



ST LEONARD'S
CATHOLIC SCHOOL

OPTIONS 2026

YOUR GUIDE TO KEY STAGE 4



WELCOME YEAR 9

Dear pupils,

You are entering an incredibly exciting period in your time at St Leonard's, and you have some very important decisions about your future coming up. These decisions won't just shape the next two years of your school life, they'll influence which qualifications you get and have a huge impact on the career paths you take for the rest of your life.

The purpose of this booklet is to help guide you (and your parents) through the Options process. The Options process is likely to be very different for each individual pupil. Some of you may already have a very clear idea in your head of the subjects you wish to pursue; others might still be unsure about which subjects to carry through to Key Stage 4. Fortunately, St Leonard's is full of staff who can help you make informed choices, and some pupils will be invited to meet with a member of the Leadership Team to ensure that the choices you make are in your best interests.

This booklet will provide information about the different routes open to pupils. It will also provide you with an overview of each of the GCSE and BTEC courses available at Key Stage 4, plus some additional information about what your decisions in Year 9 might mean for the decisions you make in Year 11 when you consider the post-16 courses on offer at St Leonard's.

I hope within the pages of this booklet you will also find an easy-to-understand explanation of how the Key Stage 4 curriculum works, and why some subjects are not optional – for example, English and Mathematics.

As well as this booklet, you'll be given plenty of information by your teachers about each subject in Key Stage 4, plus I hope that both you and your families make the most of the Options Information Evening, which will take place on Tuesday, 18th November 2026 at 17:30pm.

The school is committed to ensuring that the Options process works for you, and that you start Year 10 in September 2026 safe in the knowledge that you've made the correct decisions about your future. We hope that you'll be excited to learn more about subjects you feel passionate about and that your experience of Key Stage 4 sets you up to achieve some fantastic GCSE results.

If at any point you, or your parents, have any questions at all about Options, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Mr Simmons
Headteacher

OPTIONS PROCESS

The Options process must prepare pupils for life beyond GCSE, so it is only right that pupils are thinking ahead about choices for Sixth Form, Apprenticeships, University and the world of work.

All pupils will study:

- GCSE Maths
- GCSE English Language
- GCSE English Literature
- GCSE Religious Education
- Either Combined GCSE Science **or** three Separate Science GCSEs: Chemistry, Physics & Biology.

Science: The decision about science is taken towards the end of the academic year by the Head of Science, working with her team of specialists, based on internal progress data from key assessments throughout Year 9. You can read more about these two routes further in the booklet. It is important to state from the outset though that both routes open routes into science study at A Level and beyond.

Modern Foreign Languages: Families are strongly advised that French should be the first consideration in the Options Process.

Some Universities require a modern foreign language as a general entrance criterion; sometimes specific courses at some universities require a modern language for specific degrees, e.g. English Language. At this stage it is important that choices do not restrict options later for universities. We would ask everyone to make French their first consideration. Most schools make modern languages compulsory, and whilst we do not want to impose this on pupils, we do not want to limit our pupils in their future education and career by not starting this process by talking about the value of studying French at GCSE level.

CHOICES

Pupils will make three choices in the Options Process

Choice 1: GCSE English Baccalaureate (EBacc) Subjects

These GCSEs are traditional academic subjects which are being given preference by the Government and Universities as components of the English Baccalaureate. Pupils choose one from:

- History
- Geography
- French
- Computer Science

Choices 2 and 3: The second and third choices come from the subjects listed below. The choice is open although pupils may be guided to take additional EBacc subject, and pupils cannot take more than one Art choice and cannot take more than one Design and Technology (DT) choice. For example pupils can choose Art: Photography and DT: Food, but they cannot choose Art: Photography and Art: Graphic Design. This is because of something known as 'discount codes' – two subjects that are too similar 'discount' each other and only one would be counted in a pupil's grades.

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| • History | • Art: Textile Design | • Music |
| • Geography | • Art: Graphic Design | • Physical Education |
| • French | • DT: Product Design | • BTEC: Sport |
| • Computer Science | • DT: Textiles | • BTEC: Creative Media |
| • Art: Art and Design | • DT: Food | • BTEC: Health & Social |
| • Art: Photography | • NCFE Engineering | • BTEC: Digital IT |

KEY DATES

| Event | Date |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Options Evening | Tuesday 18 th November |
| Year 9 Parents' Evening | Monday 24 th November |
| Year 9 Assembly | November and December |
| In-Class Advice | November and December |
| Options Form Shared | Friday 19 th November |
| Options Form Complete | Monday 15 th December |

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICES

Pupils and their families will have the opportunity to receive more information about the Option process from several sources, including their subject teachers; their form tutor; through the Options Information Evening (Tuesday, 18th November 17:30pm); and through Year 9 Parents' Evening (Monday, 24th November 15:45pm – 18:15pm).

There are certain things for pupils to think about and certain things to avoid when making choices on Key Stage 4 options:

- ✓ **Do:** consider your strongest subjects. Which subjects are likely to give you the strongest set of qualifications?
- ✓ **Do:** consider your skills and abilities. Are you happy with extended writing in subjects like History? How well suited to practical subjects like Design and Technology are you?
- ✓ **Do:** consider any potential future career paths. Make sure your choices reflect what you are considering for a career. If you're unsure, make sure you keep your options open.
- ✓ **Do:** choose subjects you enjoy.

- × **Don't:** choose a subject just because your friends have picked it. For a start, it's not even likely you'll be in the same class as them.
- × **Don't:** choose a subject just because you like your current teacher. There's no guarantee which teacher you'll get for any subject.
- × **Don't:** choose a subject without putting any thought into it. You're going to be studying these subjects five times a fortnight for two years.
- × **Don't:** choose a subject because you think it will be easy.
- × **Don't:** ignore subjects because they're new and you haven't studied them before. Find out about them and decide if they might appeal to you.

