

A-Level Frequently Asked Questions

If any student or parent has been unable to attend any of our Sixth Form Open Evening events, we are conscious that you will not have had the opportunity to ask our current students and staff questions that you might have concerning the Sixth Form at Balcarras, and the courses we offer.

With that in mind, with the help of our current Sixth Form students and Heads of Department, we have compiled this 'Frequently Asked Questions' document as a supplement to our Sixth Form prospectus and other admissions information available on our website.

We have tried to answer the questions most often raised in our Open Evening discussions with potential applicants.

If you do have further questions, please do contact me at:

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Balcarras



A-Level Frequently Asked Questions

When is the application deadline?

24th February 2021

Will I have an opportunity to change my subject option choices?

Potentially, yes. We will offer you a post-application interview later this spring, in which we will discuss your option choices, their relevance to your post-18 career aspirations, and your current GCSE progress and attainment. At this point, and later in the autumn once the GCSE results are published, there will be an opportunity to review your subject options.

What should I do if I missed the Open Evening consultations this January?

Don't worry! Do feel free to contact us, and we can arrange a consultation for you. If this cannot be arranged in person, we would be happy to arrange a Teams or telephone consultation to offer further advice.

Are all students expected to study 4 A levels in Y12?

Yes. We really value the breadth and diversity offered by beginning A levels with 4 courses, and firmly believe that this is an important factor in the progress and attainment our students make. If you have any particular concerns regarding our curriculum offer, or are a student with particular educational needs, please do contact us.

Do all students study the EPQ?

Yes. In Y12 all students receive lessons for the EPQ, in which vital study and research skills are taught.

Do Balcarras Sixth Form students have 'free periods'?

Not as such! All our students are expected to attend our supervised study rooms in their 'non-contact' lessons. This is fundamental to our Sixth Form ethos, and the good study habits this forms, along with helping students maintain a healthy work-life balance, are crucial elements in the progress and attainment our students make.

A-Level Frequently Asked Questions

What are the entry criteria to join Balcarras Sixth Form?

Our minimum entry criteria is:

2 x grade 6 and 3 x grade 5 at GCSE level, to include English and maths.

Please note, for some subjects there are additional GCSE grade criteria – please see our prospectus and entry criteria document on the website for further details.

We also have an over-subscription criteria. Again, details of this can be found in the admissions section of our website.

Is Balcarras planning to change its published entry criteria?

No changes are currently planned.

How large will my classes be?

This will vary slightly from subject to subject, but our optimum class size is 15-20 students.

Our Courses:

Art

Biology

Business Studies

Chemistry

Computer Science

Drama

Economics

English Literature

Environmental Science

Food Science and Nutrition

French

Further Mathematics

Geography

Health & Social Care

History

Mathematics

Music

Photography

Physical Education

Physics

Politics

Product Design

Psychology

Religion, Philosophy & Ethics

Russian

Spanish

Textiles

What units is the course made up of?

The course is made up of two units. The coursework unit runs from September of Y12 up until January of Y13. The course has been designed to allow students to experiment with new approaches and materials. We cover a range of topics ranging from abstract art to the figure- but the main focus is the learning of new techniques. The course moves forward with weekly or two weekly challenges been set. The course has been designed to catch all sorts of different types of artists and this accounts for the success over the years. The only thing that the students require is enthusiasm. From January Y13 the students embark on the examination unit- This is set by AQA and students will be given a list of starting points for them to research and respond to. This culminates in a practical examination in May.

Will I have to write essays?

The course is primarily a practical one. Students will have the opportunity to discuss art history throughout the coursework unit, but the only piece of writing required is in Y13. This is where students submit a supportive piece of text with their practical investigation. The piece of text is a great opportunity for students to show off their understanding of the wider context of their work.

How much work outside of lessons am I expected to do?

In Y12 and Y13 you will have 9 lessons every two weeks. You will have two teachers- who will be both working on the same course requirements. Art is a practical subject and of course there are time pressures. However, the course has been designed to be fun, pacy, and overall a strong learning experience. At this level we would argue that A level art is like a club that you join and the work that you do is almost viewed as recreational. On a sixth form timetable, students have a set of private study sessions- the art students are more than welcome to come over to the art block during these times to continue with their practical work.

What equipment will I need?

We use sketchbooks at A level and you would be required to supply your own. The studios are well stocked with basic equipment but students would be expected to have their own set of acrylics, brushes, glue, pencils etc. Most students still have this equipment left over from GCSE.

Who does A level art?

We would argue that we get two different types of students. Those who might be interested in a career in one of the creative industries. And those who want to pursue it recreationally as it is a different type of learning experience. The rule of thumb for those who might want to work in one of the creative industries is that students would complete their A level art here then do a Foundation course. This is a free course offered by the county council to art students to access any of the disciplines. So even though we do A level fine art here students go on to study animation, graphic design, car design, illustration, film, architecture, fine art ... and many more. A foundation is not mandatory to get to art college, but a lot of art students do this.

Which other subjects best complement biology?

Not necessarily but there are some subjects that have overlapping content and skills. These are (in order of how valuable they are to a biologist): maths, chemistry, environmental science, psychology and PE. There are many students who take biology and none of the other subjects listed here, who are very successful biologists. It is simply helpful sometimes to have complementary additional subjects.

Is it hard?

Biology, like any A level, is a challenging subject. Some students find the transition from GCSE to A level difficult due to the increase in volume of content that must be learnt. It will be essential to work hard from the beginning of Year 12 And it's worth it – not only is biology highly relevant and engaging but in the current global situation biologists are saving the world!

Do I need to be good at maths?

The short answer is, “Yes!” 10% of the marks in written exams will involve mathematical calculations. These will test you at GCSE higher level and above. You will be taught any extra maths you need (such as statistical tests) within your biology lessons.

AQA say: *“In order to be able to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in Biology, students need to have been taught, and to have acquired competence in, the appropriate certain areas of mathematics. Overall, at least 10% of the marks in assessments for biology will require the use of mathematical skills. These skills will be applied in the context of biology and will be at least the standard of higher tier GCSE mathematics.”*

How many exams are there?

The full A level is examined in 3 papers, lasting 2 hours each.

