

ST. DOMINIC'S
VERITAS
FOUNDED 1870



GRAMMAR SCHOOL
FOR GIRLS

Sixth Form Options Afternoon

3rd February 2026

Overview

- Mr P McMaster (Vice-Principal Curriculum & School Improvement)
 - overview of the options process
- Year 14 Students Katie McNally-Varela
 - Student perspective on choosing A level subjects
- Mr O Murray (Head of CEIAG)
 - skills barometer, knowledge-based economy, People Hawk, Unifrog & careers provision in school
- Ms A Braniff (Head of Senior School)
 - Importance of attendance and after school study.
- Subject Fayre
 - An opportunity to speak with Heads of Department and students studying A levels in St Dominic's.



Katie McNally-Varela
Current Year 14 student



Mr P McMaster
Vice-Principal Curriculum
& School Improvement



A key stage in your child's education

- Crucial stage in your child's educational career;
- Decisions made in the coming weeks will have an impact down the line;
- Vital that decisions are effective and informed;
- Review child's academic performance and listen to advice from teachers.



Admissions Criteria

- Admission to Sixth Form is not automatic and students need to fulfil the general and subject specific entry criteria.
- Parents and students should familiarise themselves with these criteria.
- Subject entrance criteria can be found in the pack you received today.



General Entrance Criteria

- A minimum of 12* points spread across at least 7 subjects, including passes in GCSE English Language and Mathematics.
- At least a grade B at GCSE in the subjects chosen for A level. Subject specific criteria applies.
- For subjects not offered at GCSE performance in other subjects will be considered.
 - Points are calculated as follows:
 - A*/A 3 points
 - B 2 points
 - C 1 point



General Entrance Criteria

- Satisfactory records of attendance, punctuality and general behaviour.
 - Where there are concerns about these aspects of a students' record, they will be offered a provisional place in Year 13 and their progress will be closely monitored throughout the year.
- In exceptional circumstances, the Principal reserves the right to offer a place to a student who has not met the academic criteria but who has an otherwise impeccable school record.



Making effective decisions

- Consider your interests, career goals, and university/ apprenticeships requirements.
- Choose subjects you enjoy and excel in, but also ones that align with your future plans.
- Research university course/apprenticeship requirements to ensure you're meeting prerequisites.
- Balance your choices with a mix of subjects to keep options open.



Making effective decisions

- E.g. your aspiration to become a doctor does not mean you need to do all STEM subjects. Identify the core subjects needed (Chemistry and Biology) and explore niche subjects that may set you apart.
- Seek advice from parents, teachers, career advisors, and professionals in fields you're interested in.
- Ultimately, prioritize a combination that both energises you, challenges you and supports your long-term aspirations.



Support for Students

Weekly support in Careers lessons

Subject teacher guidance

Year 12 Options Assembly: Wednesday 28th January at 2:40pm

Year 12 Options Event : Tuesday 5th February 1:30-4pm



How many subjects can I choose?

- You should choose four AS level subjects.
- We strongly recommend choosing four subjects because this keeps options opening.
- It also helps ensure that if one subject does not work out in Year 13 you do not have to repeat the year.



How the process works

- Complete form to indicate your subject choices. Rank these 1-4 with 1 being the subject you want to study the most.
- If you really want to study a subject make it your number 1, 2 or 3 preference.
- If a subject is oversubscribed, we may offer preference to students who chose that subject as 1,2 or 3. If it still remains oversubscribed and we cannot staff another class, students will be offered a placed based on the number of GCSE points in August (this would be a very unusual situation but may, on occasion, arise).
- Deadline for return of forms to form tutor is Tuesday 17th February 2026, at registration.

St Dominic's Grammar School

A Level Subject Choices February 2025

Student Name:

Form Class:

Are you intending to return to St Dominic's Grammar school in September 2025?

Yes

No

Unsure

If you answered no, where do you intend to go next year?

What do you plan to study/do there?

Instructions on how to complete this form

You may choose four subjects in total. Please number them in order of preference i.e. 1 to 4 with 1 being the subject you wish to study most and so on.

Key Information:

- If there is insufficient uptake/interest in a subject it may not run. Please ensure that if you really want to study a subject that you make it your number 1 or 2 preference.
- At St Dominic's we use the 'best fit' approach to build the timetable as we feel this is the fairest approach. Once all option forms are returned the data is entered into SIMS and option blocks are generated to maximise preferences for the majority. In some cases, it may not be possible for students to study all their preferred subjects.

