

Questions and Answers from Parents' Information Evening

Subject Choice for current S4 and S5 moving into S5 and S6 respectively.

Q: What guidance do you offer on whether it is better to take 2 x AH and 2 x H or 1 x AH and 3 x H in S6? Does it make any difference if they have / have not achieved their required entry grades this year?

A: Any pupil who is unsure of the blend of subjects and levels should talk to their Pupil Support Teacher in the first instance. They should also have a look at university websites to see what the courses they are interested in are looking for as entry requirements. For those who are doing very well in S5 and are likely to achieve what they need, they will in most cases have the luxury of choice, unless of course they are applying for a course that requires AH, eg Medicine, Veterinary, Dentistry or courses at higher tariff English universities. Any pupil who is not likely to achieve their required entry grades this year must make sure in their options that they take enough Highers to meet the entry requirements over two years and they need to check what these are on the university websites or by contacting the admissions office of the universities they are interested in (in my experience, admissions offices are fantastically helpful and pleased to speak to pupils!). The best advice though is that the pupil speak to their Pupil Support Teacher who can advise them personally.

Q: What option could be available to an S6 pupil who wishes to study an AH in a specific subject of special interest but is not being offered to them by Cults Academy & does not actually appear on the course choice form?

A: A very wide range of Advanced Higher subjects are available to Cults Academy pupils either at Cults Academy or through the City Campus scheme (where pupils travel to another city school for the subject). Unfortunately there is no opportunity to take an AH subject if it is not on the options sheet.

Q: For university entry that requires 5 Highers: do they differentiate between those sat all in S5 as apposed to those taken over S4 and S5 together?

A: Most universities regard a Higher taken in S4 as part of the "first sitting" of S5, so for example a pupil who did Higher French in S4 then four Highers in S5 would be considered as having 5 Highers at "first sitting." However, this is not always the case and some higher tariff universities or more competitive courses will want to see that a pupil has coped with and done well in a full spread of 5 Highers in S5. If the pupil I outlined above does their 4 Highers in S5 and their fifth

subject is the AH in the French, that would be accepted by those higher tariff courses. A great number of universities stipulate a minimum of 4 Highers in one sitting; not all ask for 5. Again, the pupil needs to check. It is worth bearing in mind that where there are various entry requirements stated, eg some will say “minimum entry requirements AAAAB- AAAB”, then generally speaking they will want the AAAAB from our pupils as we are a high attaining school. Some of our pupils may be eligible for consideration for “Widening participation” entry requirements: these apply to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have suffered personal adversity, eg long term illness, bereavement, have been in care or are themselves young carers. Again, pupils should speak to their pupil support teachers for guidance on this.

Q: Gaining job experience in COVID times is challenging e.g. for veterinary medicine access to practices. Do you have any tips for pupils in this position?

A: Each of the veterinary schools have published guidance on this and some have quite specific requirements that pupils need to try to fulfil and that are possible in lockdown. This year I have seen very inventive ideas for gaining experience and knowledge, from pupils conducting zoom interviews with practitioners to attending webinars and taking online courses. Please advise your young person to look very carefully at the guidance given on the university websites and to start now, as some require evidence logs to be kept. We also have a school Medic Mentors Society run by pupil ambassadors for pupils but supported by the “official” Medic Mentors. Medic Mentors also offer lots of online courses that pupils can hear about through our school society. This is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in Medicine, Veterinary Science, Dentistry or indeed any other healthcare related career.

Q: Would you recommend taking both advanced higher chemistry and biology to apply for medicine?

A: Yes. Chemistry is a must and Biology is a preferred subject. Some universities are happy to take AH Physics over Biology, but Biology is the “norm”.

Q: In terms of those who would like to take a crash higher, is there an expectation that they contact someone before putting it on their subject choice form? (to get agreement)

A: A young person should contact their Pupil Support teacher in the first instance to seek advice. They will probably be directed to the Faculty Head for further subject specific advice.

Q: Is there advice available for 4th years choosing Highers who do not have specific careers in mind yet, ie guidance on the subject choice.

A: The general advice would be to keep their subjects as broad as possible and to make sure they don't rule themselves out of any potential university pathway. So, a pupil who likes science but isn't sure if they want to do Medicine should keep Chemistry, Biology and Maths going if they have done them in S4 (or keep one or two in reserve to take in S6). It is important to remember that most degrees aren't too specific about what subjects a pupil should have out with the one they wish to pursue, so for example a pupil who had always thought they wanted to pursue something scientific but then decides actually they'd like to study English, they can do so if they have English and all their other subjects are sciences and maths. Again, pupils in this situation should speak to their Pupil Support Teacher. For reassurance, because we do have this flexible senior phase in Scotland, most pupils are able over the two years to ensure they have the correct spread and level of subjects for most courses. And it is also worth noting that pupils always think that everyone else knows exactly what they want to do and they are the only ones without a clear plan. This is simply not true! At 15/16 years of age most of them are very uncertain about their future plans so we will work with them to make sure they make informed choices that keep their futures as flexible as possible.

Q: What is the other subject in addition to Psychology (higher) that is crashed by AH students? Can this be at National-5 level ?

A: There isn't a definitive list of "crashable" Highers. Any crashes should be discussed with Pupil Support in the first instance. Being able to crash depends on what other subjects a pupil has studied, the workload implications of having a crash on their timetable, and the advice of subject teachers too. A N5 wouldn't be considered a crash as pupils would have studied the subject in the junior phase and the N5 would be the next level of progression from that. (Although it is possible to do N5 in some subjects not studied in the Junior Phase, eg Psychology, but it is considered that the junior phase would have given the pupils the skills to be able to enter the subject at N5 level.)