The first 2 papers split the content of the course, with topics 1 to 4 (Y12 work) examined in Paper 1 and topics 5 to 8 (Y13 work) examined Paper 2.

Paper 3 places more emphasis on practical techniques and analysis of experimental data. Questions are taken from all topics and have a more synoptic feel to them. The final question involves writing an essay in response to one, from a choice of two, overarching questions. The essay is marked out of 25 and so comprises 10% of the final assessment. A high level of literacy is needed to be successful in A level biology.

Is there a lot of practical lab work?

There are 12 required practical assessments that must be completed across the 2-year course (6 per year) and we add some additional practical activities where appropriate to compliment the course content. Practical includes (but is not limited to) chemical testing of biological molecules, dissection, investigating woodlice responses and microscope work.

Knowledge of practical procedures and skills involved in interpreting data are assessed within the written exams. Answers to these questions contribute to the final grade. In addition, students may be awarded the practical endorsement. This is a pass or fail award that recognises students' competence in 5 key areas of practical skill. It is reported separately to the exam grade and assessed in class by observation of practical tasks and lab books. Many universities now look for a pass grade in the practical endorsement as an entry requirement for science courses.

Business Studies FAQs

Is the material the same as Business GCSE?

There are some topics that are the same but the majority of the theory in the A level syllabus is new and will still stretch and challenge those students who have already studied GCSE business. In addition to this, any topics taught at A level would obviously be in much more depth than at GCSE level.

Is it a big disadvantage if I have not done GCSE Business?

Not at all! The students that have not studied Business at GCSE level can and often do outperform those that have studied /GCSE Business previously. It is not a problem at all if you haven't studied Business before, and this certainly should not deter you from applying for this course.

Is there much finance involved?

About 10% of the course involves mathematical elements such as market growth, HR and finance calculations. Students should be comfortable with managing data but the maths skills required to succeed in an A level Business course are actually very simple and straightforward. If you have grade 5 or above in GCSE Maths you will be able to succeed in the financial elements of this course.

How many exams are there?

There are no coursework modules involved in this course. You will have three exams at the end of the course that will draw on a range of skills and the subject content taught across the course.

Is it hard?

Yes and no. Chemistry is regarded as one of the most challenging A levels because it tests you in so many areas. You will need good mathematical as well as well as a knowledge of practical skills. The ability to apply knowledge is essential for the top grades. But if you are prepared to work hard from the start and ask for help when you will, need it, then it's a challenge that will be rewarding and achievable. Interestingly, many of the comments written in our student surveys have stated that it is the challenge of the subject that makes it enjoyable.

What grades do I need?

6 in science or chemistry and a 6 in maths. The 6 in maths is really important, because students that have less than 6 in maths can struggle with the maths content which makes up 20% of the course.

What subjects 'go well' with chemistry?

Number 1: maths. It supports Chemistry as 20% of the course is mathematical skills. Doing A level maths is not essential. That said, I would recommend it as it helps to give students an added confidence when it comes to the 'simpler' chemistry calculations. Chemistry supports biology. If you choose biology, we suggest doing chemistry as well. The other subjects that are often taken with chemistry are physics and geography. There is no definitive list of subjects that go well though and we have had plenty of students that have taken music, theatre studies, English and history to name but a few.

Is there much practical work?

15% of the course is assessing your practical skills. You will learn about different kinds of experimental techniques. There are some topics that are purely theoretical and won't have any experimenting. As a rule of thumb, we aim to carry out one practical a week. Students are encouraged to be hands on and not watch others.

Is there a big jump between GCSE and A level?

All A levels have a jump. How big it is depends on what you have remembered from GCSE. Our advice would be to try to do some consolidation work on the important GCSE topics during the summer holiday. We have 'bridging' resources available on our website and the VLE to help you do that.

What courses and careers does chemistry lead to?

Chemistry is a 'facilitating' subject and will open doors to many universities and degree courses. Chemistry can lead to careers in medicine, dentistry, veterinary care as well as opportunities in pharmacy and environmental work. You would be surprised how many lawyers and accountants have taken chemistry!

What are the results like?

Our Chemistry department has achieved 69% A*-B and 90% A-C at A level. This is consistent over the last nine years. It is consistently above the school and national averages. This is not just because many of the most academically able students study chemistry. The value added for chemistry students is also strong. Our students work hard and this is why they do so well.

Computer Science FAQs

Why chose Computer Science?

Computers are now at the heart of everything we do, they impact not only our personal lives but our working environments too. With continued advancements in technology, throughout all industries, it is important to stay a step ahead and ensure you have not only the understanding but the skills to match too. You can make computers work for you and give you that competitive edge required in the workplace.

Computer Science is a practical subject where learners can apply the academic principles learned in the classroom to real world systems. It is an intensely creative subject that combines invention and excitement; and can look at the natural world through a digital prism. Computer Science will value computational thinking, helping learners to develop the skills to solve problems, design systems and understand the power and limits of human and machine intelligence. Learners will also develop an ability to analyse, critically evaluate and make decisions.

Is it hard?

The A-level course is certainly a step up from GCSE, however, it has a very similar structure, so the course content is an extension of your knowledge, building on what has been already taught. It does require a 6 grade at GCSE to reflect that you require the solid level of understanding to continue on to A-level.

Do we have to complete a project?

Yes. The project is worth 20% of the overall grade. The project approach is a vital component of 'post-school' life and is of particular relevance to Further Education, Higher Education and the workplace. Each learner is able to tailor their project to fit their individual needs, choices and aspirations.

What grades do I need to study the course?

A GCSE grade 6 in computer science along with a 6 in maths as it helps to understand the mathematical content and have a logical mind.

Which subjects combine well with Computer Science?

Computer science has strong connections to many other subjects, such as: mathematics, further mathematics, physics, economics and even psychology, for those wishing to work in the field of AI. However, with all industries making technological advancements, whichever subjects you chose you are likely to find a link. Students who wish to study for a computer science degree should consider combining it with A level mathematics as this is a pre-requisite at many universities.

How well do pupils do on the course?

For the last three years our A-level results have consistently put us in the top 10% of the country.

Computer Science FAQs

What can Computer Science lead to?