Subjects offered in St. Dominic's Grammar School

Preference (1-4)

Art and Design	
Biology	
Chemistry	
Digital Technology	
Drama	
English Literature	
Financial Studies (L3 Certificate and L3 Diploma)	
French	
Geography	
Health and Social Care	
History	
ICT (OCR Cambridge Technical L3)	
Irish	
Mathematics	
Further Mathematics	

Media Studies

Music

Physics

Politics

Professional Business Services

Psychology

Religious Studies

Sociology

Spanish

Systems Software Development

Sport and Physical Activity (OCR Cambridge Technical L3)

Technology and Design

Possible Career Path at this stage...

Please list any careers that you may be interested in

Parental confirmation:

I confirm that I agree to the subject choices listed on this form. I understand that in a small number of cases there may be clashes and therefore subject choices cannot be guaranteed. I understand that certain degree pathways/ apprenticeships require mandatory subjects and have discussed career pathways with my child. I understand that the timetable will be built based on student subject choices and changes may not be possible at a later date. Subject specific entry criteria apply.

Parental Signature:

Date:

This form is to be completed and returned to your form teacher during registration by Tuesday 18th February 2025.

For Official Use Only:

Date Submitted:

Vice-Principal (Curriculum and School Improvement) signature:



After forms are submitted

- Students will have some opportunity to confirm or alter subject choices after GCSE results are published in August 2026.
 - However, in the event a subject is over-subscribed preference will be given to students who originally chose a subject in February 2026.
- It is important that students and parents understand that the construction of the timetable for the 2026/27 academic year will begin as soon as subjects are chosen.
- The timetable will be based exclusively on the subject choices made by students. Once the timetable is constructed changes will be facilitated where possible, but this cannot be guaranteed.



Best-fit model

- We do not fix our option blocks and instead build them freshly every year to suit the current cohort of students. Our aim is to maximise preferences and suit as many students as possible.
- At St Dominic's we use the 'best-fit' approach to build the timetable. Once all option forms are returned the data is entered into SIMS and option blocks are generated to maximise preferences for the majority.
- In some cases, it may not be possible for students to study all their preferred subjects due to timetabling 'clashes'.



Best-fit model

- If there is insufficient uptake/interest in a subject it may not run.
- A reminder that it is logistically impossible to ensure that every student gets every subject they want. It is vital the parents/carers and students understand this from the outset.
- A small number of students may not get all their choices. If there is a clash between two or more subjects I will speak with the pupil as soon as possible in the summer term.



Mr O Murray
Head of CEIAG





EVERY SCHOOL DAY COUNTS –

Every single day a child is absent from school equates to a day of lost learning.

Attendance percentages can be misleading.

100% Attendance	0 Days Missed	Excellent
95% Attendance	9 Days of Absence 1 Week and 4 Days of Learning Missed	Satisfactory
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85% Attendance	28 Days of Absence 5 Weeks and 3 Days of Learning Missed	Very Poor
80% Attendance	38 Days of Absence 7 Weeks and 3 Days of Learning Missed	Unacceptable
75% Attendance	46 Days of Absence 9 Weeks and 1 Day of Learning Missed	Unacceptable

For some parents, 90% may seem like an acceptable level of attendance, but the reality is that 90% attendance means that your child will miss half a school day each week or 19 days of school during the school year – that's nearly 4 school weeks.



How Y12 are preparing for this transition

- Weekly Careers class
- Careers programme
- Access to Unifrog
- Access to PeopleHawk
- Interview with guidance councillor
- Careers Convention
- Subject teachers
- Options Presentations



