

MAKING *the* **R****RIGHT** **CHOICES**

WHAT ARE 
 **VOCATIONAL**
QUALIFICATIONS? 

YOUR  **OPTIONS** *at*
YEARS  **8, 9** and **11**

#LIFEGOALS

OCR's guide to helping you and your child make the right vocational qualification choices at Years 8, 9 and Year 11

It probably seems no time at all since your son or daughter started secondary school, yet they're now in Years 8, 9 or 11 and selecting their options. It more than likely feels confusing and dauntingly grown-up, but you can help them make the right choices. This brochure gives you more information about different qualification types, and what you and your child might want to consider before making options choices.

OCR is a leading UK awarding body and forms part of the Cambridge Assessment Group – one of the oldest exam groups and the only one attached to a university. We provide qualifications which engage people of all ages and abilities at school, college, in work or through part-time learning programmes. Our general and vocational qualifications equip students with the knowledge and skills they need for their future, helping them achieve their full potential.

What are vocational qualifications?

OCR offers a wide range of GCSEs and A levels and these are the qualification type most people are familiar with. However, many students choose vocational qualifications or a mix of both academic and vocational qualifications.

Vocational qualifications develop practical skills and knowledge related to an employment area, and are designed to help students learn in a practical way. They're offered in schools and colleges and can help get the skills needed to start a job, progress in a career or go on to higher levels of education. Vocational qualifications include classroom-based and practical activities, and are assessed usually by both written and practical coursework or exams.

There is a wide range of vocational qualifications but in this brochure we will talk about those specifically designed for these age ranges.



Years 8 or 9 choices...

In Year 8 or 9 your son or daughter will choose which subjects and qualifications they wish to study in Years 10 and 11.

It's essential they select the most appropriate subjects and courses for them. They should select subjects they enjoy and are interested in, but also ensure they've opted for the most appropriate subjects to maximise their chances of achieving their own aspirations.

How can Year 9 choices affect future education and career plans?

Start with 'what they want to do next' – University, FE College, 6th Form, starting work or an apprenticeship and then work backwards.

If your son or daughter has got an idea of the course or career they'd like to pursue, look at requirements listed by universities or employers for that subject. Do they require specific GCSEs, A levels, vocational or technical qualifications?

However, we all know that few young people will have their future career mapped out and their ideas can change, so the key is to keep future options open and flexible, and choose subjects they enjoy and excel in.

How much actual choice is there anyway? Aren't some subjects compulsory?

Yes ... your child will have to take, English (either literature and language separately, or both), maths and a science. Your child's school may have policies on other subjects that must be studied – often a modern foreign language, a second science, religious education or ICT.

So, depending on the number of subjects your child is able to / or has been advised by their school to take, your child could be choosing between two and five subjects.



We have children of all abilities studying Cambridge Nationals and they do very well. We do find that sometimes our less able children do better than they would at GCSE.

Cambridge National in Health & Social Care
Rolf Purvis | Headteacher, Downham Market Academy



Year 11 choices...

How can Year 11 choices affect future education and career plans?

Again, start with 'what they want to do next'. This may follow on from the thoughts your child had at Year 9, or they may have done a complete 'U' turn and need to review their thoughts.

If your child has a clear idea on a career, they should research what they need to do next. Can they start work straight away, do they require Level 3 qualifications, could they start an apprenticeship, or will they require a degree?

If they need to go to university what will be required and how long will they need to study? If they have no idea then giving themselves flexibility and choosing subjects they enjoy and excel in should be their priority.

Qualifications and Levels

Type	Level	Grade
GCSE	1 and 2	1–9
Cambridge National (Vocational)	1 and 2	Pass, Merit, Distinction and Distinction*
A Level	3	A* to E
Cambridge Technical (Vocational)	3	Pass, Merit, Distinction and Distinction*

If my child doesn't take a subject at key stage 4 or Level 2 vocational qualification in a particular subject can they still do it at Level 3?

Sometimes – but not always. With maths, sciences and English, a GCSE in the same subject will normally be necessary. With other subjects such as business, health and social care, sport, IT and media it won't be.

It may be that your child has studied a similar subject at key stage 4, and now wants to follow a vocational route.

It's worth encouraging them to double check that a new subject type is really of interest – it's a riskier pick if they have not studied it before.

Level 3 vocational qualifications are designed in partnership with universities, employers and professional organisations. This means your child acquires the knowledge to progress to a higher level – such as a degree course, or developing the skills that employers want.



The different disciplines we can work into all of the different units, it makes it really varied and keeps the kids interested in what they're doing.

Cambridge Technicals in Performing Arts
Beth McFadden | Course Leader, Rainford Sixth Form College



What are Cambridge Nationals?

Our Cambridge Nationals are Key Stage 4 qualifications designed specifically for students aged 14–16. They are designed to complement GCSEs by providing students with access to broad vocational sectors. As you might expect from vocational qualifications, as well as an exam, students also complete practical tasks as part of the assessment. Assessment opportunities are available across the course.

Cambridge Nationals have clear progression routes to A levels, Apprenticeships or further advanced vocational qualifications at Level 3, such as our Cambridge Technicals.

- **Child Development**
- **Creative iMedia**
- **Engineering**
- **Enterprise and Marketing**
- **Health and Social Care**
- **ICT**
- **Information Technologies**
- **Sport**

Why would my child do a Cambridge National rather than a GCSE?

Cambridge Nationals are designed to allow students the freedom to explore more deeply the things that interest them. The teaching of the qualification will normally be through practical work, learning skills and how to do things that may be relevant to the world of work.