The majority of our pupils selecting subjects at university in areas such as computer science, robotics, artificial intelligence and cyber security. We have also had a number find apprenticeships, allowing them to study a degree whilst working for a company and receiving a wage. There are many opportunities in the ever-growing field of computer science.

Even if you do not wish to study the subject further, you will be well set up for our technological world no matter which industry you chose, as in today's world, computer science impacts just about every aspect of our lives, with continual advancements in technology and modern life more integrated with computers than ever. The demand for skills and knowledge in this field is on the increase and whether you wish to pursue a career in engineering, medicine, business, maths or science, you will certainly gain an employability advantage.

Do I need to have studied drama at GCSE level?

Absolutely not! Whilst the majority of our candidates have some previous experience at GCSE or beyond school, we have also welcomed many excellent students who have not studied drama before. Indeed, a mix of diverse experiences makes the learning environment even better! Having fresh ideas from students new to the subject is great. The main things needed for us at A level are - to meet the general sixth form entrance criteria, to be enthusiastic, and commit to learning about this wonderful art form.

What subjects work with drama?

Any! Drama may be your main passion or the 'something different' A level that adds variety to your weekly schedule – and, importantly, breadth to your UCAS application. Candidates' other subjects are from across the spectrum of all available courses. Because drama is a hybrid art form it offers a chance to experience dimensions of all other arts subjects - including music, art, movement, and design. We also look at sound, lighting and projections. So, there are complementary elements to all subjects, or nice contrasts.

Sometimes a student doing maths, computing and/or sciences will opt for drama as their extra A level, they may also be particularly interested in the technical drama skills. People studying English, humanities, languages, psychology, business or other arts will have plenty of crossover learning – such as the study of various texts and journals, looking at the experiences, behaviour and attitudes that informs different times and cultures. We also study elements of visual design.

Who does drama suit?

Whether you see yourself as quite confident or rather shy, drama can be a fantastic experience that will develop you as a person, an artist and an academic. Those who love performance will learn how to add more sophistication and rigour to their work, whilst people who may lack some confidence can learn strategies not just to cope, but to excel in the modern interconnected world. The subject enables students to develop both independent learning skills and group work. It is also a nice way to build longstanding friendships.

What can I do with a drama A level?

Well, firstly, it's important to know that drama is an A level with the same points as all other subjects. Students go on to a wide range of different degrees or other post-18 opportunities. We've taught people who have gone into almost every field of work - although I don't think we've taught an astronaut - yet! For those considering a life in the arts or media, we do have an established track record of students going on to drama school or university. Some ultimately go into the professional world of television, film and theatre - as actors, technicians, writers, directors, designers or journalists. You can study drama at degree level - either as a single honours subject or as part of a combined honours degree. There are many combinations available and you may be surprised to see the range of possibilities!

It's also worth bearing in mind that drama offers many transferable skills. A level will develop these. Indeed, drama graduates often go on to work in other careers too.

How well off for facilities is Balcarras?

There are 2 full time, experienced drama specialists who share A level teaching. Balcarras has 2 purpose designed studios, plus a fully equipped main hall. Each space has up to date lighting, sound and projector rigs. We also have 2 technicians and an apprenticeship scheme. We regularly update our technical equipment to stay in touch with latest developments – for example, we were amongst the first schools to integrate LED lighting fixtures into our operational rig. All our spaces have Bluetooth interfaces so students can use the PA from their phones. We also have extra bright industry standard projection capability to enable clearer projections amid vivid stage lighting. Last year, we bought a new sound mixing desk for our major shows – incidentally, this initiative was led by a current Year 12 student.

Are there opportunities to use the equipment and develop technical skills?

Yes! We do major productions every year, involving hundreds of students - this year, due to temporary Covid restrictions, we made a film instead. Such experiences offer a range of opportunities to work in technical, performance or front of house areas. Our A level practical exams are another major part of our school year and offer access to the full range of facilities.

Can I take Business and Economics together?

Absolutely yes! We have not heard of a university that doesn't accept the subjects together in recent years, and it would seem to be a myth if anyone tells you otherwise. There is minimal cross over between the courses and syllabus content is very different but they do support each other well.

Do many students take both?

Yes. There is always a number of students that select the subjects together. The subjects supplement each other well.

Is there lots of Maths involved in Economics?

There is about 10-15% of the A level which is more mathematical and requires the ability to analyse and interpret data and statistics, but actually being able to write a good quality evaluative essay is much more important in economics. As a result, a grade 6 in both English and maths.

How is Economics different to Business?

Economics covers fewer topics but you might say that the economics course has more depth, with the business studies course having more breadth. Economics attempts to explain how the actions and decisions of firms, consumers, workers and governments affect the operation of the economy. It requires a fair deal of analysis and includes topics such as supply and demand, growth, inflation, globalisation and exchange rates. Business studies is more concerned with the actions and decisions taken by firms and focuses on topics such as marketing, human resources, finance, strategy and production methods. Business studies students will also have to cover some economics, as it affects how businesses operate in their external environments.

English Literature FAQs

Do you have to like reading?

Absolutely! No-one would choose to study A level PE who didn't like sports and so you have to love reading to study A level English! You obviously read the books that you are studying and these will have to be re-read a number of times to fully understand them. We would also encourage you to read at home for pleasure and to read other books by the writers that you are doing.

How many books would I study?

We study 8 'texts' in total on the course (1 Shakespeare play, 1 modern play, 2 books of poetry and 4 novels). You will have two teachers both of whom will be teaching a different text and so you will always have two texts on the go at any one time. We ask you to buy your own copies of each of the texts that we study so that you can make plenty of notes on them. All the exams that you do are 'open book' so for the exam itself we will provide you with a 'clean copy' of the text (no notes on it).

Is English Literature A Level the same as at GCSE?

Yes and no. This is literature, not language, and so we still study poetry, plays and novels, but the course does not include any creative writing or non-fiction as these were part of the English language exam. A level texts are studied in much greater depth than at GCSE. We also read critical essays which is where we look at what other people (critics) have said about the text and you are expected to incorporate their opinions into your own essays. Classes are much smaller than at GCSE, usually around 12 to 15 students, and so you will have more opportunities to express your ideas.

English Literature FAQs

Is there any coursework?