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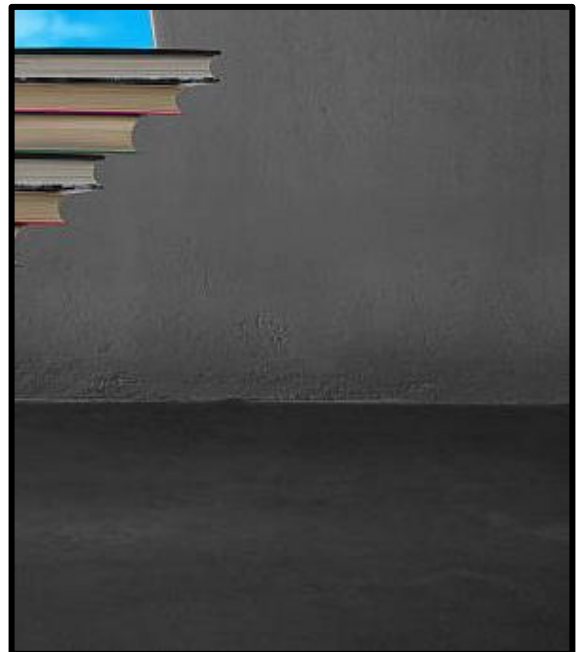
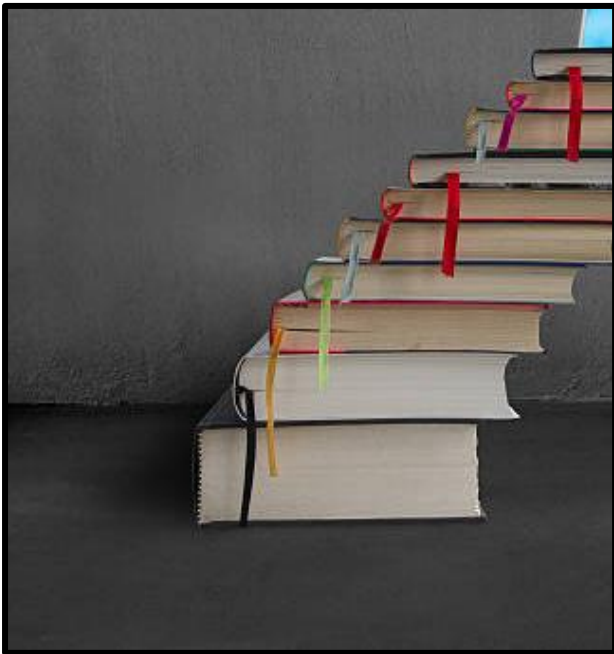
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THE CORE SUBJECTS



The Core Subjects are the subjects pupils are required to study which have GCSE examinations. These are English Language and English Literature, Mathematics, Science (either Combined or Separate), and Religious Education.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

English Language is one of the key qualifications required by employers, colleges and universities. The study of English Language will support your other GCSE choices as you will learn to read in-depth and express yourself clearly in writing as well as speech. GCSE English Language builds upon the work covered at Key Stage 3. There are three units which are assessed in class and by external examinations over the course of two years at Key Stage 4.

How will I be assessed?

At present all pupils follow the AQA Specification A for both English Language and English Literature. There are two written papers for GCSE English Language:

- Paper 1 (50% of GCSE): Explorations in Creative Reading and Writing.
- Paper 2 (50% of GCSE): Writers' Viewpoints and Perspectives.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework, but spoken language is a separate NEA endorsement. It is worth 0% of the GCSE but is compulsory in order to be awarded the GCSE qualification.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

English Language is essential to almost all A Levels and BTECs. For pupils wishing to continue with their studies specifically in English, St Leonard's Sixth Form currently offer A Level English Literature, A Level English Language, Media Studies and a variety of other courses.

Which careers require GCSE English Language?

Virtually all career paths require this qualification, as successful oral and written communication is essential for the majority of careers.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr McConnell, the Head of English.



“Before I even think about any other qualifications, I’d check to see if people who applied for the job had English Language. If they don’t have that, I won’t look twice at their application.”

Andy, Principal Regeneration Officer

ENGLISH LITERATURE (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

English Literature is another of the key qualifications desired by employers, colleges and universities. As with English Language, the study of English Literature will support your other GCSE choices as you will learn to analyse texts and write analytically in a succinct manner. As with GCSE English Language, GCSE English Literature builds upon the work covered at Key Stage 3.

How will I be assessed?

At present all pupils follow the AQA Specification A for both English Language and English Literature. There are two written papers for GCSE English Literature:

- Paper 1 (40% of GCSE): Shakespeare, plus a 19th century novel
- Paper 2 (60% of GCSE): Modern Texts and Poetry

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework and no NEA for GCSE English Literature.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

For pupils who wish to continue with their studies in English Literature, St Leonard's Sixth Form currently offers A Level English Literature. This GCSE is also useful in several other A Levels and BTECs on offer.

Which careers require GCSE English Literature?

Being able to successfully read and analyse texts is an essential requirement for the majority of careers. Careers specific to GCSE English Literature include journalism; the majority of jobs in the publishing industry (for example copywriters or editorial assistants); jobs in the legal sector; and public relations, among many others.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr McConnell, the Head of English.



“You definitely need English Literature at GCSE to get a look in for my job. For a start, you need it to get onto the degree course you need to do the job.”

James, Chief Communications Officer for
an MP

MATHEMATICS (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Mathematics is the language of the universe. Everything around us has a foundation in mathematics in one way or another, from aeroplanes flying to the number of petals on a flower. Mathematics is applied in many other subjects from physics to ICT to art and design. You wouldn't have a mobile phone or a computer if it wasn't for the application of mathematics.

How will I be assessed?