Northern Ireland Skills Barometer: 2023-33

Overview report



Economic Policy
Centre



Department for the
Economy
An tSeirbhís
Geilleagair
www.dfe.ni.gov.uk

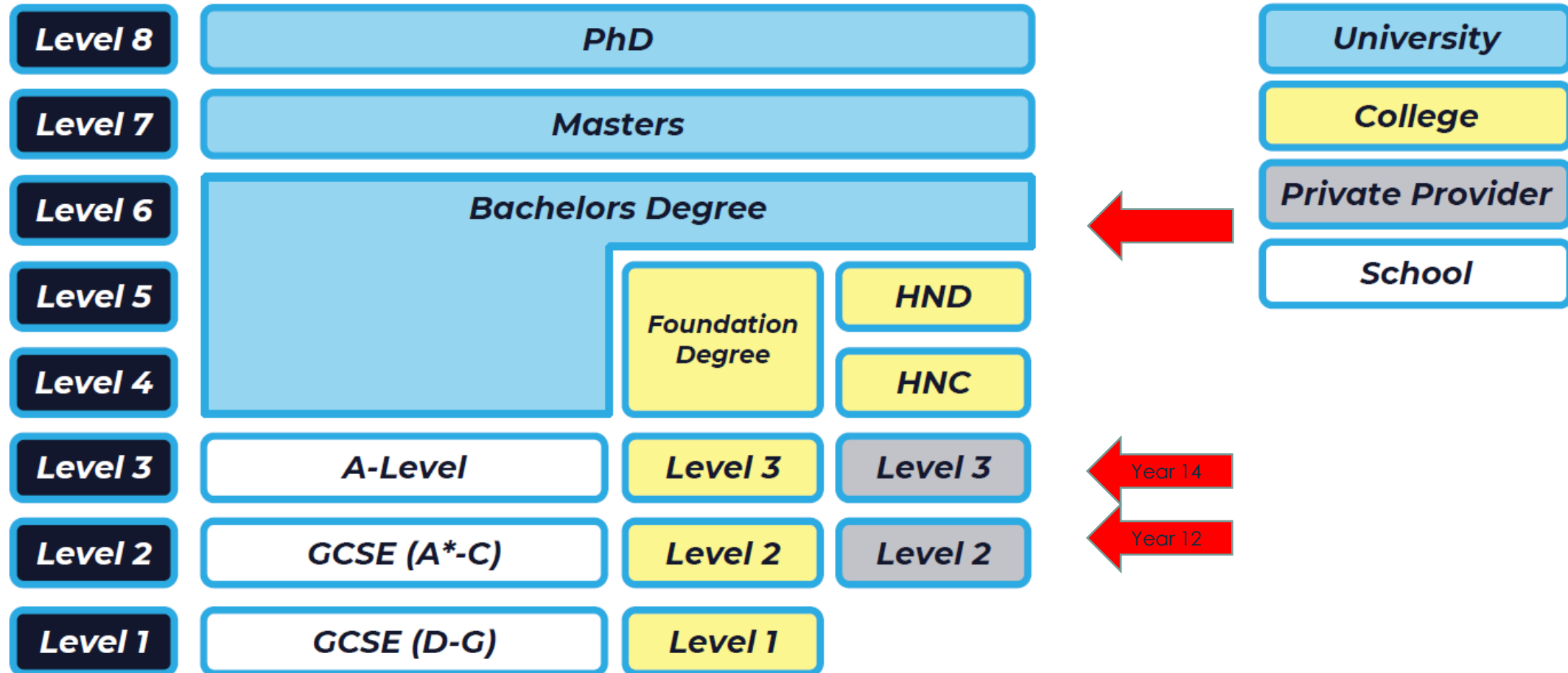


EPIC
FUTURES NI

