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Subject Matters

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Today's session

- Oxbridge and the Russell Group
- Starting to think about what you want to study
- Why is post-16 subject choice important?
- How do I choose what subjects to take?
- Sciences and Mathematics
- Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
- Three or four?
- Subjects to avoid as one of 'only' three subjects
- Questions

Oxbridge and the Russell Group

RUSSELL INTERNATIONAL EXCELLENCE GROUP

- Top academic universities in the UK
- Includes Oxbridge
- ‘Big name’ universities you have heard of

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- Characteristics
  - Top of their field in many academic subjects
  - World class research facilities and staff
  - Traditional course structure and academic subjects
  - Highly competitive: typical offers range from BBB to A*A*A

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Why study at a Russell Group university?

- Outstanding research based teaching
- Higher student satisfaction rate – 88% satisfied with teaching
- Lower drop-out rates – less than 3%
- Higher employment rates – 80% within 6 months
- Hundreds of millions invested every year in teaching facilities and resources, accommodation and social/extracurricular facilities
- Well-established student support

Why study at Oxford or Cambridge?

- World-class education
- Teaching by expert academics
- Extensive small-group teaching
- Superb facilities and resources
- Academic, pastoral and financial support
- Excellent graduate opportunities, irrespective of degree discipline
- Fantastic student experience
- Close-knit peer communities through the college system

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Introducing Lucy Cavendish College

- Previously a College for mature-age (21+) women, now open to all
- We welcome all students for all subjects offered by the university
- We are uniquely committed to widening participation at Cambridge
- We pride ourselves in having one of the most socioeconomically diverse student communities in Cambridge
- Our students are driven by a desire to make a difference and who are committed to having a positive and lasting impact on society

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What are we looking for?

- Academic ability and potential
- Satisfy any subject requirements
- Ability to think independently, critically and analytically
- Genuine subject interest, motivation and enthusiasm

All universities are looking for the brightest and the best students, irrespective of social, religious, school or financial background. So go for it!

Doing your best in Year 11

- Move to linear A-Levels means GCSEs will probably be your most recent external examination results by the time you apply, so try to do your very best
- BUT don't panic if things don't go exactly to plan – universities do not believe GCSEs are strong indicators of future performance
- Most important thing is to start to make informed decisions about your future education

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Which of these best describes my current situation?

A. I think I know what subject I want to study at university
B. I'm torn between a couple of subjects
C. I have no idea what I want to do

Starting to think about what you want to study

- University education in the UK is subject-focused
- Admissions Tutors for competitive courses are looking for students with a comprehensive, well-founded interest in the subject
- Do your best to identify a subject that really interests you and apply for that
- How do you identify the 'right' subject for you? Don't worry if you don't know right now - try to narrow down your broader interests
  - What subject are you enthusiastic about?
  - What subject are you good at?
  - What careers are you interested in? (if you know)
  - Does the course interest you?
- A good place to start is deciding if you're interested in Maths/Sciences or Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences

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Maths and Sciences

- Maths
- Natural Sciences
  - Physics
  - Chemistry
  - Biology
- Medicine
- Veterinary Medicine
- Engineering
- Computer Science

- Psychology
- Economics

I prefer to focus on facts, numbers, statistics, and 'laws' about what actually happens in the world (e.g. the law of gravity)

I prefer to think about questions that have one single correct answer, which you have to find

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Arts and Humanities

- English Literature
- History of Art
- History
- Classics
- Theology
- Music
- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- Classics
- Anglo Saxon, Norse and Celtic

I like thinking about questions that might have many different answers, depending on how you approach them

I enjoy learning about people's opinions, feelings, motivations, and analysing the kinds of words and language people use

I prefer writing essays and creative writing

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Social Sciences

- Sociology
- Psychology
- Law
- Anthropology
- Political Science
- International Relations
- Economics
- Education
- Land Economy
- Geography
- Linguistics

I'm interested in what people think and feel, but I like to use numbers, statistics and facts to measure them

I like to conduct surveys and interview people on their opinions, then writing a report about the results

To determine if a question is 'true', I would need to collect real-life information and apply it to a theory/model

Confidential Lucy Caven

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Interdisciplinary Courses

- Archaeology
- Anthropology
- Architecture
- Economics
- Linguistics
- Psychology
- Philosophy

I enjoy applying lots of different sources, skills and points of view to solve one problem

I like doing lots of different tasks and activities – I get bored studying just one thing!

