they love and wish to study further.

Guidance on Choosing A Level Courses

At this stage of their school career, students will fall into one of two groups:

- Those who do **not** know what they want to study at university;
- Those who already have a very clear idea.

The advice that we offer to each group is different and we advise students to read the following guidance carefully prior to their one-to-one guidance session with a senior member of staff.

The Russell Group of universities have produced an extremely useful interactive guide to subject choices; this can be found at www.informedchoices.ac.uk. This may assist you in understanding which subjects open up which degrees.

Students who do not know which degree to study

If a student has yet to make up their mind about which degree they wish to study, there is absolutely **no** cause for concern about this at this stage! We recommend the following:

- Choose subjects that you are genuinely interested in and will motivate you to study
- Consider new subjects which do not require previous study at GCSE; this is especially the case if a student knows where their skills and strengths lie
- Discuss subject choices with teachers, parents and form tutors as well as with the senior member of staff in the guidance interview
- Research potential careers and degree courses on Unifrog

Students who know which degree to study

If a student has a particular career or course in mind, it is important that they do lots of research into what qualifications are required.

- The UCAS website is an excellent starting point for university courses in the UK together with the subject pages of university prospectuses.
- Do **not** rely on anecdotal stories from family and friends
- Unifrog allows students to research and shortlist degree courses with fine details about the course content, student satisfaction levels, entry requirements and success rates

Essential and Useful Subjects

The following table gives guidance on A Level subjects which are 'essential' and 'useful' for a range of degree choices. The table is **not** meant to replace the advice above: institutions differ in their entry requirements, so individual research is essential.

- If you have any questions about specific courses **in the UK** please book an appointment to speak to Mr. Trivic by emailing dcsixthform@dubaicollege.org.
- If you have any questions about specific courses **in the USA** please book an appointment to speak to Mr. Tate by emailing dcsixthform@dubaicollege.org.
- If you have any questions about specific courses **in the Rest of the World** please book an appointment to speak to Mrs. Maguire by emailing dcsixthform@dubaicollege.org.

University Course	Essential Subjects	Useful Subjects
Accountancy/ Banking/ Finance	Usually none, although some universities require Mathematics	Mathematics, Economics
Actuarial Studies	Mathematics	Further Mathematics, Economics
Aeronautical Engineering	Mathematics and usually Physics	Further Mathematics, DT, Computer Science
American Studies	Requirements vary but English and/or History are often asked for	Politics
Anthropology	None	Some courses like a science subject.
Archaeology	None	Geography, History or a science
Architecture	Art sometimes required	Art, Mathematics, DT, Physics
Biology	Biology, usually Chemistry. Some will specify two sciences.	Physics, Further Mathematics,
Art & Design	Art	DT plus art foundation
Biochemistry	Always Chemistry and some require Biology as well; some say Chemistry plus one from Mathematics, Physics, Biology. Doing Biology, Chemistry and Mathematics of Physics will keep all courses open to you.	Biology, Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science
Biology	Biology, usually Chemistry. Some will specify two sciences.	Mathematics or Physics, Computer Science
Biomedical Sciences	Normally two from Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics. Chemistry is essential for some courses.	Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics
Business Studies /Management	None	Mathematics, Economics
Chemical Engineering	Mathematics, usually Chemistry and sometimes Physics	Physics, Biology, Further Mathematics, Computer Science
Chemistry	Chemistry. Most courses would like Mathematics and one other science.	Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Physics, Biology, Computer Science
Civil Engineering	Mathematics, in many cases Physics. Sometimes one of Physics or Chemistry	Further Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, D&T, Geography, Computer Science
Classical Studies	Not all courses require Greek or Latin, but universities do look at linguistic ability. For Classical Studies or Classical Civilisation most subjects will be considered.	Any language, English Literature, History. There are some Classics courses which will allow you to start Latin or Greek from scratch.
Computer Science	For some courses, Mathematics. For some courses, Computer Science.	Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science
Dentistry	Chemistry and Biology for most courses, but some require Mathematics or Physics as well	Mathematics, Physics, Further Mathematics
Dietetics	Chemistry, Biology	Mathematics
Drama	Some courses require English Literature and/or Drama	English Literature, Drama
Economics	Usually Mathematics; Economics is not always necessary, although some universities require Further Mathematics	Economics, Computer Science, History

University Course	Essential Subjects	Useful Subjects
Electronic Engineering	Mathematics and usually Physics	Further Mathematics, DT, Computer Science
Engineering (General)	Mathematics and Physics	Further Mathematics, DT, Computer Science
English	English Literature	History, Modern Language
Environmental Studies	Many courses will ask for two from Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics and Geography	Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, History and Geography
European Studies	A modern foreign language	Another modern foreign language, English Literature, History, Politics
Geography	Geography usually required	Some prefer one from Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics or Physics
Geology	Usually two from Mathematics, Physics, Biology and Chemistry	Geography, Computer Science
History	History usually required	Economics, English Literature, Politics, a modern or classical language
History of Art	None	Art, English Literature, History, French, Spanish
Languages	French/Spanish/German are required for the relevant degree; some languages are taught <i>ab initio</i> but a language to A Level is required	English Literature, History, Politics
Law	Usually none, although some require English	History, Economics, English Literature
Material Sciences	Normally two from Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Biology (also DT for some universities)	Chemistry, DT, Further Mathematics, Computer Science
Mathematics	Mathematics and sometimes Further Mathematics	Further Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science
Mechanical Engineering	Mathematics and usually Physics	Further Mathematics, DT, Computer Science
Media Studies	A few courses ask for English	English, Psychology
Medicine	If you do Chemistry, Biology and one from Mathematics or Physics you will keep all the medical schools open to you	Further Mathematics or a contrasting (non-science) subject, sometimes a language is specified, Computer Science
Music	For most traditional courses Music and Grade 7 or 8, although some courses will consider candidates without A Level Music	Some universities have a preference for one essay based subject
Nursing and midwifery	Usually Biology or another science	Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology
Occupational Therapy	Some courses ask for Biology	Psychology, PE or another science
Optometry	Two from Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics (some courses prefer Biology as one of their choices)	Further Mathematics, Computer Science
Orthoptics	Biology	Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science
Pharmacy	Chemistry and one from Biology, Mathematics and Physics	Mathematics, Physics, Computer Science
Philosophy	None	Mathematics, Classical Civilisation
Physics	Mathematics, Physics	Further Mathematics, Chemistry, Computer Science
Physiotherapy	Biology, but some require a second science from Chemistry, Mathematics or Physics	Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology