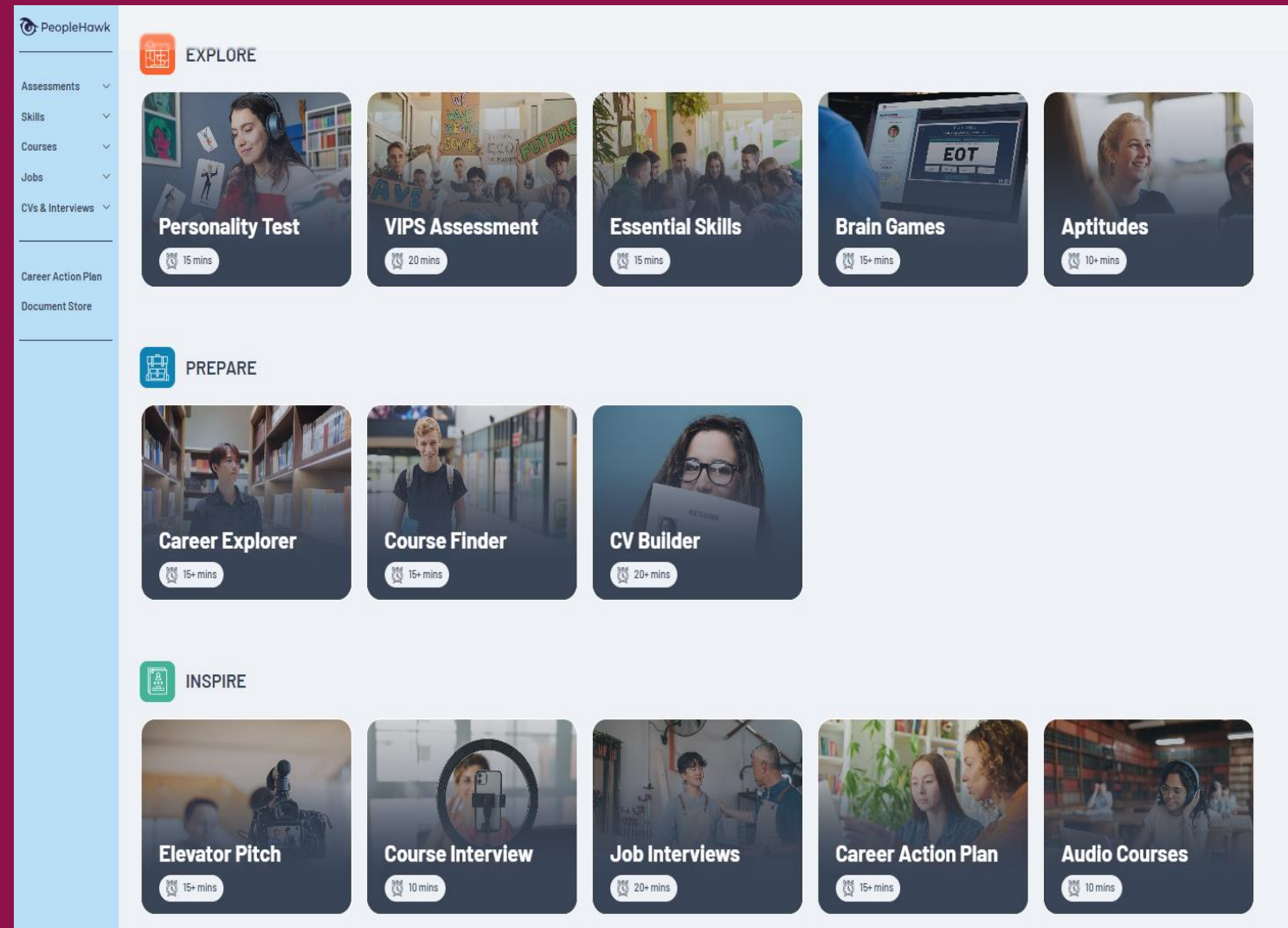


Qualification levels

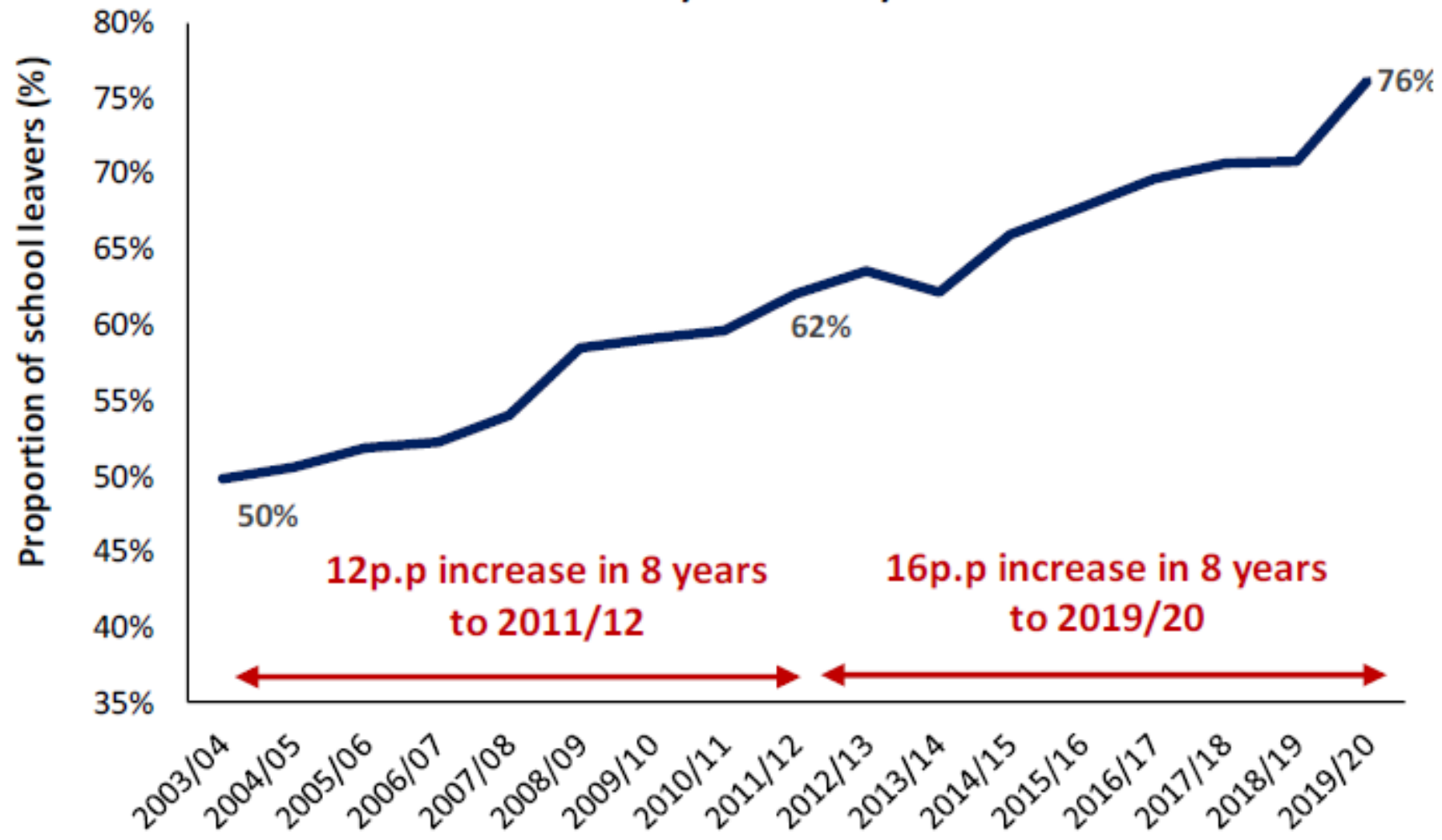
work+



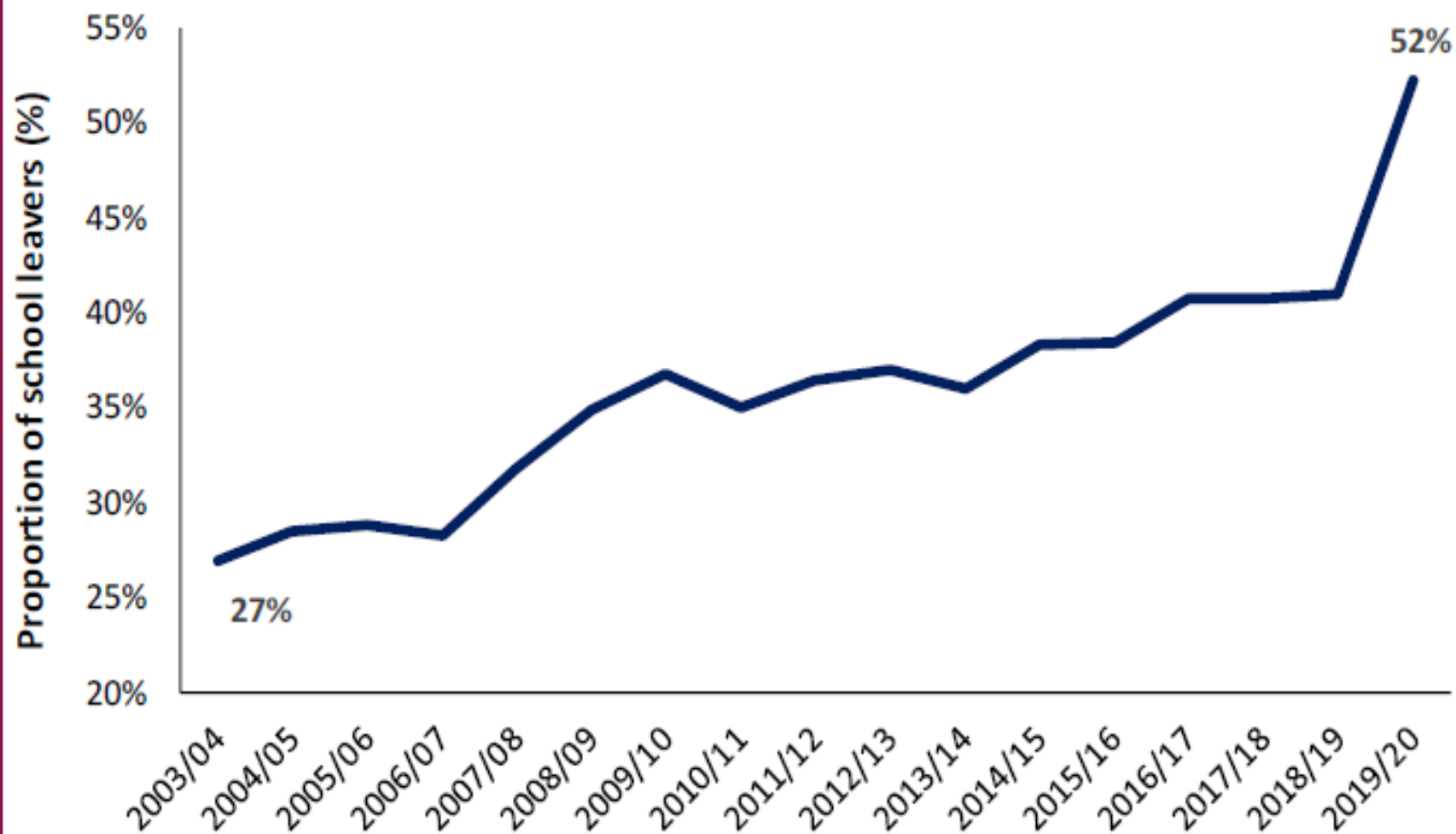
- Significant investment in the PeopleHawk platform.
- To give all students the chance to build the career they want, no matter where they've come from.
- Essentially, we want to put ownership for career development back into the hands of the one person who owns it – the individual.



