



# GCSE and BTEC Pathways 2026-27

St Paul's Catholic School & Sixth Form



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Making decisions for a better future

*"Let your light shine before others" (Matthew 5)*



—ST THOMAS—  
**AQUINAS**  
CATHOLIC MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST



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# Message from the Principal

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Dear Parent(s), Carer(s) and Students,

Please find enclosed details of the pathways available to your child from August 2026. As he/she prepares to enter the next stage of their learning, ensuring students are on appropriate courses and studying options that are challenging and will meet or exceed their potential and prepare them for future life, is always our priority. Often students find choosing subjects difficult. If this is the case, consider the following:

- seek advice and direction from the relevant subject teachers
- clarify if this is a subject your child will enjoy and is currently achieving well in
- don't choose a subject just because peers have
- consider Post 16 and Post 18 option pathways and possible future careers

The DFE and school measures students' attainment and progress using a student's best 8 qualification results. (A8 and Progress 8)

The English Baccalaureate (EBACC) qualification formally recognises the value of 'Facilitating Subjects'. Increasingly, competitive universities are expecting that students will have studied at least two facilitating subjects at A Level. The facilitating subjects include maths, further maths, English literature, physics, biology, chemistry, geography, history and Languages.



# Message from the Principal continued

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We aim to ensure every Year 8 student, chooses to undertake a programme of study that is aspirational and engaging. The distinct pathways ensure each student has a clear journey, through to post 16 study or employment. The number of subjects a student can choose to study is three. The rationale for this is threefold;

- student well-being
- students do not need 11 GCSEs
- It is hoped that students will be able to secure stronger grades in the subjects they are studying.

This booklet aims to outline the three learning pathways, with a detailed outline of all subjects to ensure that students have a comprehensive guide to support them, with the demanding process of making their choices. In addition, there is a full transition programme in place; including a series of assemblies, signposted student support and the Pathways Evening in order to ensure good decisions can be made.

It is important to note that the government's intention, is to increase numbers of students studying a language. The ability to study a language up to GCSE or A Level, puts young people in a privileged position in the workplace and offers many opportunities that would not be open to those without a language. I therefore encourage your child to continue studying the language they have been, in Years 7 and 8.

I am confident you will find this booklet and the support in place helpful.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Conaghan".

Mrs S Conaghan  
**Principal**

# Key Stage 4 Qualifications

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The combination choice of subjects and qualifications will have a significant impact on all subsequent choices at Key Stage 5 and beyond. It is essential that students choose courses and qualifications, that suit their learning needs and career aspirations. The transition into Key Stage 4, is a very important staging post along the educational journey and requires careful thought and reflection.

The curriculum provision at Key Stage 4, meets the aims outlined by the Government through the provision of two main types of qualifications:

Business and Technology Education Council (BTECs). The BTEC qualifications have a strong vocation focus, whereby the theoretical elements of the course are frequently delivered through real life case studies. Additionally, there is a strong focus on placing the learning in context through trips, visits and, in some cases, extended work experience. There are now also external exams within BTECs.

Qualification choices at Key Stage 4 will naturally flow through to the available choices at Key Stage 5 and beyond. The most competitive universities such as Oxbridge and Russell Group universities - a group of 24 universities which demand some of the highest entry criteria for degree courses:

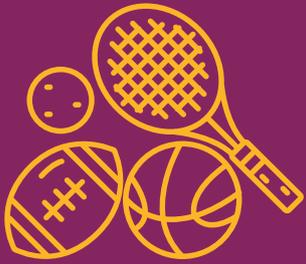
<https://www.russellgroup.ac.uk/> are less likely to accept Level 3 BTEC qualifications and may have a stronger focus on facilitating subjects. However, over 95% of universities do accept BTECs especially where they offer relevant subject areas <https://www.theuniguide.co.uk/search/course?utf8=%E2%9C%93&c%5Bq%5D=BTECS>





# Key Stage 4 continued

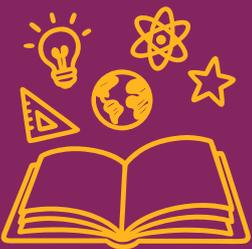
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It is therefore critical that students and parents, give time to thoroughly considering the wider context within which final subjects and qualification selections are made.