At present all pupils follow the OCR GCSE specification. Pupils will be entered into either the Higher or Foundation tier. There are three exams completed at the end of Year 11:

- Two calculator exam papers (67% of the GCSE)
- One non-calculator exam paper (33% of the GCSE)

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework and no NEA for GCSE Mathematics.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

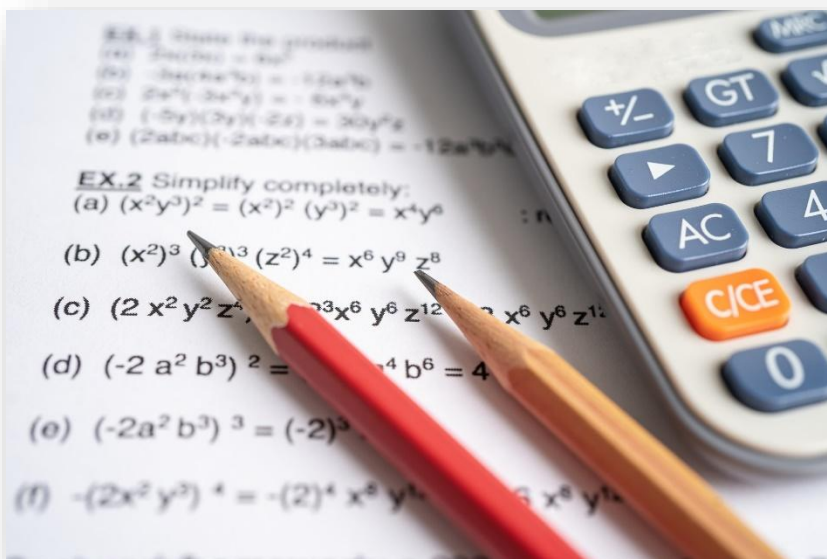
GCSE Mathematics is essential for any pupils who wish to study A Level Mathematics, but also several other Key Stage 5 courses offered by St Leonard's such as any of the Sciences at A Level, plus Psychology, Geography and several of the BTECs offered.

Which careers require GCSE Mathematics?

Most employers require a level of functional skills in mathematics. A significant number of professions require more than a basic level of mathematics; this is everything from air traffic control to aerospace engineering, from financial advisors to software development.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Zigmond, the Head of Mathematics.



“You absolutely need a qualification in maths to do game design. Those waves crashing against your boat in Assassin’s Creed: Black Flag? Maths. The bullets flying over your head in Call of Duty? Maths. Mario jumping up and down and moving forward at the same time? Maths.”

Matthew, Video Games Designer for
Activision

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Religious Education impacts on everyday life across the country and all over the world. There are links to news items every day with 85% of the global population identifying as being religious. Do you understand where other people are coming from and what makes them tick? Do you have strong views, enjoy debates and have questions on current moral issues? Do you like to be in touch with what is happening in the world? Whether you have religious faith or not – are you prepared to listen to others? Your ability to answer these questions is one of the reasons why Religious Education is a core subject at St Leonard's.

How will I be assessed?

At present all pupils follow the Eduqas Route B specification. Both Catholic Christianity and Judaism are studied and assessed through three exams at the end of Year 11:

- Two 90-minute examinations
- One 60-minute examination

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework and no NEA for GCSE Religious Education.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

A GCSE in Religious Education is important for the further study of A Level Religious Studies, plus other Post-16 courses offered at St Leonard's such as the Social Sciences (Law, Sociology, Psychology), Business, Geography, Economics as well as History and English.

Which careers require GCSE Religious Education?

Due to the nature of the content covered in GCSE Religious Education, the qualification is desirable for careers in law; medicine; the media; the Armed Forces; civilian services (e.g. police, fire brigade); the care professions (e.g. nursing, social work); environmental studies; and politics.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr McTernan, the Head of Religious Education.

“Given the diverse nature of the families, and their backgrounds and their beliefs, that use our services, I’m so pleased I did RE at GCSE. It means I can be more understanding and compassionate. My understanding of different cultures and religions has turned out to be really, really important.”

Christine, Nottingham Bereavement Services Manager



SEPARATE SCIENCES (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Separate Sciences – sometimes known as Triple Award Science – is designed for those pupils who are particularly interested in Science, especially at A Level. The pace of the course will be fast as this will result in three GCSE qualifications (separate GCSE qualifications in Biology, Chemistry and Physics) covered in the same amount of curriculum time as Combined Science, which is worth two GCSE qualifications. Due to the nature of the pace, content and complexity of Separate Sciences, there are entry requirements based on prior performance and attainment. Approximately 25% of the year group will be entered for Separate Sciences.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils on the Separate Sciences pathway follow the AQA specification in all three subjects. There are two examinations per subject at the end of Year 11 (six examinations in total across the three GCSEs).

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

As well as the examinations at the end of Year 11, pupils are expected to complete ten required practical tasks per subject.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offer A Levels in Biology, Chemistry and Physics, but the GCSEs will also be useful in any STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) related subjects.

Which careers require Separate Sciences?

Although studying Combined Science over Separate Sciences does not close doors to pupils wishing to follow a career path in a STEM related industry (for example 34 of the 39 medical schools in the UK – including those at Oxford and Cambridge – accept Combined Science as well as Separate Sciences), some pupils may find it useful to have a more in-depth knowledge of certain areas if they wish to follow a career in medicine, the pharmaceutical industry, veterinary medicine, biomedicine, physics, chemistry, sports science, forensics, etc.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Stewart, the Head of Science.

“Although my job involves a lot of logistics I don't think I'd be able to do it properly without a decent understanding of Biology.”

Dora, Global Public Health Advisor



COMBINED SCIENCES (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Combined Sciences – sometimes known as Dual Award Science or Double Award Science – is concerned with developing an understanding of scientific principles and, through the work on ‘How Science Works’, relating this understanding to the world we live in: you’d be hard pushed to think of a workplace anywhere in the world that doesn’t now rely on science in one form or another. Approximately 75% of the year group will be entered for Combined Sciences.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils on the Combined Sciences pathway follow the AQA specification. There are two examinations per subject at the end of Year 11 (six examinations in total across the three subjects).