Yes, and this is a big difference with GCSE. Coursework is worth 20% and will take the form of a single essay of 2,500 to 3,000 words. We will start preparing for your coursework essay in the summer term of Y12 and you will submit the final draft around Easter in Y13. In the essay you have to compare 2 texts (most students do two novels), although you can do non-fiction. We will guide you and direct you to texts that you could use and provide you with plenty of examples of texts that work well together, although the final choice of which texts to use will be yours. Most students really value and enjoy the coursework element as it gives them the chance to work more independently and to focus on books that they find really interesting.

What grade do I need to take English literature at A-Level?

A grade 6 in either English language or English literature.

Which other subjects complement English Literature?

The beauty of English literature is that it is such a varied, interesting and stimulating subject that complements a range of option choices. Particular subjects that would support your English Literature studies include: religion, philosophy and ethics; psychology and drama. However, it is completely up to you what subjects you choose and the other subjects are not essential for you to excel in English literature.

Do universities value English Literature?

YES! English literature is classed as a 'facilitating subject' and is widely respected by all universities. English literature will open doors as it will encourage you to become a critical thinker, improve your analytical talents and develop essay writing skills.

What are my career options if I take English Literature?

The list is endless! However, some key careers include: journalism, law, teaching, publishing and many more.

Environmental Science FAQs

What will I study in environmental science?

Environmental science is a broad subject with many interconnected systems and processes. You will study why the Earth is such an amazing planet and how it works; you will learn about the biological process necessary to maintain life on Earth as well as understanding how we rely on resources and services for our survival. Themes include wildlife conservation, pollution issues, global warming and the future use of energy.

Are there other subjects that I should do alongside environmental science?

Not necessarily but there are some subjects that have overlapping content and skills, such as biology, geography, chemistry, maths and even business.

Are there any trips on this course?

We have planned trips to: Cotswold Wildlife Park, IKEA, local conservation areas as well as a four day residential.

Do I need to be good at maths?

Consideration of environmental issues and the conclusions reached should be based on reliable evidence-based information and quantitative data. You will need to be able to interpret data in different forms such as tables, diagrams and graphs. If you have a GCSE grade 5 or above in maths, then you will be able to master the mathematical demand of this course.

What are the entry requirements?

GCSE grade 5 in combined science or in 2 sciences and grade 5 in maths

Environmental Science FAQs

How will I be assessed?

There is no coursework or NEA component to this qualification. The assessment is 100% exam. The A level consists of two exams: each are 3 hour exams and worth 50% each.

Do universities count environmental science as a 'science'?

Yes. If you are intending to take a science degree, it is often the case that two A-level sciences are required and environmental science is accepted alongside the more traditional 'core' sciences of biology, chemistry and physics.

What could I go on to study post-18 with environmental science?

There are currently 727 higher education environmental science courses at 106 institutions! These include; wildlife and environmental conservation, environmental Earth science, civil and environmental engineering, marine conservation, forestry, climate science and many more.

Food Science & Nutrition FAQs

I have not studied food since KS3 – can I opt for Level 3 food science and nutrition?

Although GCSE in food preparation and nutrition or hospitality and catering Level 2 is advantageous, it is possible to study this at Level 3, but we ask that you have ideally studied another DT subject (textiles or product design). There will be some gaps in your knowledge, but a willingness to learn and work hard soon overcomes this.

How much cooking do you do?

In year 12, you will be expected to cook nearly every week to build your practical skills and pace in cooking. Although there is a practical assessment, most marks are awarded for the theoretical understanding of nutrition and food science as demonstrated in written tasks. Do not pick this subject just because you like cooking! It has a great deal of academic rigour to it which often surprises students and makes it challenging to secure the high grades.

How is this subject graded?

There are 3 grades available: Pass, Merit and Distinction at Certificate level (year 12) and at Diploma level (year 13). Distinction * grade is only awarded when distinction grades have been achieved in all 4 units of assessment across the 2 years.

Pass - equivalent to E grade at A level

Merit C grade

Distinction A grade

PLEASE NOTE – there is no B or D grade equivalent.

What if I only want to study this subject for one year?

The good news is that if you discontinue this subject in year 13, but have successfully completed the units in year 12, you will be awarded the Certificate in Food Science and Nutrition which is a recognised qualification, which can contribute to your UCAS points tariff for some further education courses.

Food Science & Nutrition FAQs

What kind of careers can I go into with this qualification?

An understanding of food science and nutrition is relevant to many industries and job roles. Care providers and nutritionists in hospitals use this knowledge, as do sports coaches and fitness instructors. Hotels and restaurants, food manufacturers and government agencies also use this understanding to develop menus, food products and policies that support healthy eating initiatives. Many employment opportunities within the field of food science and nutrition are available to graduates.

Do universities accept this qualification?

Universities vary considerably with their entry requirements so if you have a specific qualification in mind, it is worth doing some background research , maybe even contacting the admissions tutors to seek up to date guidance.

NOTE – entry onto graduate courses in nutrition frequently require an A level science. to have been studied.

Why study French?

French is an official language in 29 countries, including France, Canada, Switzerland, Monaco, Luxembourg, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Haiti and Belgium. Spoken by over 300 million people over five continents, French is a truly global language. It is also the official language of many international organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, NATO and the World Trade Organisation.

Studying French at A level will allow you to enhance your knowledge of French language and culture. You will gain an insight into many aspects of life in France and Francophone society, improve your comprehension of contemporary French idioms and develop your oral and written communication skills in terms of fluency and appropriate linguistic register.

What do we study?

The scope of the specification is wide and rich: you will learn about French music, French cinema, the diversity of the French society as well as the different types of families in France and French-speaking countries for example. You will also study a film and a famous French play. In the second year, you will prepare an independent research project which will enable you to study a topic of your choice: you could do some research on literature or a period history thus creating some cross-curricular possibilities.

What grades do I need?

Minimum grade 6 at GCSE in French.

Are there other subjects that I should do alongside French?

There are so many subjects you can choose to do along with French: history, politics, philosophy and ethics, psychology, science, geography business, drama ... studying a modern foreign language will complement any programme of study. French will add extra skills to the ones acquired in other subjects and will make you stand out when applying to universities and for a job.