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What subjects are available?

- Courses are broad and often interdisciplinary
- It is worth looking around at related subjects as you may find subjects that are a better fit
- There might be subjects you haven't heard of!

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What subjects are available at Cambridge?

- **Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic**
- **Archaeology**
- **Architecture**
- **Asian and Middle Eastern Studies**
- **Chemical Engineering**
- **Classics**
- **Computer Science**
- **Economics**
- **Education**
- **Engineering**
- English
- Geography
- History
- History and Modern Languages
- History and Politics
- **History of Art**
- **Human, Social, and Political Sciences**
- **Land Economy**
- **Law**
- **Linguistics**
- Mathematics
- **Medicine**
- **Modern and Medieval Languages**
- Music
- Natural Sciences
- **Philosophy**
- **Psychological and Behavioural Sciences**
- **Theology, Religion, and Philosophy of Religion**
- **Veterinary Medicine**

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What do I need/want from a degree? Can I get this elsewhere?

Enjoy learning languages?

- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Classics
- Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic
- History and Modern Languages
- Linguistics

Interested in history?

- History
- Classics
- English
- Education
- Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic
- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- Human, Social and Political Sciences
- Economics
- Archaeology
- History of Art

Love reading literature?

- English
- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- Classics
- Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic
- Education

Want to study Medicine?

- Biological Natural Sciences
- Psychological and Behavioural Sciences
- Veterinary Medicine
- Biomedical Sciences (Oxford)

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What do I need/want from a degree? Can I get this elsewhere?

Love learning about ideas and societal systems?

- Classics
- Economics
- Education
- Geography
- History
- Human, Social and Political Sciences
- Land Economy
- Law
- Philosophy
- Psychological and Behavioural Sciences
- Theology

Enjoy making and designing things?

- Architecture
- Chemical Engineering
- Engineering
- Computer Science

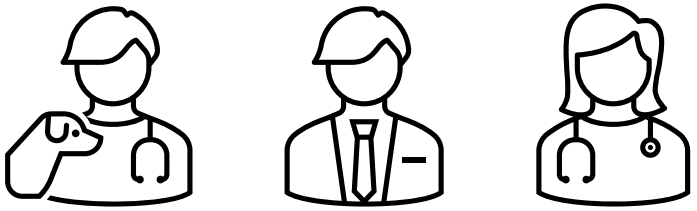
Interested in culture and human behaviour?

- Archaeology
- Education
- Geography
- History
- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Philosophy
- Linguistics
- Psychological and Behavioural Sciences

Enjoying studying a breadth of disciplines?

- Asian and Middle Eastern Studies
- Economics
- Education
- Geography
- Modern and Medieval Languages
- Philosophy
- Psychological and Behavioural Sciences
- Theology
- Linguistics
- Joint honours courses