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

As well as the examinations at the end of Year 11, pupils are expected to complete twenty-one required practical tasks.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

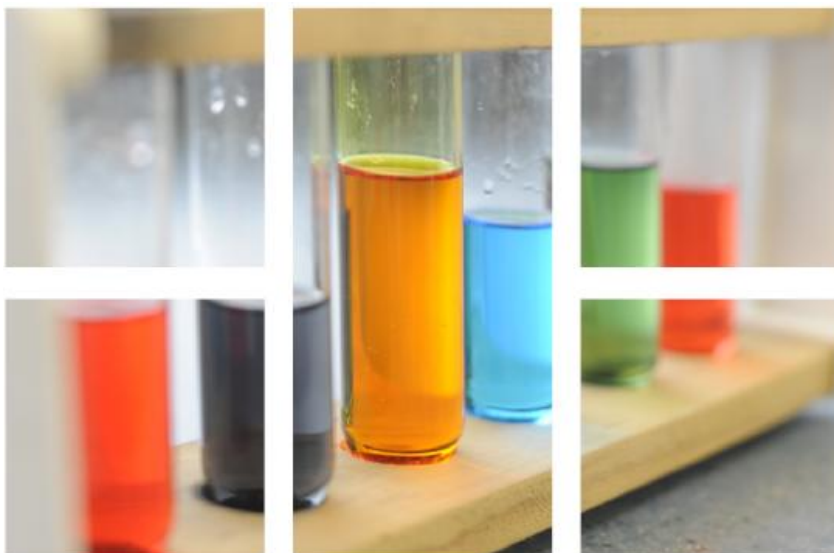
St Leonard’s offer A Levels in Biology, Chemistry and Physics, but the GCSEs will also be useful in any STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) related subjects.

Which careers require Combined Sciences?

Studying Combined Science over Separate Sciences does not close doors to pupils wishing to follow a career path in a STEM related industry (for example 34 of the 39 medical schools in the UK – including those at Oxford and Cambridge – accept Combined Science as well as Separate Sciences). Careers in the same sectors as those open to pupils studying Separate Sciences - medicine, the pharmaceutical industry, veterinary medicine, biomedicine, physics, chemistry, sports science, forensics, etc – are just as viable to pupils who leave school with two GCSEs in Combined Science.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Stewart, the Head of Science.



“When I’m looking through job applications, given what we do, I just can’t see how I could employ anyone who didn’t have a qualification in Science.”

Dan, Building Control Consultant

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THE EBACC SUBJECTS



The GCSE English Baccalaureate (EBacc) subjects are traditional academic subjects which are being given preference by the Government and Universities. The government and Department for Education has set schools targets of 75% of pupils studying for the EBacc by 2022 and 90% of pupils studying for the EBacc by 2025.

HISTORY (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

GCSE History is essential for understanding the modern world. Apart from being very interesting, GCSE History is useful for a host of different careers as well as general life skills. It is very practical and teaches you vital skills that employers want, because it involves learning about people – how they interact, differing perspectives and interpretations, the motives and emotions that can tear people apart into rival factions or help them to work together for a common cause. GCSE History also helps to locate and sift through facts – in today’s internet-based, information overloaded world, employers really appreciate someone who can sift through the evidence to find the vital information – a skill that GCSE History is perhaps better placed than any other subject to help you develop. As well as this, GCSE History teaches you to properly communicate your ideas and opinions.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE History follow the Edexcel specification. All examinations are at the end of Year 11. There are three papers:

Paper 1: Medicine In Britain c1250 – Present, and the British Sector of the Western Front

Paper 2: Anglo Saxon and Norman England 1060-1088, and The American West 1835-1895

Paper 3: Germany 1918-1939

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework or NEA requirements for GCSE History.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard’s offers A Level History, but pupils wishing to study A Level Politics, A Level Law, or an A Level in the Social Sciences may find GCSE History useful.

Which careers require GCSE History?

GCSE History is highly valued by employers, due to the academic nature of the course and the range of skills required to achieve the qualification. Future career paths may include the Diplomatic Service, local government, journalism, law, and even industries such as television (e.g. history qualifications are required for costume design in shows such as Downton Abbey) and computer game development (e.g. an in-depth knowledge of history is required for the development of games such as Assassin’s Creed).

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr Curry, the Head of History.

“I use my History qualifications all the time, especially when we’re developing games like Assassin’s Creed. The games have to be realistic and that takes a good depth of historical knowledge.”

Leighton, Project Manager at Ubisoft



GEOGRAPHY (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

GCSE Geography has an equal balance of physical and human geography, which allows pupils to explore the current environmental and economic issues that we face in a global climate. Geography will likely appeal to you if Geography will appeal to you if you are curious about the world, people and environments; you like asking questions and finding answers; you enjoy practical, hands-on work; you are interested in local, regional and global issues; you have the ability to think independently; and you want a well-respected, broad qualification to prepare you for many future courses or employment.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Geography follow the AQA specification. All examinations are at the end of Year 11. There are three examinations.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework or NEA requirements for GCSE Geography, although fieldwork will need to be completed in order to complete one of the examinations.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Level Geography, and GCSE Geography also compliments the Sciences and Mathematics at A Level as well.

Which careers require GCSE Geography?

Pupils with GCSE Geography qualifications tend to have excellent transferable skills which are attractive for employers in a range of sectors, including the public sector, education, commerce, industry, transport, tourism, business, law and finance.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Miss Curtis, the Head of Geography.



"If I didn't have Geography, I couldn't do my job at all. Worse than that, without it I might end up making a mistake and Whitby would fall into a sink hole because I didn't know enough about geology!"

Don, Terrestrial Laser Scanner for the Anglo American Woodsmith Project

FRENCH (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

We are excited to offer this newly designed course which promotes communication and focuses on the language most frequently used in French. The course consists of three themes: People and Lifestyle; Popular Culture; and Communication and the World Around Us. A GCSE in a language is essential for a range of skills, including communicating with others; having a talent that is applicable to almost every job you could do; providing a grounding to work for a global company; understanding the importance of languages when competing in today's job market; travelling; discovering new cultures; and developing your confidence.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE French follow the AQA specification and will be entered for either the Foundation or the Higher tier. All examinations are at the end of Year 11. There are four examinations:

- Listening: Foundation 35 minutes, Higher 45 minutes
- Reading: Foundation 45 minutes, Higher 1 hour
- Speaking: 15 minutes preparation time and then Foundation 7-9 minutes, Higher 10-12 minutes
- Writing: Foundation 1 hour 10 minutes, Higher 1 hour 15 minutes

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There is no coursework or NEA requirements for GCSE French.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Level French, and a GCSE in a language has a series of highly transferrable skills.

