

Strong foundations

In years 7, 8 and 9, there are plenty of things you can be exploring, doing and thinking about to help you plan and prepare for your future career.

Did you know that you do not need clear career ideas or goals just yet? However, it is important you are beginning to explore your career ideas and interests so you are ready and able to make decisions at the key times over the next few years.

Year 7, 8 and 9 are very important years to **develop good habits and attitudes to learning**. People who do well at GCSE and go on to have fulfilling careers, usually work hard, revise and do their best from the start of secondary school.

This begins with **identifying your strengths and weaknesses**. There may be some subjects and school work related tasks that come easy to you, and others that do not. You can make sure that your weaker areas do not become bigger issues later on by **speaking with teachers, spending some extra time making sure you understand a topic and getting help for things you do not understand** before moving on.

Understanding your strengths is also one of the first steps in discovering your career interests. **Think about what you are good at, what subject and school work related tasks you enjoy and consider what you naturally learn easily and quickly**. On www.icould.com you can research careers by subject areas. This website then allows you to watch videos of people who do particular job roles so you can find out more about them.

The importance of developing skills and personal qualities

The second step in discovering your career interests is to **identify your skills and personal qualities**. A skill is something we develop through tasks and activities which can then be applied to future tasks and responsibilities. E.g. if during an English project you have become good at team work, sharing ideas and producing a good piece of work, you have developed these skills and can then apply them to a History project where you have to work as a team. Over time you develop strong team-working skills, become strong at sharing ideas and produce good work.

A personal quality is a way we do things well. It is not too dissimilar to a skill. If you have good team work skills and share ideas easily, you can say one of your personal qualities is that you are a good communicator, you have good communication skills.

Certain careers require particular skills and personal qualities. This is where we can start to match up our skills and personal qualities to careers. The buzz quiz www.icould.com/buzzquiz can help you identify your skills and personal qualities and provides links to careers and career videos you can watch.

Start looking up and finding out about careers and different jobs roles

When researching careers in year 7, 8 and 9, ask yourself the following questions:

- What would I be doing in this career/ job? Do I like that?
- What skills and personal qualities would I need to do such a career/ job? Do I have these? Can I develop these?
- What subjects relate to this career? Do I have to take such a subject at GCSE, or is this something I can specialise in later on at college or work?

Choosing Your GCSE Option Subjects

When you are in either year 8 or year 9, your school will ask you to **choose your GCSE options**. There will be certain subjects you have to take, usually Maths, English, Science and possibly ICT and Religious Education. Depending on your school they may suggest you take either History or Geography and a language. This usually leaves you with a choice of two to four subjects from all the remaining subjects (Music, Drama, Dance, Food Technology, Graphics, Resistant Materials, Art, PE). How many of these subjects you can take will be dependent on your school.

Your school may also offer some alternatives to GCSEs such as BTECs. GCSEs usually involve lots of classroom learning with various assignments and projects to help you develop and apply your learning. Your knowledge and ability in a subject will be finally tested through an exam or exams at the end of year 11 and possibly through some exams at the end of topics, as well as coursework.

BTECs again involve classroom learning but may have more practical content. They tend to test your knowledge through assignments, projects and coursework as your work through the course. You may have some tests at the end of a topic and will have practical exams and assessments, but generally there are no written exams at the end of year 11.

Occasionally a school may have an arrangement with a local college where you can go and study a course one day a week at college in a specialist area such as Construction, Hair & Beauty, Childcare and many more subjects. You will need to find out if your school offers such courses.

As you can see, there is a lot to consider when choosing your options. The following can be helpful:

- **Think about how you learn best and what types of qualifications and subjects may suit this.** For example if you are creative, artistic and feel you will do well in coursework, Art or a Technology subject like Graphics may suit you
- **Think about what subjects you currently do well in and enjoy.**
- **Speak with your teachers and check that they think you would be suitable and do well on a particular course and subject**
- If you have a career in mind, **find out if there any particular subjects that link or relate or that you need to take at GCSE**

Regarding this last point, there are plenty of subjects that link and relate to certain careers but actually on a few careers where a subject is definitely needed at GCSE. Here is a list:

If you are interested in an Art or Design related career (fashion designer, interior designer, architect, product designer) in the future, you will need to take an art or design technology related subject at GCSE such as Art or Graphics.

If you think you may want to study languages or have a career that requires languages, then taking a language at GCSE is essential.

If you want to study Science or have a science related career in the future (Scientist, Forensics, Medicine, Veterinary related, Engineering) you need to make sure you take at least the double award science or triple science.

For most other careers, as long as you have a range of subjects including in Maths, Science, English Cs and above at GCSE/ grade 5 and above at GCSE, then this will allow you to access further qualifications beyond year 11. Many employers, colleges and universities look for good grades and developed skills. So another way to judge how helpful a subject will be towards your future is to **think about the skills it will help you develop in preparation for further study and training beyond year 11.**

For example, if you are interested in Law, colleges and universities will want to see that you have good research skills, writing skills and you are able to form an argument. English can be helpful for this as can History. If you are interested in Engineering, you will need to show good problem solving skills. Maths and Science relate to this but subjects such as Design and Technology show you can take a problem and design and modify a solution. **It is worth looking at your subjects and listing the skills they can help you develop.** I.e. Drama: devising ideas, working as a team, presenting in front of others.

If you are stuck between many subjects, **try writing a list of positives and negatives for that subject and see which list is longer.** If you are finding it hard to identify any subjects you may want to take as options, **try a process of elimination starting with the subjects you definitely do not want to take and working out what you could take.**

Make sure you **find out as much as possible about your subjects and what you will study at GCSE.** Often subjects change. For example PE in year 7, 8 and 9 is mainly practical study of sports. At GCSE you learn about the science of exercise and its effects on the body, as well as undertake practical study of sport. You need to **make sure that the content of the course at GCSE is what you expect and you are prepared to work hard on any new topics.**

After year 11, you will be able to choose whether you continue to study further qualifications at school, college or in the workplace through an apprenticeship. You can explore these options, what they may mean and how to make decisions after year 11, in the KS4 guide.