Course choice and career prospects



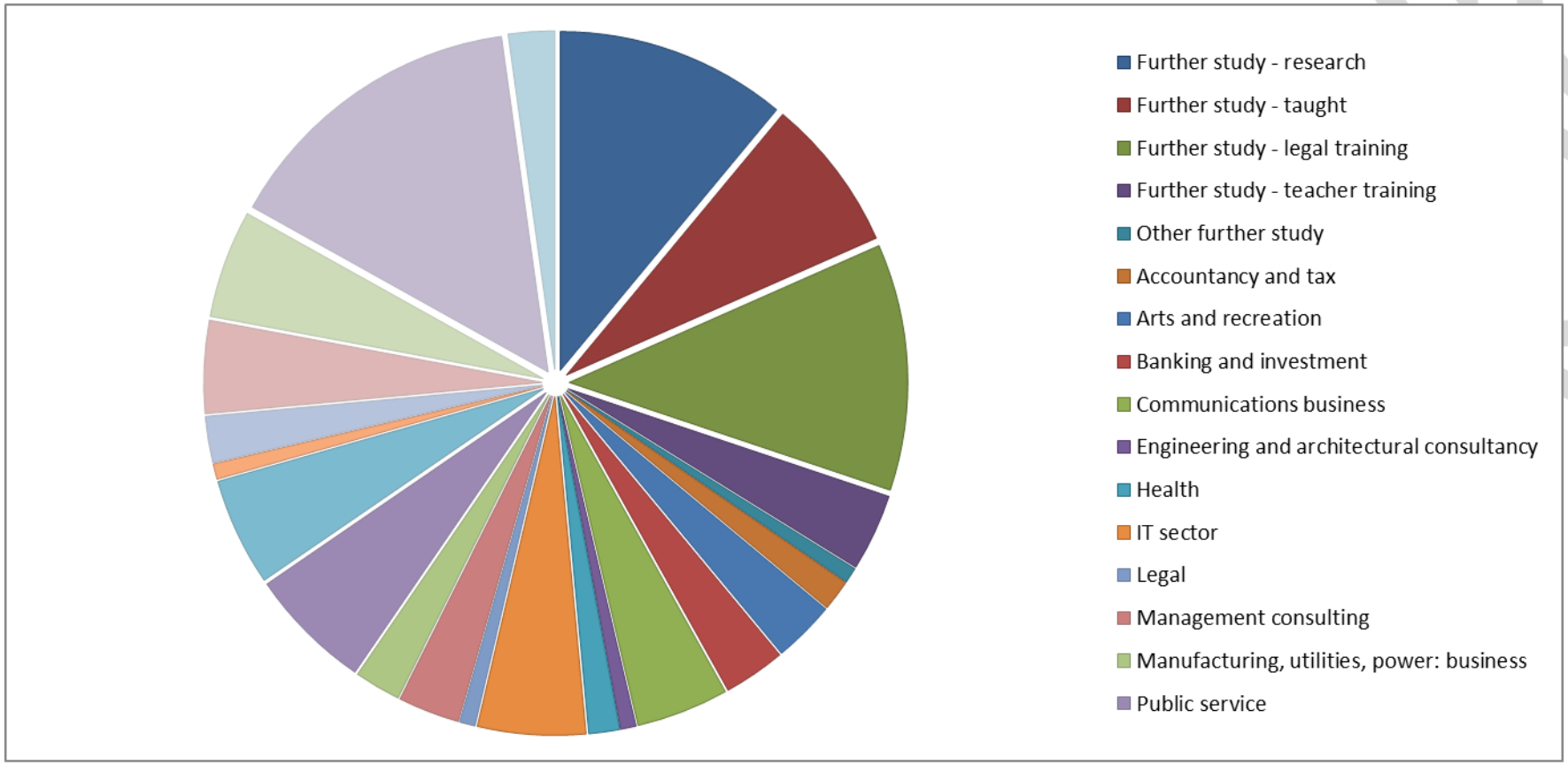
- Some careers **require** a specific degree
  - Architect
  - Engineer
  - Doctor
  - Vet
  - Psychologist
  - Secondary school teacher
- Some jobs in the commercial/business world (~5% of the total) also require particular degree subjects: typically, Mathematics or Languages

Even though these careers require specific degrees, this can sometimes be achieved by e.g., a graduate course or other training