Which careers require GCSE French?

A surprising range of careers are opened to anyone who has a GCSE in a modern language. This is because a modern language qualification is useful in the world of business, leisure, tourism and education, among others. Many employers highly value a GCSE in a modern language as it demonstrates that the candidate for the job has good communication skills, plus many businesses rely on international trade – UK companies currently claim that they are losing 20% of their potential business because they cannot find candidates with good foreign language skills. Languages are increasingly being cited as essential in the healthcare sector for both doctors, nurses and others who work in health settings.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Alderson, the Head of Languages.



“You might not think it but one of the qualifications I’d very, very strongly recommend for my job is a GCSE in a language. It’s the same here as when I worked in the hospital – you need to communicate with people who sometimes have limited English and if you can’t, there could be a disaster.”

Mike, former NHS Nurse and current Offshore Paramedic for North Sea Oil

COMPUTER SCIENCE (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

The GCSE Computer Science course will allow pupils to develop computational thinking skills and think about real world application of these skills, including using programming languages. The course is made up of two parts, with two written examinations. Topics covered include hardware; software; network topologies; data representation; and computer programming. However, it should be noted that this GCSE requires a good mathematical grounding – pupils who feel they struggle with mathematics will potentially feel that they struggle with Computer Science as well.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Computer Science follow the OCR specification and both examinations are at the end of Year 11. Each examination is written and is worth 50% of the overall GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

Component 2 focuses on the practical application of Computer Science, including program design; writing; testing; and refinement. Throughout the course you will also undertake programming challenges to develop your programming skills and understanding.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Level Computer Science as well as BTEC ICT.

Which careers require GCSE Computer Science?

GCSE Computer Science is highly regarded as a complex academic subject and leads well into careers centred around programming, graphics, animation, technical support, software engineering and many other ICT related careers.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Miss Maughan, the Head of Computer Science.

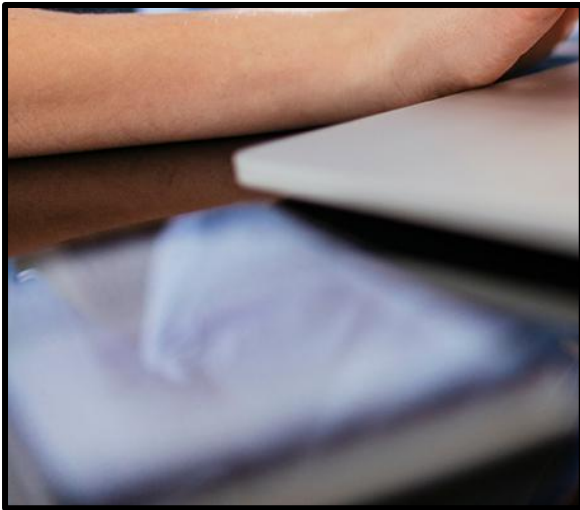
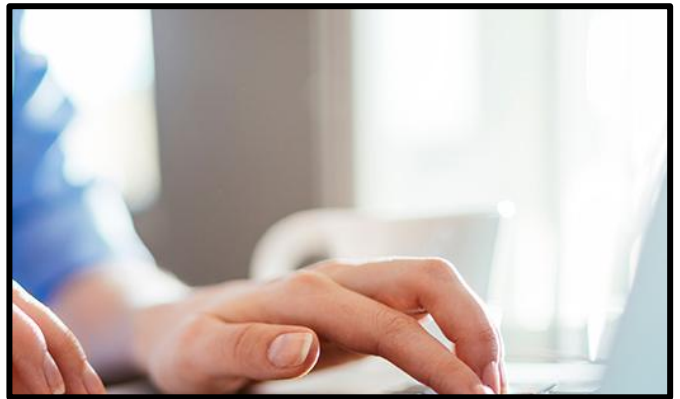
“If anyone was to go into the area I work in, I'd say they should definitely have an ICT related GCSE. I'd be totally lost without the Computing GCSE I have.”

Sam, Digital Marketing Specialist at a London startup company



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SUBJECTS WITH INTERNAL ASSESSMENT



ART: ART AND DESIGN (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Fine Art is the practice of creating original pieces of art through exploring ideas, conveying experiences or responding to a theme or issue of personal significance in a visual way. The contexts in which you could work during this GCSE course are: drawing, painting, sculpture, installation, photography, film, printmaking, mixed media and land art. Digital photography, drawing, annotation and artist research is part of each project.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Art And Design follow the AQA specification and the course concludes with a 10-hour examination with 10 weeks preparation time at the end of Year 11. This is worth 40% of the final GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

GCSE Art and Design requires pupils to complete a portfolio of work from September of Year 10 until the January of Year 11. This is worth 60% of the final GCSE.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Levels in Fine Art, Photography, and Textiles. GCSE Art and Design would also be a requirement for both Art Foundation and University degrees in all of the creative subjects.

Which careers require GCSE Art and Design?

A GCSE in Art and Design can lead to a range of career opportunities in the creative industries including: fine art; fashion and textile design; graphic design; interior design; illustration; architecture; advertising; film and TV; photography; games design; digital design; and animation.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr Sutcliffe, the Head of Art.

“Whenever I advertise a job I get far more applications than I originally thought I would when I set my business up, but obviously one of the first things I look for is a qualification in Art. I rely on word of mouth and if I had an artist who was no good at art, I'd have serious problems!”

Lizzie, Tattoo Artist and tattoo parlour owner



ART: PHOTOGRAPHY (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Photography is the practice of producing images using light-sensitive materials such as photographic film, or digital methods of development and production to create static or moving images. The contexts in which you could work are: portraiture, locations, studio photography, experimental imagery, installation, documentary photography, photo-journalism, fashion photography or moving images: film, video and animation. Contexts may be combined and overlap.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Photography follow the AQA specification and the course concludes with a 10-hour examination with 10 weeks preparation time at the end of Year 11. This is worth 40% of the final GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

GCSE Photography requires pupils to complete a portfolio of work from the September of Year 10 until the January of Year 11. This is worth 60% of the final GCSE.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Levels in Fine Art, Photography and Textiles. GCSE Photography would also be useful for both Art Foundation and University degrees in Photography, TV, Film, Media and Animation.