The aim is to personalise the curriculum to meet the needs of all students as far as possible. For instance, a student may demonstrate outstanding independent learning skills and a preference for more applied learning at Post 16 and beyond. Many more universities are now offering degrees, designed for students who have come through a BTEC route and who wish to pursue a more applied or vocational career. In addition, a number of students explore the option of studying High Level Apprenticeships.



Alternatively, the increasingly rigorous GCSEs forms a solid foundation for a range of A Levels, that require high level research and analytical skills fundamental to being successful on more traditional degree courses. All students will take either GCSEs or a combination of GCSEs with one or possibly two BTEC courses alongside. Whatever qualifications are selected, the most important thing is that students enjoy their learning, consequently, make outstanding progress throughout Key Stage 4 and that there is a pathway at Post 16 and beyond.

# Key Stage 5

# Sixth Form

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Key Stage 5 is the next stage of the learning process; it builds on the knowledge and skills developed in Key Stage 4. The pathways established in Year 9 continue through into the Sixth Form. While students can review their pathway on the completion of their GCSEs, for many the next phase of the educational journey involves a further selection of courses and qualifications that is a little less complex. Students will have an even more defined pathway with a narrowing of their personal curriculum and an increase in the depth of their learning.



All students are expected by law, to stay in education, training or employment until the age of 18 years. For most students this means staying in full time education at school or college or undertaking an apprenticeship- <https://www.notgoingtouni.co.uk/apprenticeships-223>



The Government policy is that students who fail to achieve at least a standard pass (Grade 4) in their GCSE English or Maths, will be required to continue with these subjects post 16 until they do achieve a standard pass or higher.

## St Paul's Sixth Form

While we recognise that there are many different settings within which to study Post 16, we endeavour to ensure that all students in Year 11 have a suitable option to continue their studies at St Paul's Sixth Form. We are delighted that a significant number our students choose to continue their education with us, as well as a number of students from other schools. We offer a wide range of A Levels and BTEC qualifications.



Please see the Sixth Form section on our website which contains the Post 16 Prospectus, entrance criteria and course guides for more information: <https://www.st-pauls.leicester.sch.uk/sixth-form/>



# Example of Post 16 Choices

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(these are subject to change, year on year)

Block A	Block B	Block C	Block D
Chemistry	Applied Science (BTEC)	Business	Chemistry
Biology	Biology	Computer Science	English Language
Maths	Business	French	History
Economics	English Literature	Geography	Maths
Religious Studies	F Maths	Media Studies	Sport Science (CTEC)
Spanish	Politics	Physics	Psychology
	Psychology	Sociology	Theatre Studies



# Higher Education & Careers

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**Option choices made at Key Stage 4, will have a significant impact on possible choices at Key Stage 5 and beyond. It is critical when students (with parents and carers) are making choices about their future careers, that they consult widely and keep as many different routes open as possible.**

If a student has a particular career in mind, it is important to find out the pathway for that career by talking to subject teachers, other staff members, the Careers Advisor, family members and others who are known to work in that career area. It is also very important to review online literature.

The best site for researching Higher Education is the University's College Applications System (UCAS— **website <http://www.ucas.com/>**)

Through this website you can access a vast database of undergraduate degree information, including subject and grade entry criteria. Another very useful website is the Guardian site (**<http://careers.theguardian.com/>**) with a substantial range of resources.

The transition from Year 8 into 9 is the perfect time to start the challenging, and at the same time, exciting processes of considering Higher Education and career options.

## **Careers**

Year 9-11 students can use the Careers Education & Guidance (CEAG) provision within the school, including our new platform **Unifrog**. This is delivered through PSHE lessons, assemblies, tutor time as well as specific Careers and Work-Related Learning (WRL) activities.



# Higher Education & Careers

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## **Careers continued.**

Mrs McDonagh, is our dedicated Careers Coordinator who is responsible for CEAG across the year groups. One to one guidance interviews are available at key transition times i.e. Year 8 Pathways and Post 16 choices. A range of careers resources are being updated and developed to provide a quality careers area that is available to all students. Specialist CEAG is available to cater for students' individual needs, in conjunction with the SENDCo Miss Boyle and the Local Authority.