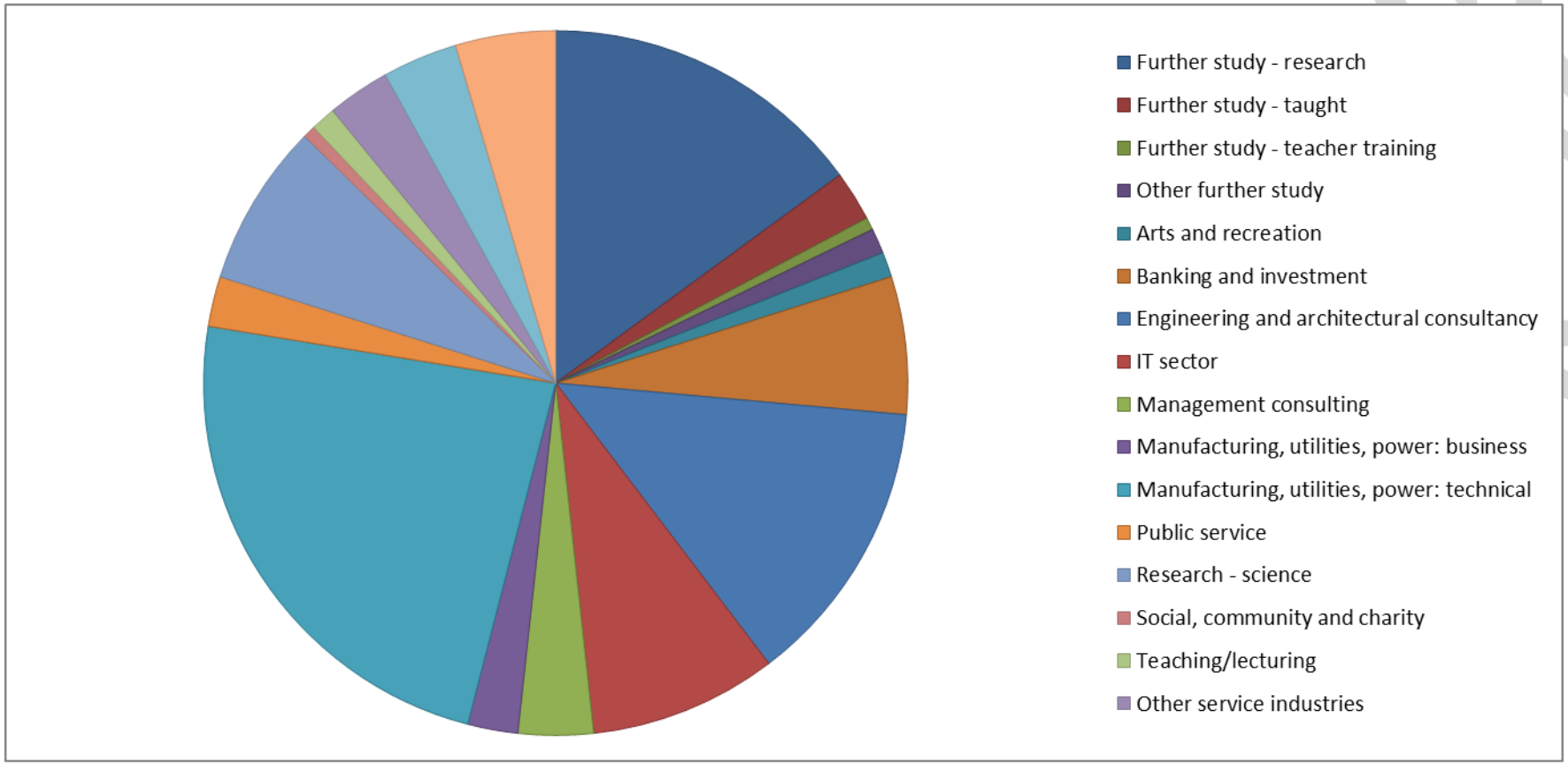
Course choice and career prospects

- The majority of top jobs **don't** specify a degree subject – they ask for a good degree (Class I or II.1) from a good university, in **any subject** (and if necessary, professional training following your degree)
- Typical 'open access' careers include:

Graduate destinations of Cambridge historians (2018)



Graduate destinations of Cambridge engineers (2018)



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Why is post-16 subject choice important?