Which careers require GCSE Photography?

A GCSE in Photography can lead to a range of career opportunities in the creative industries including: photography; fashion; advertising; animation; film; TV; digital design; and website design.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr Sutcliffe, the Head of Art.

“Every single skill I use in my job I learnt when I did GCSE Photography. I’d never have gone into this line of work without it.”

Ste, self-employed Wedding Photographer



ART: TEXTILE DESIGN (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Fashion and textile design is the creation of designs and products for woven, knitted, stitched, printed or decorative textiles that might have a functional or non-functional purpose. The contexts in which you could work are; fine art textiles, fashion design and illustration, costume design, constructed textiles, printed and dyed textiles, surface pattern, stitched and embellished textiles, soft furnishings and textiles for interiors, digital textiles and installed textiles.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Textile Design follow the AQA specification and the course concludes with a 10-hour examination with 10 weeks preparation time at the end of Year 11. This is worth 40% of the final GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

GCSE Textile Design requires pupils to complete a portfolio of work from the September of Year 10 until the January of Year 11. This is worth 60% of the final GCSE.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Levels in Fine Art, Photography and Textiles. GCSE Textile Design would also be useful for Art Foundation and University degrees in fashion including: Illustration; Body Contour; Textiles and Surface Design; Costume Design and Creative Direction; and Fashion Communication.

Which careers require GCSE Textile Design?

A GCSE in Textile Design can lead to a wide range of career opportunities in the creative industries including: fashion; costume design for TV, film and stage; and interior design.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr Sutcliffe, the Head of Art.



ART: GRAPHIC DESIGN (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Graphic Design is a specialist type of art that uses typography, photography and illustration to design visual material that conveys information, ideas, meaning and emotions. Pupils will produce art work in the following contexts: advertising, books, magazines, posters, computer games, product packaging, exhibitions, websites, displays and creating visual 'brands'.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Graphic Design follow the AQA specification and the course concludes with a 10-hour examination with 10 weeks preparation time at the end of Year 11. This is worth 40% of the final GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

GCSE Graphic Design requires pupils to complete a portfolio of work from the September of Year 10 until the January of Year 11. This is worth 60% of the final GCSE.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

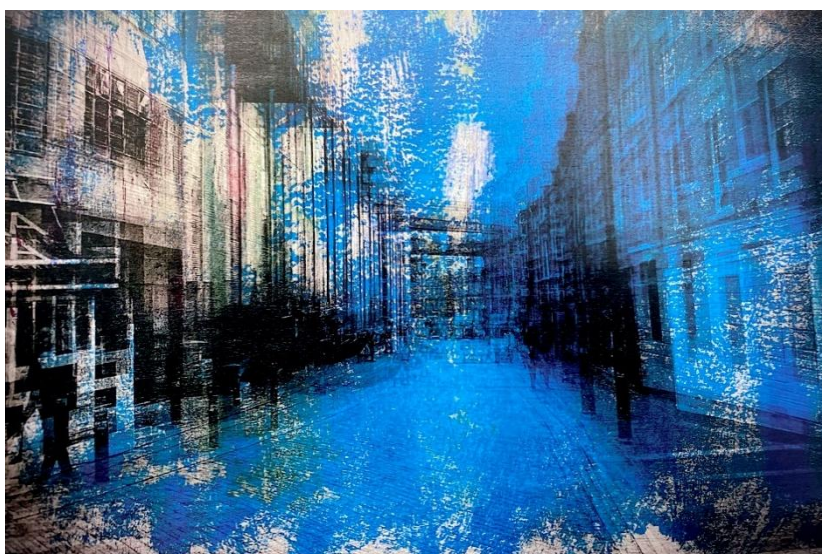
St Leonard's offers A Levels in Fine Art, Photography and Textiles. GCSE Graphic Design would also be useful for Art Foundation and University degrees in fashion including: Graphic Design, Illustration and Fine Art.

Which careers require GCSE Graphic Design?

A GCSE in Graphic Design can lead to a wide range of career opportunities in the creative industries including graphic design and illustration.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mr Sutcliffe, the Head of Art.



MUSIC (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Music at GCSE allows you to be creative and expressive whilst learning a huge amount about how music works. The course is split into five areas: My Music; The Concerto Through Time; Rhythms of the World, Film Music and Conventions of Pop. GCSE Music for those who enjoy listening to and performing music as well as learning new skills and being creative.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Music follow the OCR specification and the course concludes with a ninety-minute listening examination worth 40% of the GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

GCSE Music requires pupils to complete two performances - one solo performance and one ensemble performance (worth 30% of the GCSE) – and complete two compositions (worth another 30% of the GCSE).

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Level Music and some pupils may wish to pursue a BTEC National Award in Music.

Which careers require GCSE Music?

A GCSE in Music can lead to a range of careers in the music industry, for example performing; songwriting; composing; live music entertainment; music education; music production; artist management; marketing and PR; music journalism; and sound technician.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Anyan & Mrs Hastie, the Head of Music.



PHYSICAL EDUCATION (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Building on the knowledge, understanding and skills established in Key Stage 3, the GCSE Physical Education course covers anatomy and physiology, factors affecting participation in physical activity, socio-cultural influences and wellbeing and the safety aspects of physical activity. There is a large percentage of the theory aspect of this course, which uses data analysis.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Physical Education follow the AQA specification and the course concludes with two exams, which between them are worth 60% of the GCSE:

- The Human Body and Movement: 1 hour and 15 minutes
- Socio-Cultural Influences: 1 hour 15 minutes

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

There are six sections to the coursework on the GCSE Physical Education course, comprising of analysis and evaluation of performance. 10% of the GCSE is through written coursework, with an additional 30% of the GCSE being made up of practical sports.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Level Physical Education and BTEC Diploma in Sport.

Which careers require GCSE Physical Education?