## **Career Education and Employability Skills**

Career opportunities are explored and students practice their skills, to investigate different types of qualifications. Students gain an understanding that different pathways can lead to the same goal. Students develop transitional skills, becoming more aware that they are responsible for their own career progression and for developing the skills they need, to achieve their goals. Issues such as diversity in the workplace, recognising and challenging stereotyped career roles, are discussed. Students develop research skills to find relevant job and Labour Market Information (LMI) and understand the importance of this, to subject and career choices. Useful websites [www.nationalcareersweek.com](http://www.nationalcareersweek.com)

- tips on looking for work experience <https://www.careersbox.co.uk/>
- useful for exploring different careers <https://www.unifrog.org/>
- explore further education and apprenticeships <https://kudos.cascaid.co.uk>





# Learning Pathways

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## Pathway 2:

- This pathway is suitable for students who want to study creative subjects but will not need to study a modern foreign language to be able to fulfil their future education and careers plans.
- Students on Pathway 2 choose either **geography** or **history**, and additionally one from: **art, dance, drama, music, fashion & textiles, music. photography** or **product design**
- Students on pathway 2 are then able to choose one other option from the remaining column.

## Future Pathways Programme

- This course is ideally suited for students who will achieve some GCSE passes, although not necessarily at grade 5 or above
- It has a large vocational element, preparing students for college and the world or work beyond St Paul's, with important life skills lessons and support for English and maths.
- It is a hugely successful course that enables progression to arrange post-16 studies.



# Learning Pathways

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## Year 8 Option Pathways Grid

By the end of the selection process, each student should have selected one subject from each of the option blocks listed –there is a paper copy of the option blocks on the next page, where they can circle their choices. Students will complete the online options form with their tutor, when they have their appointment with them.

### Instructions for the grid:

#### Instructions for the columns:

- All students must make three choices, one from each column
- Students choosing Pathway 1 must choose Spanish and History/Geography and one other subject.
- Students choosing Pathway 2 must choose history or geography plus a creative subject (bold in option columns) and one other subject.
- Parents of students suitable for the Future Pathways programme have already been contacted about this. Please go to room 120 to talk to Mrs Kean about this programme. Future pathways counts as 2 options.
- Students can only choose one of: fashion and textiles, art, craft and design and photography.
- Students cannot study digital IT and computer science.

# Learning Pathways



## 2026-2027 Year 8 Option Pathway Grid

Pathways	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
All students on Pathway 1 or 2 must choose at least one of these subjects	History	History	History
	Geography		Geography
All students on Pathway 1 must choose Spanish and one other option		Spanish	Spanish
Students on pathway 2 must choose a creative (in bold) subject and one other option.	Digital IT	Business	Sociology
	<b>Product Design</b>	Computer science	<b>Photography</b>
	<b>Art, Craft and Design</b>	Food and Nutrition	Food and Nutrition
	Sports Studies	<b>Fashion and Textiles</b>	<b>Music</b>
	Sociology	<b>Dance</b>	<b>Drama</b>
	<b>Drama</b>	Future Pathways	Future Pathways
	Business		



# Timeline

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## Timeline of the Selection Process

The Year 8 Pathways selection process is challenging and often students find it difficult, to make their final decisions about courses and pathways. With the extensive support that is in place, we are confident that students will make the right choices and will be confident as they make their transition into Year 9. The table below outlines the processes and support events in place for students and parents.

11 Feb 2026	Options assembly	Introduction to the options process	Mrs Laidler and Mr Byrne to students
11 February for 4 weeks	Options support and advice programme during PSHE	Guided advice and support with tutors	Students and tutors
4 Mar	Options Evening	Parents will see a presentation on the process and be able to talk to subject staff	Parents and students
w/b 9 March	Pathways and Careers discussions with tutors and Careers' adviser	Discussions with students about appropriate pathways and post 16 study/careers/ apprenticeship plans	Students
w/b 9 March	Tutor support with students to make choices	Forms are submitted online	Tutors, Students and parents
20 Mar	Deadline for option forms to be submitted		



# Final Decisions

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## Final Option decisions

Parents and students are advised that we will endeavour to ensure all students gain access to the pathway that best suits them. However, we will work closely with parents and students ensuring that, in our professional judgement, the selections made are appropriate. **If a course has insufficient uptake, then that course may not run.** If a student opts for a course that is withdrawn, we will contact students and their parents to discuss alternatives.

The process of selecting options can be challenging. It is critical that students (and parents/carers) are confident in their choices as this will ensure a smooth transition to Year 9. Students will not be able to change their options after October half term, as critical subject content will have already been covered and courses may be full.



# Contact us

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