How many exams are there?

There are 3 exams at the end of Year 13. Paper 1 which comprises listening and reading questions as well as translation tasks, Paper 2 which contains the essays and Paper 3 which relates to the speaking component.

Is it hard?

No, provided that you have a good understanding of tenses and that you are able to memorise vocabulary you will be successful in French.

What courses and careers does French lead to?

French is a 'facilitating' subject and will open doors to many universities and degree courses. Some courses that students have gone on to study in recent years included: PPE, international business, international relations, law, medicine and French with another language. Some of our students have been able to go and study in France for example with the University of London Institute in Paris.

Modern languages students embark on a number of rewarding careers as translators, interpreters, researchers and teachers in Higher Education. Other examples include careers in publishing, business, law and banking.

Further Mathematics FAQs

What kind of maths is in further maths?

The pure part of the further maths course covers totally new, and hopefully exciting, types of mathematics. We start with complex numbers and matrices, both are hugely important areas of mathematics and are not covered at GCSE. These areas of mathematics have so many applications in all areas of STEM.

The statistics part of the course also pushes into new areas of statistics that you have not met at GCSE. We look at probability in more detail and carry out hypothesis tests related to real world applications. The mechanics part of the course has a big overlap with A level physics. We look into collisions between particles, energy in elastic springs and applying the vectors work that you learn in your pure lessons to real world applications.

How is further maths taught?

We teach the further maths course parallel to the A level course. So, you will still have your 9 'maths' lessons a fortnight, in a class with students who do not do further maths, but then you will have an extra 9 lessons with the further maths group. These lessons will be with another 2 or 3 different teachers. Some schools teach 'maths' in Year 12 and then 'further maths' in Year 13, but we do them both along side each other, which gives more flexibility for any students who just want to study further maths for 1 year.

Further Mathematics FAQs

How hard is further maths?

Further maths isn't necessarily harder maths, it's just more maths! To be successful, it is really important that you have a solid grasp on the GCSE content ready for the start of Year 12, so as long as you're confident with algebra, statistics and trigonometry from GCSE, you'll be fine. That's why we suggest an entry criteria of a grade 8 at GCSE.

Is further maths just for people who go on to do maths degrees?

No! In fact, it is almost essential if you wish to study maths, physics or any type of engineering post 18. If you wish to do one of these degrees, you will have to learn about complex numbers, vectors and matrices at some point, and it's a much better idea to do so in school with the support and guidance from your teachers than it is to leave it until you arrive in a university lecture hall. Especially when other people in your lecture group have already studied further maths, you don't want to be left behind from day one.

Do I definitely have to have done geography at GCSE to be able to take it at A level?

Yes, you do - there is a huge amount of content and skills covered at GCSE that gets built on at A level.

What Careers are linked to geography that makes it a useful A-level subject?

Geography has a huge range of career options. It is widely regarded as one of the most highly regarded degree choices by graduate employers. 90% of geographers gain employment within 6 months of finishing their degree. More carers information is available through the options presentation on the geography website and in the career's pages on the website and VLE.

How much fieldwork is there?

We value fieldwork very highly, there is a compulsory element of 4 days during the A level but we try to do more in the local area. We also run a foreign residential trip which is optional.

Is there any coursework?

Yes - the NEA is worth 20% of the final mark. It is an independent fieldwork study of the students own choice.

Health & Social Care FAQs

What is Health and Social Care?

These qualifications focus on the skills, knowledge and understanding that today's universities and employers demand should you aspire to a career in the health and social care sector. You will apply your skills and knowledge practically, in preparation for further study or the workplace.

What's the difference between the Certificate (Single H&SC) and the Diploma (Double H&SC)?

Students who study the Diploma tend to be students who love the subject and students who are sure they would like to go into the industry. They study more units and therefore they gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter and the industry. Students who study the Certificate would opt for three other subjects, whereas Diploma students would opt for two further A levels in any subject of their choosing. Students who study the Diploma have fewer exams and so this course may appeal to students who prefer independent study and assessment by coursework.

Why isn't it an A level?

There are no longer any A-levels in health and social care. Instead the OCR exam board offer this qualification and other exam boards offer other vocational qualifications including BTECs. We have found the Cambridge Technicals suit our students well. They are assessed fairly and the units are interesting, engaging and fun.

I've never studied health and social care before, can I study this course?

Absolutely! There will be, of course, students on the course who have studied the subject before however, we are sure that by the end of the first two weeks we will have brought you 'up to speed' and you will not feel different to the others in the class. This year some of the students in the class who have never studied health and social care before Year 12 are achieving the highest marks in the class!

Health & Social Care FAQs

What units will I be studying?

All students in Year 12 will study the following units:

Unit 1 – Building positive relationships (coursework)

Unit 2 – Equality, diversity and rights in health and social care (exam)

Unit 3 – Health, safety and security in health and social care (exam)

The Diploma students will study an additional three units in Year 12:

Unit 5 - Infection control (coursework)

Unit 7 – Safeguarding (exam)

Unit 13 – Sexual, reproduction and early development stages (coursework)

In Year 13 all students will study the mandatory unit:

Unit 4 – Anatomy and physiology for health and social care

In addition to this there are a range of optional coursework units for us to choose from including units on mental health, nutrition and physiological conditions.

For more specific information on each unit please read the department produced leaflets.

What grades do I need to get onto the course?

As a subject we welcome anyone who achieves the Balcarras minimum Sixth Form entry requirements. You do not need to have studied health and social care before and therefore there is no minimum subject grade to begin this course.

Health & Social Care FAQs

What do universities think of the qualification?

Cambridge Technicals are highly regarded by universities and as such they are given the same UCAS points as A level qualifications:

Distinction*: (A-level Grade A*) – 56 UCAS Tariff Points

Distinction: (A-level Grade A) – 48 UCAS Tariff Points

Merit: (A-level Grade C) – 32 UCAS Tariff Points

Pass: (A-level Grade E) – 16 UCAS Tariff Points

Students have been offered a place on a range of degrees after studying this course including a Diploma student who was offered (and went onto) a place at Kings College London to study a Geography degree!

Where can this qualification lead?