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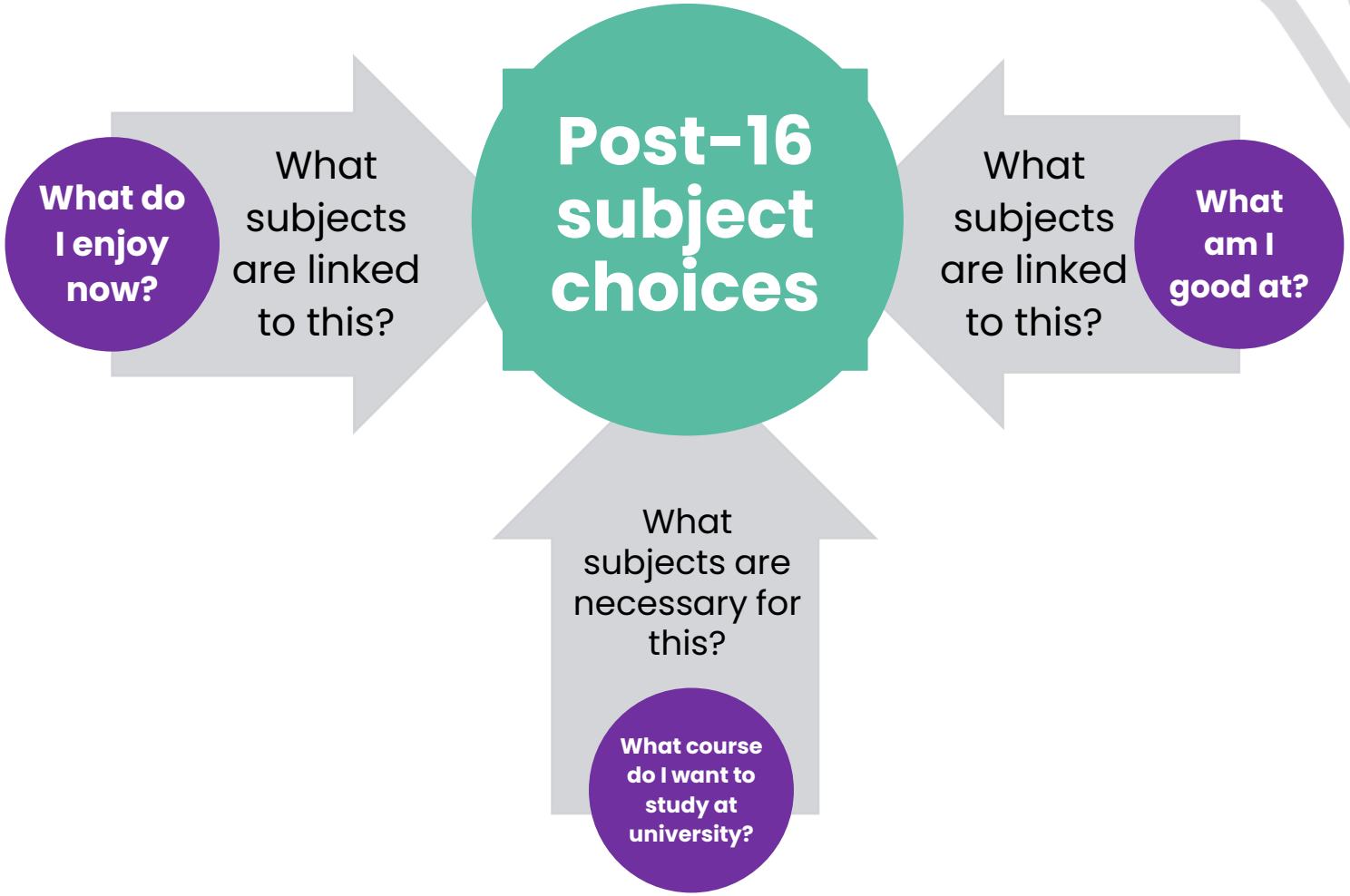
Why is post-16 subject choice important?