Achieving at least 5 GCSE's inc. English and Maths, NI, 2003/04 - 2019/20



Achieving 3+ A-levels A*-C, NI, 2003/04 - 2019/20



Summary

- More jobs being created
- We need to produce more graduates
- Increase in the number of young people who gain three A levels
- University places are capped MaSN
- Cost of university has increased but maintenance loan has not
- Young people travelling to other regions to study
- How many return?



High Level and Degree Apprenticeships

- a salary and guaranteed job while you have course fees paid by your employer
- no student debt
- the potential to achieve graduate and postgraduate qualifications
- new opportunities for career progression if you're already in work
- the chance to gain professional accreditation and membership



Audit & Assurance BrightStart Apprenticeship



How to Apply



The BrightStart Journey

No one can tell you what's the best route for you. We all have our own passions and capabilities, and will be inspired and learn in different ways. What we can tell you is **what our BrightStart apprentices enjoy:**

- A permanent job;
- Professional qualifications, fully funded;
- A competitive salary plus lots of fantastic benefits;
- Paid time off to study;
- The chance to work with and learn from industry leaders;
- The support of a buddy and mentor at work;
- Real projects with real clients;
- Valuable insights into the business world;
- Career opportunities that will take you as far as you want to go; and
- A great working environment, with an active social scene.



**Relevant work
experience is one of
the most important
factors looked for in job
applicants by employers**











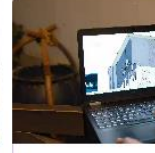









Experiences of Work

- Work experience
- Virtual Work Experience
- Futures for All or UCAS Hub
- Specialist Open Days
- Voluntary work
- Summer school
- Part-time jobs

All industries (A-Z)

These are the industries that we currently have work experience opportunities for that are open for applications. Can't see the industry you're interested in? Check back regularly as we're always adding new opportunities.