Lots of health and social care students go on to university to study subject specific degrees. In the past we have had students leave us to go on to study the following subjects: nursing (adult, paediatric and mental health); midwifery; primary education; early years care and education; social work; speech and language therapy; operating department practice; paramedic science; sociology.

Some students choose to leave the department and go straight into work in the industry for example, working in nurseries looking after children under 5. Other students choose to leave school to start apprenticeship in the industry for example, as a health care assistant. Finally, some students leave the department and choose a more adventurous life working in the industry abroad for example, midwifery in Thailand. The options are endless!

What asking grade do I need to study history?

We ask for a grade 6 in history or a grade 7 in history is even better. This enables you to make the transition from GCSE to A level with confidence. Study of history is preferred at GCSE, as we find that students who have not studied history since KS3 struggle with the challenges of A level. If you have not studied history at GCSE and are determined that this is the course for you, we would want you to have at least GCSE grade 6 in English literature or another humanities subject.

Which exam board do we use?

We use AQA to continue our content and skills studied at AQA GCSE history. You can explore more details on their website or feel free to email the Head of Department, Mr Stoker on mks@balcarras.gloucs.sch.uk if you have any history or politics-related queries.

What areas of history do we study?

We study 'Industrial Britain 1783 – 1885' – exploring how Britain recovered from the shock of the loss of the American colonies and how the nation evolved into the industrialised powerhouse of the late 19th century. This study is political, economic and social. Something for everyone! The other side of the course is the American Dream 1945 – 1980 - this depth study explores how America wrestled with its place at home and abroad in the post-war years and through the Cold War era. You will explore international conflicts, elections, social changes and the epic civil rights challenges faced by minorities and majorities alike. Should you continue study into Year 13, you are then able to study a NEA of your own choosing in a manner very similar to dissertations at undergraduate level.

Why should I study the history?

History at Balcarras is one of the most popular and rewarding subjects that be studied at A level. We offer a rich and varied historical course that explores social, economic, political and international history. You should look to study this subject if you are passionate about the topics above and interested in asking questions about the past. History is delivered by all members of our department and we offer a challenging and rigorous course that will be taught in familiar ways to you whilst also inspiring you through other tasks such as seminar discussions, assessing varying interpretations of the past and having some fun along the way.

What types of careers can history lead to?

History is a subject that is always considered highly by Oxbridge Universities, Russell Group establishments and any employer. If you are considering a future career in any field in which you are required to analyse, evaluate, research and present, then history is invaluable – so graduate courses in history, politics, PPE or American studies, or careers in law, journalism, management are just a few of the varied post-18 paths one could pursue.

How will I be assessed?

Each component has a 2 hour 30 minute paper which will assess evaluative essays, source extracts and historian's interpretation analyses. You will practice these skills throughout your A level career, with termly assessment points to help refine these skills. The NEA is 20% of your final grade, with plenty of general guidance and support throughout your two years of study.

What is the NEA?

The NEA is a 'Non-examined assessment' – essentially coursework. Here you will research a topic area which you will be able to nominate, and present an evaluative and analytical response to the question you have posed. Previous NEA submissions have ranged in their focus from ancient history and the collapse of the Roman Empire, to Tudor-era foreign policy, Bismarck and the unification of Germany, to modern 20th century history and the rise and fall of the USSR.

What kind of maths is in the A level course?

At A level, we mostly study algebra, graphs and trigonometry. I'm afraid there are no more 'plans and elevations' lessons! These are the bits of GCSE that you need to work especially hard on during Year 11, if you are planning to study maths in Year 12.

I'm on track to get a 6/7- will I find it too hard?

Honestly- yes, you might do. The reason we ask for an entry criteria of a grade 7 or above is based on previous year groups GCSE grades and how successful they have been at A level. If you scrape a 7 because you're really good at rotations and reflections, but you missed out the quadratics questions, then you will really struggle in Year 12. However, if you are on track to get a grade 7 or above, then you will be fine. If you're not sure, talk to your GCSE teacher about it.

How much of a jump up from GCSE is it?

The first half term in Year 12 is a review of the top end of GCSE, but quicker. We recap the key algebra topics before extending them further.

The start of the statistics course is also a recap of higher end GCSE. The start of the mechanics course, however, is totally different to GCSE maths, but has some overlap with GCSE Physics and a huge overlap with A level physics. The biggest step up is in the attitude we expect you to have towards your learning. You will need to be motivated to seek out extra help in your own time if you are stuck.

How is it taught?

You will have 9 lessons a fortnight split between 2 or 3 teachers. Normally, one teacher will teach the pure maths (algebra, graphs, trigonometry etc) and another will teach the applied maths (statistics and mechanics), but that does change every year, depending on the staffing. You will be set homework most lessons and you will be expected to complete a lot of practice questions in your own time... so I hope you like maths!

What subjects does maths go well with?

Everything! But especially physics, biology, chemistry, psychology and geography. No matter what you hope to do after sixth form, maths looks great on your CV. Having a good grade in A level maths doesn't just tell employers that you're fantastic at drawing graphs, it also tells them you have a calm and logical mind, and that you can break problems down into stages and tackle them one step at a time.

Do I have to have studied GCSE Music to take A level?

No. If you have instrumental skills equivalent to grade 4 and theory skills equivalent to grade 5, we will consider your application. Where you have not taken official exams, we may ask for some sort of 'reference' from your current teacher(s) - whether that is school teachers or private instrumental teachers.

Do I need to have taken actual instrumental and/or theory exams?

No - as above! If you are studying for GCSE music, and achieve a grade 6 or above, it is assumed that your performance and theory skills are where they should be. However, any extra work you can do on these, especially on theory skills, before starting the course in September, will be of real benefit.

Do I need to be able to play two instruments?

No. And remember, voice counts as an instrument! You can use two instruments in your recital if you wish to, but there is no additional credit given for this.

Do I have to have instrumental or vocal lessons in school?

No. It is a requirement of the course that you are having lessons on at least one instrument or voice. We like to be able to liaise with instrumental teachers to ensure we are all working to the same goals, but we are happy to liaise with private teachers. Obviously, instrumental lessons are available in school and priority is given to A level students. Lessons tend to take place in study lessons or at social times to avoid you missing curriculum lessons.