A GCSE in Physical Education is important in a number of careers, covering everything from a leisure centre manager to a lifeguard; and from a performance sports scientist to sports and exercise physiologist.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Hockaday, the Head of Physical Education.

“The theory part of the PE GCSE has been one of the most important things I’ve learnt given the career I’ve chosen.”

Dario, Personal Trainer at Bannatyne's



DESIGN TECHNOLOGY: PRODUCT DESIGN (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

The Product Design GCSE allows pupils to study core technical, design and making principles, including a broad range of design processes, materials, techniques and equipment. They will also have the opportunity to study specialist technical principles in greater depth. Pupils will appreciate the design world and work closely with a real client in order to address their needs and wants in a working prototype.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Product Design will conclude the course with one two-hour examination, which is worth 50% of the GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

As well as the examination at the end of Year 11, pupil will complete one electronic PowerPoint file (consisting of 20 A3 slides) and practical (prototype) outcome. This is also worth 50% of the GCSE.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's offers A Level Product Design and some pupils may wish to pursue an apprenticeship or a Level 3 Engineering course.

Which careers require GCSE Product Design?

A GCSE in Product Design can open up career paths in engineering, for example as an Industrial Designer Maintenance or Service Engineer. This GCSE is also important for careers in manufacturing and product design.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Gerrens the Head of Technology.



DESIGN TECHNOLOGY: FOOD (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

Pupils who opt to study the Food GCSE will learn about food components and their function; food processing and manufacturing; the consumer market; product design; and manufacture. The course focuses on practical cooking skills to ensure students develop a thorough understanding of nutrition, food provenance and the working characteristics of food materials. This qualification focuses on nurturing students' practical cookery skills to give them a strong understanding of nutrition.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Food will conclude the course with one two-hour examination, which is worth 50% of the GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

As well as the examination at the end of Year 11, pupil will complete a controlled assessment consisting of a design folder and several practical activities. A written report based on a range of practical experiments will need to be created. All theory covered will be underpinned by practical activities throughout the course.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

Although Food Technology is no longer offered as a Post 16 option, pupils who study GCSE Food will find that much of what they have learnt compliments other A Levels and BTECs, for example using the in-depth knowledge of food and nutrition they will have gained over the Key Stage 4 course.

Which careers require GCSE Food?

If you wish to pursue a career in nutrition and dietetics; medicine; nursing; food science; food product development; quality assurance and control; food technology; hospitality; food merchandising; or food manufacture, among many others then this course would be an excellent choice.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Grainger the subject lead for Food Technology.

DESIGN TECHNOLOGY: TEXTILES (GCSE)

Why study this subject?

The Design Technology: Textiles GCSE allows pupils to study core technical and designing and making principles, including a broad range of design processes, materials techniques and equipment. You will appreciate the design world and work closely with a real client in order to address their needs and wants in a working prototype.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying GCSE Textiles will conclude the course with one two-hour examination, which is worth 50% of the GCSE.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

As well as the examination at the end of Year 11, pupil will complete a design folder and a practical. The design folder and practical is worth the other 50% of the GCSE.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

A GCSE in Textiles can lead to A Level Fashion and Textiles or A Level Art and Design. Pupils may also wish to explore a BTEC or a degree in textiles-related studies.

Which careers require GCSE Textiles?

Careers related to GCSE Textiles include fashion and costume design; historical costume restoration; interior design; manufacturing; retail buying; marketing; textile science; and textile technology.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Grainger, the Subject Lead for Textiles.

OPTIONS 2026

VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS



These subjects are courses that result in qualifications other than GCSEs – either BTECs or NCFE Technical Awards.

ENGINEERING (NCFE TECHNICAL AWARD)

Why study this subject?

This qualification is appropriate for learners who are motivated and challenged by learning through hands-on experiences and through content which is directly related to those experiences. The study of Engineering is the application of mathematics and science to solve real world problems. This involves an understanding of the different disciplines of engineering and how they have shaped the products and projects of the modern world. Learners will be able to read technical drawings, select appropriate materials along with tools and machinery, and know how to carry out a practical task, working in a safe manner in line with current health and safety legislation.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying Engineering will conclude the course with one ninety-minute examination, which is worth 40% of the qualification.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

As well as the examination at the end of Year 11, pupil will complete an externally set, internally marked and externally moderated synoptic project. This is worth 60% of the qualification.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

The NCFE Technical Award in Engineering can lead to a Level 3 Applied General in Engineering or a Level 3 Technical Level National Foundation Diploma in Engineering. Pupils also have the option of pursuing a Technical Level (T Level) qualification. The NCFE qualification in Engineering will also be useful for A Levels in Mathematics, Further Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Design Technology. These will support progression to higher education.

Which careers require Engineering?

Careers related to Engineering include employment in the engineering and manufacturing industry, as well as recruitment into the armed forces (for example engineering in the Royal Navy or Royal Air Force). Several apprenticeships are also available following the successful completion of the NCFE Technical Award in Engineering.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Gerrens, the Head of Technology.

SPORT (BTEC)

Why study this subject?

BTEC Sport builds on the knowledge, understanding and skills established in Key Stage 3. With this BTEC, pupils have the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge about different types of sport and physical activity, skills development and sports leadership along with their own practical performance. They'll also learn about contemporary issues in sport such as participation, ethics and role models, and sport and the media. Students develop an appreciation of the importance of sport locally and nationally, different ways of being involved in sport and how this shapes the sports industry. This qualification may be more suitable than GCSE Physical Education for pupils who prefer project work and more practical activities.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying BTEC Sport follow the Pearson specification. There are three units, the third of which (Unit 3: Developing Fitness to Improve Other Participants Performance in Sport and Physical Activity) is examined at the end of Year 11.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

The remaining two units of the BTEC (Unit 1: Preparing Participants to Take Part in Sport and Physical Activity and Unit 2: Taking Part and Improving Other Participants Sporting Performance) are internally assessed and externally moderated. Both internally assessed components require candidates to provide both photographic and video evidence of themselves participating in practical sport for assessment purposes.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

St Leonard's currently offers Level 3 BTEC Extended Diploma in Sport as part of our Sixth Form offer.