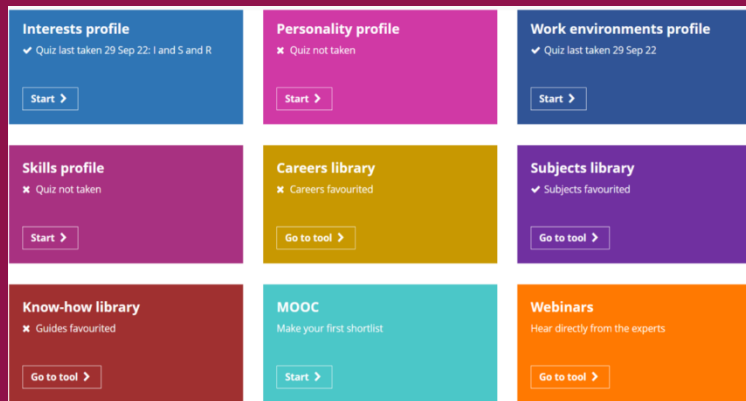
 Accounting, Banking & Finance View opportunities	 Agriculture & Environment	 Aviation	 Business & Sales	 Charity & Volunteering	 Construction
 Creative Arts & Design View opportunities	 Digital, IT & Computing View opportunities	 Education & Childcare	 Energy & Utilities View opportunities	 Engineering	 Government & Politics
 Healthcare & Medicine View opportunities	 Hospitality, Catering & Events View opportunities	 Housing	 Law & Legal Services	 Manufacturing	 Marketing & Communications View opportunities



Look for Opportunities in Y12/13

ONLINE RESOURCES

- Unifrog
- Prospectus
- Virtual Work Experience
- Work Placement



OPEN DAYS

- Accountancy ✓
- Law ✓
- Engineering ✓
- Health professions ✓
- Nursing ✓
- Psychology ✓
- Radiography
- Medicine ✓
- OT ✓
- Hospital Labs ✓



JOIN US IN SEPTEMBER 2026

Open Days at Ulster University

Join us for Open Days this September to find out more about undergraduate study at Ulster.

Undergraduate Open Days

Join us this September for **Open Days at Ulster University**, where you and your family will have the opportunity to:

- Find out more about our courses and life at Ulster
- Meet our teaching teams and see our teaching spaces
- Learn more about career options in your chosen field
- Get all your questions answered in our informative sessions

2026 DATES

- Thursday 3, Friday 4, Saturday 5 September – Belfast campus
- Thursday 10, Friday 11, Saturday 12 September – Derry~Londonderry campus
- Friday 18, Saturday 19 September – Coleraine campus



UNDERGRADUATE OPEN DAY

SATURDAY 6 JUNE

Discover your future at Queen's



JOIN US ON OUR BEAUTIFUL CAMPUS

Our Undergraduate Open Day is the best way to get a taste of life at Queen's. On **Saturday 6 June 2026 from 9.30am - 3pm** you'll learn more about our courses that you can study with us, plus you'll have the opportunity to hear first-hand from our current students and teaching staff about learning and living in Belfast.

You will be able to experience our world-class education, unique location and rich history for yourself.

PARENTS AND TEACHERS: REGISTER HERE

STUDENTS: REGISTER HERE >



REGISTER NOW ▾



Changes in Higher Education

- Ulster University has moved the Jordanstown campus to the Cathedral Quarter September 2022.
- Faculty of Life and Health Sciences is based in Magee and Coleraine
- New Post-graduate Medical School and Therapies has moved to Magee campus; specialising in Health Sciences
- CAO Universities and Institutions showing more interest, more favourable points system for A level, (based on 3 A levels + 1 AS), however they do not accept Vocational A levels.



Points conversion table			
Grade	Best 3 Levels	A-	4th A level AS Level
A*	192	24	24
A	165	24	24
B	142	20	20
C	120	18	18
D	100	16	16
E	67	14	14

ACCEPTABLE QUALIFICATION COMBINATIONS

A-level 1

A-level 2

A-level 3

A-level 1

A-level 2

BTEC/OCR
equivalent
to one
A-level (L3)



Note:

- BTEC/OCR qualifications are acceptable for entry to all courses except Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmacy
- Applicants must satisfy normal GCSE and/or A-level subject requirement(s). BTEC/OCR may be acceptable in satisfying subject requirement(s) for some courses. Contact Admissions and Access Service for guidance (admissions@qub.ac.uk)
- AQA Level 3 Extended Certificate and WJEC Level 3 Applied Extended Certificate treated as equivalent to BTEC/OCR
- Offers expressed in terms of overall grade(s) since 2022 entry



SECURING AN OFFER FOR QUEEN'S

GCSE threshold for interview/offers (some examples) – more flexibility in 2025 due to larger intake