What is the extracurricular provision, and can anyone get involved?

Music at Balcarras is a thriving and vibrant part of the school. We have a huge range of activities on offer including brass, woodwind and string groups, Balcajazz, Orchestra, and various vocal ensembles. All A level students are expected to commit to at least one extracurricular activity, but all students are welcome to join any groups. We have an annual school production, Christmas Concert, Spring Concert and Midsummer Music - our very own music festival with at least two stages! There are lots of other performance opportunities throughout the year, both in and out of school. And we are always open to new ideas!

What facilities are there for Music A Level students?

There is a dedicated A level music study room within the music department that has computers running Sibelius software. This can be used in study lessons. There are also eight music practice rooms - one solely for A level use - which can again be used in study lessons assuming they are not being used by instrumental staff. This is in addition to the two large teaching rooms and an additional rehearsal space. Music students are very welcome in the department outside of their timetabled music A level lessons, and dedicating some of your study time to music practice is encouraged.

Photography FAQs

What units is the course made up of?

The course is made up of two units. The coursework unit runs from September Y12 up until January Y13. The course has been designed to allow students who no very little about photography to learn about this fascinating artform. We cover a range of topics ranging from abstract image making to looking at fashion, documentary, still life and art photography- The course moves forward with weekly or two weekly challenges being set. The course has been designed to catch all sorts of different types of interests the students might have. The only thing that the students require is enthusiasm. From January in Y13 the students embark on the examination unit. This is set by AQA and students will be given a list of starting points for them to research and respond to. This culminates in a practical examination in May.

What equipment will I need?

We use digital portfolios at A level so you do not require physical sketchbooks. We do not supply cameras and students will need to own their own camera with **manual settings**. Students do not need to spend a fortune on expensive SLR cameras but a camera where you can adjust the settings is imperative. We can give more advice on this.

Will I have to write essays?

The course is primarily a practical one. Students will have the opportunity to discuss art history throughout the coursework unit, but the only piece of writing required is in Y13; where the students submit a supportive piece of text with their practical investigation. The piece of text is a great opportunity for students to show off their understanding of the wider context of their work.

Photography FAQs

How much work outside of lessons am I expected to do?

In Y12 and Y13 you will have 9 lessons every two weeks. You will have two teachers, who will be both working on the same course requirements. Photography is a practical subject and lesson time is spent editing images using Photoshop and discussing the results. The course has been designed to be fun, pacey, and overall a strong learning experience. At this level – we would argue that A level photography is like a club that you join and the work that they do they view as recreational. On a Sixth Form timetable, students have a set of private study sessions- the photography students are more than welcome to come over to the art block during these times to continue with their practical work (if computers are free and available at that time).

Who does A level photography?

We would argue that we get two different types of students. Firstly, those who might be interested in a career in one of the creative industries. Secondly, those who want to pursue it recreationally as it is a different type of learning experience. The rule of thumb for those who might want to work in one of the creative industries is that students would complete their A level photography then either do a Foundation course. This is a free course offered by the county council to allow art students to access more of the creative disciplines. Photography students can go on to study animation, film, various photography degrees and graphic design. A foundation is not mandatory to get to art college, but a lot of art students do this.

Physical Education FAQs

Do I have to have studied GCSE PE before doing A Level?

Not necessarily. As long as you have a grade 6 or higher in GCSE science you will have the foundation for the physiology components of the course.

Can I do PE A level after studying BTEC PE?

Yes, but from our previous experience this can be a more difficult transition compared to the transition experienced by students who have studied the course at GCSE level. You must have grade 6 or higher in science, have got a distinction in your BTEC and be playing at a high level in your chosen sport.

What practical sports can I be assessed in?

The list can be added to by the exam board so the best advice is to go to the OCR PE Exam page and look for the H555 syllabus. This will contain the most up to date information on practical activities and the sports in which assessment is recognised and available.

Do I have to do practical sport?

Not necessarily. You can be assessed as a coach in some activities, check the H555 syllabus, but you will need to provide a detailed log, filmed evidence and lesson plans built up over the year.

What is the filmed talk?

It is part of your practical grade and is very similar to the GCSE written coursework. You need to look at the strengths and weaknesses of a performance and have a detailed plan of how to improve the performer with the theories to support your decisions.

What other subjects go well with physics?

Maths does! There is such an overlap between physics and maths that it's a bit like a 2 for 1 special offer. On the flip side that means that it is extremely difficult to do physics A level without doing maths. There's also a bit of overlap with chemistry, and economics students find physics useful too.

Will we study new topics beyond GCSE?

Yes we will. We have a look at space, at quantum theory and even the special theory of relativity. These are always highlights.

What do people go on to do when they finish the course?

A range of things. Plenty go on to study STEM subjects at university, but some have found apprenticeships in engineering and some have gone on with all sorts of other subjects from drama to medicine.

What's the best thing about the course?

We think it's the broad scope of our A level course. Hopefully by the end of it you will have a good idea of how nearly everything works, from tiny nuclei to huge galaxies. You also get to do some nice hands-on practical work.

Is physics really difficult?

If you can think mathematically then it's really quite approachable - it's a subject where you have to think hard but not write too much. Your teachers will support you and make sure that you work consistently, a little bit every week. We tend to find that everyone 'gets it' by the end of the course, and if you enjoy thinking then you will be fine.

Politics FAQs

What asking grade do I need to study politics?

We ask for a grade 6 in English, history or a similar literacy-based subject. No previous knowledge or experience of studying politics is required. However, we do expect any prospective student to have read at least one book from our recommended reading list and to be regularly following the news and current affairs before starting the course.

What do we study?

We study 3 units, which focus on: UK government and politics; USA government and politics; political ideologies. This course covers all the basics of how democracy operates in both countries, as well as looking at the institutions which govern us. The final unit considers a range of political ideologies such as Liberalism and looks at their impact on political thinking in the modern world.

How will I be assessed?

You will be assessed across 3 two-hour long papers in your final year of study. Each exam includes a range of essay questions to choose from where you will be required to analyse and evaluate both sides of a debate and then make your own substantiated judgement.

What other subjects should I study alongside politics?