Which careers require BTEC Sport?

A BTEC in Sport is important in a number of careers, covering everything from a personal trainer to an exercise physiologist, and from a sports therapist to a fitness centre manager.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Hockaday, the Head of Physical Education.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE (BTEC)

Why study this subject?

The Pearson BTEC Level 2 Tech Award in Health and Social Care has been designed for pupils who want to acquire sector-specific applied knowledge through vocational contexts by studying human lifespan development, health and social care services and values, and health and wellbeing as part of their Key Stage 4 learning. The qualification recognises the value of learning skills, knowledge and vocational attributes to complement GCSEs.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying BTEC Health and Social Care cover three components. Component three is designed to be synoptic (drawing together knowledge from the previous components) and the external assessment is taken towards the end of the course.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

Components one and two of the BTEC are internally assessed and externally moderated.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

Studying this qualification will help pupils to make more informed choices for further learning, either generally or within this sector. Pupils that enjoy and achieve at level 2 can progress to either A Levels as preparation for entry to higher education in a range of subjects or the study of a vocational qualification at Level 3, such as a BTEC National in Health and Social Care, which prepares learners to enter employment or apprenticeships, or to move on to higher education by studying a degree in the health or social care sector.

Which careers require BTEC Health and Social Care?

BTEC Health and Social Care is useful for several career paths, including care assistance to help clients live independently; medical care assistance within a hospital ward or in an Accident and Emergency department; nursery nursing; play therapy or play co-ordination; social work; various nursing roles; service management; etc.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Mrs Henderson, the Subject Leader for Health and Social Care.

CREATIVE MEDIA (BTEC)

Why study this subject?

The BTEC Tech Award in Creative Media Production provides learners with the opportunity to gain a broad understanding and knowledge across the digital media sectors. The course examines how creative digital media is used within our everyday lives and allows students to investigate digital media sectors, products and platforms.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying BTEC Creative Media course currently follow the Edexcel specification. The course is split into three components and the third component (Component 3: Create a media product in response to a brief) is a practical examination which is set and marked by Edexcel. This will take place over 10 hours of supervised sessions.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (NEA)?

Components one (Exploring Media Products) and component two (Developing Media Production Skills) of the BTEC are internally assessed and externally moderated.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

BTEC Creative Media lends itself very well to Level 3 BTEC ICT, which is one of the courses currently offered at the Sixth Form at St Leonard's.

Which careers require BTEC Creative Media Production?

BTEC Creative Media lends itself well to careers within the gaming and digital creative media industries, such as a junior role working in moving image production, audio production, website production or digital games production and many other ICT related careers.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Miss Maughan, the Head of Computer Science.

DIGITAL IT (BTEC)

Why study this subject?

The BTEC Tech Award in Digital Information Technology provides learners with the opportunity to gain a broad understanding and knowledge across the digital media sectors. The course examines how creative digital media is used within our everyday lives and allows students to investigate digital media sectors, products and platforms.

How will I be assessed?

Pupils studying the BTEC Tech Award in Digital Information Technology course currently follow the Edexcel specification. The course is split into three components and Component 3 – Effective Digital Working Practices is an external assessment which is set and marked by Edexcel. The assessment will be completed in 1 hour 30 minutes within the window timetabled by Pearson.

Is there any coursework or Non-Examined Assessment (PSA)?

There are two Pearson Set Assignments (PSAs) Component 1 - Exploring User Interface Design Principles and Project Planning Techniques and Component 2 - Collecting, Presenting and Interpreting Data which are internally assessed and externally moderated.

What can this qualification lead to in Post-16 education?

BTEC Tech Award in Digital Information Technology lends itself very well to Level 3 BTEC ICT, which is one of the courses currently offered at the Sixth Form at St Leonard's.

Which careers require BTEC Digital Information Technology?

The BTEC Tech Award in Digital Information Technology lends itself well to careers within the digital sector and prepares learners to enter employment or apprenticeships, or to move on to higher education by studying a degree in the digital sector.

Where can I find out more information about this course?

For more information, contact Miss Maughan, the Head of Computer Science.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

At this point in Year 9, you are being asked to make choices about which subjects to study in Years 10 and 11. You may not have decided on a career path yet and you are finding your choices difficult. Do not worry about this – you are certainly not alone. There are pupils in schools across the country who are in the same situation.

Even if you have a good idea now about a future career, you may find that you change your mind in the months to come. Research even suggests it can take nine years from first being introduced to a subject to discovering that you have a genuine passion for it.

In our school we help you through this time in two ways. We have designed the option system in such a way that it will give you a balanced choice of subjects that will let you take different career paths in the future even if you do change your mind. Secondly, we provide you with Careers Education throughout Years 9, 10 and 11. Careers advice in school is intended to help you think realistically about yourself and what would suit you.

INTO THE FUTURE, INTO THE SIXTH FORM

The vast majority of pupils at St Leonard's stay on after Key Stage 4 and enter the Sixth Form. This is for a number of reasons, namely through providing an excellent learning and caring environment along with a range of courses which meet the needs of students entering post-16 education. The Sixth Form has been recognised as one of the top performing state Post-16 providers when it comes to university admissions ("St Leonard's Catholic School in County Durham has the best record for sending students to the Oxford and Cambridge universities in the North East" – Chronicle Live, 11 November 2023).

It is very important for you to be aware of these opportunities now, even though you're in Year 9 and not in Year 11. Some of your choices at GCSE may affect your Sixth Form choices, your Higher Education choices and ultimately your career choices. All students will follow one of two routes in the Sixth Form:

Route A: The GCE A Level Route

A-levels will be linear with assessment at the end of the two-year course. Parents and pupils will be updated as more information becomes available.

Route B: The Vocational Route

Vocational courses differ from GCE Advanced levels in that they place a greater emphasis on coursework and assignments produced over a period of time; the earning is related to the world of work; and work experience is an integral part of the course.

Full details of the Sixth Form courses available at St Leonard's are available on the school website: stleonardsdurham.bwcet.com/sixth-form/students/choosing-your-options



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