- Top universities look for students who have studied subjects that prepare them for their university course
- The choices students make at the start of their post-16 education can have a significant impact upon their options at degree level
- Recent research has reiterated this
  - One in five students reported that they were unable to study their preferred degree subjects because they had chosen the wrong A-Levels
  - Two in five reported that they would have chosen different subject had they received better advice

https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2020/2020-entry-ucas-undergraduate-report-where-next

https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/mar/25/one-in-five-students-say-bad-a-level-advice-led-to-lack-of-degree-choice-poll

How do I choose what subjects to take?



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Want to keep your options open?

- It's easier for Arts/Social Sciences courses than for Sciences/Maths (except Psychology)
- One or two A-Levels in Arts subjects and one or two in Sciences/Maths will be fine – even attractive – for most Arts/Social Sciences courses, but can narrow your options in the Sciences
- Generally, try to choose one or two **'keystone' subjects**, and one or two additional subjects that are relevant to your interests and add something to your profile
- Extended Projects can be a good way to explore your interests further

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Keystone subjects

- Maths
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- English Literature
- Languages
- History
- Maths

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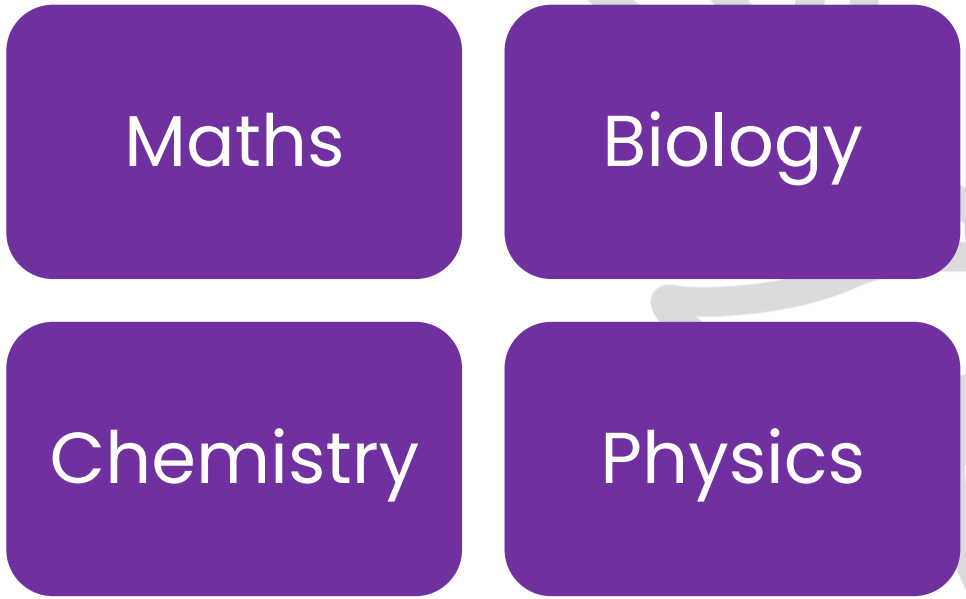
Sciences and Mathematics: General advice

- We advise any student interested in Sciences/Mathematics degrees at competitive universities to take **at least 3 Science/Mathematics keystone subjects**
- For students interested in the physical sciences – Physics, Engineering, Computer Science, etc. – and Mathematics itself (or related disciplines), we would also strongly recommend **Further Mathematics**
- It is definitely possible to secure an offer with just two of these, but it is less likely, certainly at Oxbridge
- Useful depending on the course you are applying for
  - Psychology
  - Computing
  - Statistics
  - Design & Technology
  - Electronics
  - Geology



Sciences and Mathematics: Know what you want to study?