University Course	Essential Subjects	Useful Subjects
Planning	Sometimes Geography	Geography, Mathematics and Economics
Politics	None	Politics, History, Economics, English Literature
Psychology	One from Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Mathematics	Biology, Mathematics, Computer Science, Psychology
Religious Studies/ Theology	None	English Literature, History
Sociology	None	Geography, Computer Science, Psychology
Speech Therapy	Some want a science and some specify Biology	A modern foreign language, English, Psychology
Sports Science	One from Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics; some will see PE as a science equivalent	PE, Psychology
Surveying	None	Mathematics and Physics could be helpful
Teacher Training	Check individual course website	Check individual course websites
Veterinary Medicine	Chemistry and Biology and one from Mathematics and Physics	Further Mathematics

Some Frequently Asked Questions

1. When are the examinations for A Levels?

Students sit examinations at the end of the two-year course i.e. in term 3 of Year 13.

All Year 12 students will also have a period of internal examinations in term 3 of Year 12, together with mock examinations in term 2 of Year 13.

2. Should I study three or four A Levels?

It is perfectly normal for most students to be unsure about their future destinations and courses; many therefore prefer to keep their options open with the express intention of dropping one of their four chosen A Levels by the end of Year 12. In many cases, when choosing their A Level options in term 2 of Year 11, it is simply too early for students to focus on the three subjects which they are certain about. Keeping options open is especially important if students have chosen subjects that are new to them.

Universities in the UK only ever require three subjects and their conditional offers for entry into their courses are always three-grade offers. However, occasionally, those taking four A Levels may receive a four-grade offer. The majority of our students do drop their 4th subject at some point in Year 12 (although this will be no earlier than the mid-point of term 1).

Whilst there is no requirement for students to take four subjects, those who do may benefit from greater academic enrichment and variety. However, this should never be at the expense of quality grades. Therefore students should have a compelling reason to continue with four A Levels into Year 13. It is better to have higher grades in three A Levels than slightly lower grades in four.

3. Should I take an EPQ?

We strongly recommend that all students take the EPQ in addition to their chosen A Levels. The taught element of the EPQ and the skills that students gain throughout the course will be extremely useful for further study at university and are unable to be picked up in any other A Level course.

4. Will it be seen as a disadvantage that the dropped fourth subject is not certified?

Students are free to drop their fourth subject after half term in October in Year 12. However, students will be unable to sit any external examination at this point.

Universities have made it clear to schools that no student will be disadvantaged by having an uncertified fourth subject. On the contrary, universities look for students who are motivated, engaged and varied in their skills and knowledge. Our reference will state that students have taken a dropped subject as pure academic enrichment, rather than for its certification. This style of self-motivated academic enrichment is in line with the profile of a top university candidate: someone who goes beyond expectations to satisfy their intellectual curiosity.

In the Sixth Form, we already encourage students to pursue additional courses such as the EPQ, MOOCs, to conduct extra reading and to develop their knowledge and skills beyond the curriculum in TopUP sessions; having an internally validated examination at the end of Year 12 in the dropped subject subscribes to this philosophy of academic enrichment.

5. **What will universities base their decisions on?**

Universities base their decisions on achieved GCSE grades as well as the A Level predictions submitted by us. We have two waves of predictions: the first wave occurs in September of Year 13 for those students who wish to apply early; the second wave occurs in mid-November of Year 13 for all remaining students. Predictions take into account the end of Year 12 examination grade as well as the student's level of attainment and application throughout the A Level course to date.

In addition, universities will also look at the additional enriching extra-curricular activities and courses that students will hopefully do; all of these will assist in us writing a great reference.

6. **I want to study Mathematics, Engineering or Economics at university. Do I need Further Mathematics?**

There is a significant amount of misinformation surrounding the need to study Further Mathematics for certain degree courses.

We encourage students and parents to check up-to-date information on individual university websites, rather than to rely on word of mouth. We do advise those students with a realistic chance of studying *straight* Economics at LSE and Cambridge to take Further Mathematics. Around 70% of successful applicants to Economics at these institutions studied the full Further Mathematics A Level.

Many universities state that Further Mathematics is *desirable*, but not essential, for these courses. Students who have studied Mathematics to a deeper level are likely to be at a greater advantage when applying for these courses and we expect that many candidates from other schools applying to the top universities will also have studied Further Mathematics.

However, our view is that students for whom Further Mathematics is *most* appropriate are those who genuinely excel in, and love, Mathematics. The course entails very difficult mathematics, and lots of it, so it is this subject passion that is critical to the selection of the course, as opposed to the long-term potential vision of studying these courses.

Students who wish to study Further Mathematics **must** first discuss this option with the Head of Mathematics.