A lot of the qualification is assessed by coursework set and marked by your child's teacher. This will be done throughout the duration of their two year course. So if your child likes project work, enjoys research and doing practical things they may find a Cambridge National a better option than a GCSE.

To ensure the qualification is robust and as stretching as a GCSE, every Cambridge National has an exam. Your child will have two opportunities to take the test, one in January, and the other in June – these can be taken at any time during their two year course. GCSE's only have one opportunity to sit the exam; this is in June at the end of the second Year 11. Cambridge Nationals therefore allow your child to have the opportunity to re-sit if they needed to.



What we learn and do means we now understand why professionals do it ... like Mo Farah getting in an ice bath, we know that's part of a cool down.

Cambridge National in Sport Science
Student | Kingswood Secondary Academy, Corby



What are Cambridge Technicals?

Cambridge Technicals are vocational qualifications taught in 6th forms and FE colleges. They are for students aged 16 years old and over. They're designed to develop knowledge and skills, and will prepare your child for university, work or an apprenticeship.

- **Applied Science**
- **Art and Design**
- **Business**
- **Digital Media**
- **Engineering**
- **Health and Social Care**
- **IT**
- **Performing Arts**
- **Sport and Physical Activity**

Level 2

Level 2 is designed for students who have continued their education post GCSE, but they're not quite ready to move to a more demanding type of qualification. This student is quite likely to be re-sitting some of their GCSEs, for example English and maths. So, a Level 2 Cambridge Technical is more appropriate for them at this stage of their learning.

All Level 2 Cambridge Technical subjects have a complementary Level 3 subject. This means that following their Level 2 students can choose to progress onto a Level 3 Cambridge Technical, or they could head straight into the world of work, or start an apprenticeship.

Level 3

Level 3 is designed for students who have continued their education post GCSE and are ready to progress to more demanding qualifications. This student could be doing a re-sit, but they're likely to be progressing to university at 18 yrs.



The best bit about delivering Cambridge Technicals is the flexibility of being able to choose the pathways that students take.

Cambridge Technicals in IT
Jonathan Walsh | Head of IT, Samworth Church Academy



Level 3 Cambridge Technicals qualification sizes

Level 3 Cambridge Technicals has different sizes of qualification to choose from.

The two smaller sizes, 180GLH* and 360GLH are the same size as ½ and 1 A Level. This means your child can study a number of Cambridge Technical subjects, or mix their Cambridge Technical with complementary A Level subjects. We've worked with universities to design the content of the qualification and its assessment – ensuring that your child is prepared and has the skills to progress to degree level.

The three larger sizes, 540GLH, 720GLH and 1080GLH are the same size as 1½ and 2 and 3 A Levels. Again, this means your child can study a range of subjects and mix vocational Cambridge Technicals with academic A Levels. The 1080GLH is the same size as 3 A Levels which is ideal if your child has a clear vision of their desired future

career or is planning to progress to university. These qualifications have specialist pathways aligned to specific industry sectors. We've worked with employers to design the content and assessment of these – ensuring that your child is prepared when entering university, work or a higher apprenticeship.

*GLH = Guided Learning Hours



It really meets the needs of our students. It's so accessible for them, it's so relevant for the job opportunities and their further study that they're wanting to go into.

Cambridge Technicals in IT

Jonathan Walsh | Head of IT, Samworth Church Academy



Why would my child do a Cambridge Technical rather than an A Level?

Your child may prefer project and research activities, so being assessed by coursework could help them attain a higher grade.

A Levels now have a high proportion of exams taken in June of the final year. This may not suit your son or daughter's style of learning. Cambridge Technicals provide two opportunities to take the external assessment, one in January and one in June – these can be taken at any time during the two year course.

So if your child would accomplish more if their exams were split across two years and they'd have the opportunity to re-sit if they needed to, then Cambridge Technicals could be a better option.

Your child may have a very clear idea on the type of career they want to pursue, so doing a Cambridge Technical and following an industry sector pathway may be the right option for them.



Do Cambridge Technicals get UCAS points?

Yes, all Level 3 Cambridge Technicals attract UCAS points.

A Level		Cambridge Technicals Level 3	
Grade	UCAS Tariff Points	Grade	UCAS Tariff Points
A*	56	Distinction*	56
A	48	Distinction	48
B	40	Merit	32
C	32		
D	24		
E	16	Pass	16

The truth about UCAS points

Level 3 qualifications designed for progression to university will normally have UCAS tariff points attached to them. This isn't just Cambridge Technicals, but vocational qualifications from other exam boards such as Pearson's BTEC and A Levels too.

However, this doesn't mean every university will accept them, there are a lot of variables to consider; it's not as simple as this university does and this one doesn't.

1. The subject – it'll depend on the Level 3 subject and the combination of other Level 3 subjects taken with it (a mix of vocational and A Level subjects, a mix of smaller vocational subjects, one 'big' vocational qualification).

2. The degree – what degree course the student wants to do. Are the Level 3 subjects taken what the university want for that degree course? Students must check what subjects and qualification types universities require.

3. Demand – some degree courses are massively oversubscribed. Degrees such as physiotherapy often take small cohorts and become massively oversubscribed – allowing the university to be very selective when choosing applicants.

4. University status – some universities prefer a mix of vocational and academic subjects at Level 3. Students who may have their eye on a certain university need to be mindful of this and choose their Level 3 qualifications accordingly.



Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technical offer a broad and balanced curriculum for your child.



For more information visit
ocr.org.uk/vocational
or call our Customer Support Centre on
01223 553998

Alternatively, you can email us on
vocational.qualifications@ocr.org.uk



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