	2024	2025
Medicine * †	38 points OR 37 points + SJT Band 1 or 2	30 points
Dentistry * †	38 points	36 points
Actuarial **	32 points	32 points
Accounting (MAcc)	GCSE - 6 B/6	GCSE - 6 B/6
Law	GCSE - Average 6 B/6 (including 1 A/7)	GCSE - 5 B/6 + 1 C/4
PPE	GCSE - 6 B/6	GCSE - 5 B/6 (including Maths grade B/6)
MEng	GCSE - 6 B/6	GCSE - 6 B/6
Midwifery †	GCSE - 5 B/6 (including Maths and Science)	GCSE - 5 B/6 (including Maths and Science)
Pharmacy †	GCSE - 5 A/7 + 1 B/6	GCSE - 3 A/7 + 3 B/6
Psychology	GCSE - 4 B/6 + 2 C/4 (including Math grade B/6)	GCSE - 1 B/6 + 5 C/4 (including Maths grade B/6)
Social Work †	GCSE - 5 B/6 (including Maths grade C/4)	GCSE - 1 B/6 + 4 C/4 (including Maths grade C/4)

Notes

* Points for Dentistry and Medicine count nine best GCSEs - A*/9 = 4 points, A/7-8 = 3 points, B/6 = 2 points, C-C*/4-5 = 1 point (or an equivalent acceptable to the University) and include UCAT score.

** Points for Actuarial count nine best GCSEs - for 2025 Entry - A*/9 = 4 points, A/7-8 = 3 points, B/6 = 2 points, C-C*/4-5 = 1 point (or an equivalent acceptable to the University).

† This is the threshold required to be shortlisted for interview. Otherwise, the stated GCSE profile is the threshold to be made an offer.

Extra-curricular Activities

- Teaching
- Nursing
- Midwifery
- Social Work
- Medicine



All interview and expect that you have numerous examples of extended periods of time where you have worked in a caring environment

Soft skills are often initially built through extracurricular activities and part-time employment, however as students move through their education it is important they are provided with opportunities to gain work experience relevant to their career path.



Key things to bear in mind when choosing A-level subjects

Here are the three principles which should guide your choice:

- **Choose subjects you will enjoy;**
- **Choose subjects which will fit in with your career plans;**
- **Take time to research to find out all you need to know**



Where to find out more about A level subjects

- A level Options Booklet
 - Your current teachers
 - Sixth-form teachers
 - AS and A2 subject syllabuses
 - Web sites
 - Unifrog
 - PeopleHawk
- What topics will I study?
 - Content and skills
 - How will I be assessed?
 - Coursework
 - Final exams
 - Traditional v non traditional
 - How will this be viewed by universities
 - Russell Group Informed Choices
 - <https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>
 - CAO entry



A Level requirements for popular degree courses

- **Psychology:** No essential subjects (a mix of Arts and Science subjects is good). You will need GCSE Maths.
- **Computing:** No essential subjects for most courses. Maths A level is essential for a few Universities and useful for all.
- **Engineering:** Maths and Physics are generally essential. Chemistry is essential for most Chemical Engineering degrees. Some courses would ask for Maths and a Science or TD



- **Chemistry** A Level is essential for: Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Biology (and Bio related subjects).
- To study **Medicine**: Chemistry is essential, plus two other A Levels, one of which should be a science. Biology is often asked for. **A fourth AS is no longer required, A*AA or AAA(A).** Outstanding GCSE results needed. >5A*4A. Aptitude test, MMI and relevant work experience.
- For a **Business Studies** degree: No essential A Level subjects, though you will need a good Maths result at GCSE (B) if you wish to study Business/Management courses at university. QUB is trying to encourage students take A Level Maths.
- **Law** degrees: No essential subjects, though they like you to have subjects which show logical ability and the ability to write (eg: a mixture of Arts and Science subjects). A good GCSE profile of 5 or 6 A grades



- **Teaching** requires GCSE English , Maths and a Science. AAA/AAB at A Level for local university courses
- **Nursing at QUB** would recommend a Science A Level but only requires GCSE Science. Nursing is increasingly competitive and some courses require numeracy and literacy tests. Specifically naming a course i.e. adult, mental health. Interview and relevant work experience
- Most other degree courses either have no essential A Level subjects, or just require an A level in the subject concerned plus any two others. Do check though!
- And do bear in mind that the top academic degree courses will generally expect three 'academic' A Levels.



Mrs C Cauley
Head of Year 12





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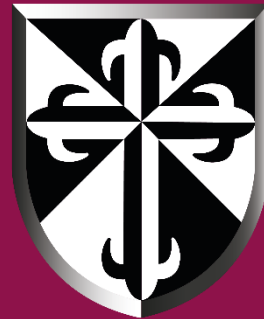
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