- **Medicine/Veterinary Medicine**: three sciences/maths, including Chemistry
- **Biology-based degrees**: three sciences/maths, including Biology and Chemistry
- **Chemistry-based degrees**: three sciences/maths, including Chemistry
- **Physics-based degrees**: at least three sciences/maths, including Physics and Maths; Further Maths strongly advisable
- **Mathematics**: Maths and Further Maths are compulsory at many top universities
- **Economics** is very maths-focussed at Oxbridge, LSE, etc.
  - Maths and (ideally) Further Maths are your best preparation
  - Economics is not necessary, but many applicants do take it
  - An essay subject can be helpful
- **Computer Science**: Maths and (ideally) Further Maths – Computer Science is not necessary (Physics is often preferred)
- **Psychology**: at least one science/maths (not including Psychology itself) is helpful; Psychology

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Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: General advice

English Literature

Languages

History

Maths

- Students interested in a degree in this area would be well advised to pick from a range of academic, essay-based subjects in the first instance
- They may also wish to add in one or more science/maths subjects, if they are skilled at these subjects
- Any academic subjects which build relevant skills and knowledge will be useful

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Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: General advice

- English Literature
- Languages
- History
- Maths

Other good choices, likely to be useful:

- An additional Language
- Economics
- Further Maths
- Geography
- Religious Studies
- Sciences (Biology, Chemistry or Physics)
- Ancient History
- Classical Civilisation
- Philosophy

Useful depending on the course you are applying for:

- English Language/Literature & Language
- Music
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Archaeology
- Environmental Science
- Government & Politics
- History of Art

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Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences: Know what you want to study?

- **Psychology**: at least one science/maths (not including Psychology itself) is helpful; Psychology
- **Economics** is very maths-focussed at Oxbridge, LSE, etc.
  - Maths and (ideally) Further Maths are your best preparation
  - Economics is not necessary, but many applicants do take it
  - An essay subject can be helpful
- **Philosophy**: Mathematics is helpful
- **Architecture**: Art can be an advantage; Maths and/or Physics is also a plus
- **Modern & Medieval Languages**: at least one of the languages you wish to study; English Literature/Language can be helpful
- **Music**: Music A-Level/HL/ABRSM Grade 8
- **English Literature**: English Literature A-Level/HL
- Most successful applicants for **History** have History; for **Geography**, Geography, and so on. But it's not true of **Law**!

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Three or four?

Three or four?

- Less than 5% of UK students now take four or more A Levels
- University entry requirements have adapted accordingly, and it is now possible to put in a very competitive application to all subjects with just three A-Levels
- There are only three subjects at Cambridge where four can be an advantage (and it is less essential for the latter two)
  - Chemical Engineering
  - Computer Science
  - Physical Natural Sciences
- For most applicants, therefore, it conveys no advantage to be studying four subjects instead of three
- Typical offers from Cambridge are based on students taking three A-Levels (or equivalent) together in Year 13
- In general, universities would rather students focused on fewer subjects and achieved higher grades: it's better to excel in three subjects than to perform modestly in four

Three or four?

- This makes it more difficult to keep students' options open, and particularly to select combinations that open up both Arts/Humanities and Science/Maths degrees
- It is essential to ensure that students taking three A-Levels select a competitive combination of subjects and that there are not one or more which are 'out of place' within this

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Subjects to avoid as one of ‘only’ three subjects

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Subjects to avoid as one of ‘only’ three subjects

There are some subjects which are generally less competitive as one of ‘only’ three A Level choices for applications to Oxbridge and the most competitive Russel Group universities.

- Art & Design (unless applying for related courses, such as Architecture or Fine Art)
- Drama & Theatre (unless applying for related courses, such as the English, Drama and the Arts track in Education)
- Business
- Criminology
- Film Studies
- Law
- Media Studies
- Photography
- Physical Education
- General Studies
- Critical Thinking
- Vocational Level 3 courses

Where can I find out more?

- Lucy Cavendish College Subject Choice Guidance: www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/subject-choice-guidance
- Cambridge Undergraduate Study: www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk
- Informed Choices: www.informedchoices.ac.uk
- HE+: www.myheplus.com

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Any questions?

Or you can always email us at outreach@lucy.cam.ac.uk

Find out more about Lucy Cavendish, sign-up to our newsletter and get involved with events: www.lucy.cam.ac.uk/study-us/prospective-applicants