Like any humanities subject, politics is one which is very flexible and one which complements many other options. We find that many students also study at least one of history, religion, philosophy and ethics, or English literature as the content and key skills overlap in many ways. Others commonly combine politics with business studies, or economics. Given the international aspects to the course content, politics is also well-suited to study alongside modern foreign languages too.

Politics FAQs

Why should I study politics?

Politics at Balcarras is a popular and rewarding subject and there has never been a better time to study it. The western world is facing many challenges to its democratic institutions and this course will help students to understand why this is happening and to develop their own arguments and ideas. We offer a rich and varied course that explores fascinating and contemporary political issues, including analysis of the latest events such as Brexit and the US Presidential election. You should pick this subject if you are passionate about politics and have a genuine interest in current affairs. Above all, we are keen to have students who are prepared to work hard and who recognise that this is a challenging academic subject with an important focus on reading, writing and debate.

What types of careers can politics lead to?

As the key skills taught by this course are similar to those taught in history, politics is a subject that is always considered highly by universities, including, Russell Group establishments and employers. If you are considering a future career in any field in which you are required to analyse, evaluate, research and present, then history is invaluable – so graduate courses in history, politics, PPE or American studies, or careers in law, journalism, management are just a few of the varied post-18 paths one could pursue.

Product Design FAQs

I haven't studied D&T at GCSE, can I take A Level Product Design?

Yes, we have had many students in the past who have not studied Product Design at GCSE. If you are willing to work hard and learn skills quickly you will be successful. Students who have studied art at GCSE tend to do very well in product design.

What do you do in Y12?

In Y12 we focus on skill building and the theory you will need to develop your broader understanding of product design. You will complete a practice design project where you will identify a real-world problem and follow this through to a final manufactured product.

How much practical and how long does the project take?

Throughout the course you will have lots of opportunity to work practically. As well as mini manufacturing projects you will also be required to prototype your design ideas and experiment with processes and materials. We use a lot of CAD CAM at Balcarras (3D printing, laser cutting) but like to balance this with more traditional skills such as the use of the metal lathe.

Product Design FAQs

What are the lessons like?

The lessons in Product Design are a nice balance between informal tutorial sessions and more traditional classroom-based lessons. When working on your coursework you will be expected to work independently and use your initiative to drive your project forward. This type of lessons works well as it allows everyone to work at their own pace.

What subjects does Product Design work well with?

Product Design compliments a wide range of subjects. It works very well with maths, computing and physics allowing students to apply their scientific knowledge to their projects. Business, environmental science and geography also share a lot of the same theory such as sustainability issues and scales of production. Product Design also works well with other creative subjects such as art and photography however students need to be able to manage their time well as each of these subjects requires extended pieces of coursework.

Psychology FAQs

What is psychology?

Psychology is the science of human mind and behaviour. If you are interested in people or just like questioning why people do/say/think what they do then psychology would definitely be for you.

What kinds of things do you study?

We cover a broad range of topics. from OCD and phobia, to gender, social behaviour, and criminal psychology. The first term of year 12 though will be very much an introduction to psychology where you will learn the fundamentals of research methods and the basic approaches in psychology.

How is it assessed?

There is no coursework element so assessment in class will take the form of essays and exam papers. Formal assessment will be through external examination at the end of Year 13.

What are the entry criteria/essential skills?

Psychology has no formal or specific entry criteria other than the grades needed to access the Sixth Form. However, it is an essay-based subject requiring in depth analysis and evaluation so strong English skills are essential. In addition, there is a significant scientific and mathematical element to the course, so confidence in these areas is desirable too.

What are the possible career opportunities?

The great thing about psychology is that it lends itself well to many different future careers. Even if you don't have a desire to pursue a career in clinical or research psychology, an A level (or even degree) is sought after for many fields including business, education, journalism, and healthcare. Psychology is recognised by most universities as a 'science' so it is possible to study psychology at A level if you are considering a medicine degree.

Religion, Philosophy & Ethics FAQs

What is Philosophy, Ethics and Theology?

Religious education at A-Level is a philosophy, ethics and theology course which allows you to ask some of the big questions in life. During this course, students will develop their knowledge and understanding of a variety of philosophical arguments, ethical theories and theological ideas as well considering their own interpretations. The course covers the work of the great philosophers such as Plato, Kant, Aquinas and Descartes to more modern philosophical works. You will also be covering ethical theories and applied ethics, covering such topics as euthanasia and business ethics. As well as this you will also extend your understanding of the study of religion, particularly Christianity, considering its influence and history as well as the place that it has in today's world.

How is the course different to GCSE study?

During the GCSE course you will have studied two religious views and then applied one, or both, of these to ethical and philosophical ideas. A typical GCSE question may well be, '*What do Christians believe about euthanasia?*' However, within A Level you are asked to consider what a theorist, or group of theorists believe about certain issues and ideas. A typical A Level question may well contend that '*Situation Ethics is of no use when considering euthanasia*'. Whereas GCSE is descriptive in nature, with a partial emphasis on your views and evaluation, A level focuses more on gaining knowledge and understanding to be able to advance your evaluation skills.

Religion, Philosophy & Ethics FAQs

How is the course taught?

During year 12 you will have two teachers, one will teach you the 6 philosophy topics, one will teach you the 6 ethics topics and they will teach you 3 the theology topics. You will have three exams at the end of the course, one in each subject.

Can I study this subject if I didn't do philosophy and ethics at GCSE level?

Yes. Although having a background in GCSE philosophy and ethics will be useful to you, we have previously had pupils who have not studied GCSE do extremely well on the A level course.

Do I need to be interested in religion to do this subject?

Yes! This is a religious studies course. However, you do not need to be religious yourself to take this course. During the course we study many scholars and ideas, some religious, some not, however, an interest and understanding of the impact of faith on the life of believers is important.

What could I do at University with this subject?

Philosophy, ethics and theology is a varied subject that both employers and universities respect and value. This course facilitates you in becoming an analytical, open minded, evaluative, and socially aware young adult. Therefore, the possibly career and future study options are vast. Some courses that students have gone on to study in recent years included the more obvious PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics), theology and religious education courses as well as perhaps less obvious but very much still linked courses for example, European studies, psychology with criminology, American studies, Arabic and Middle Eastern studies, law and international relations.

Should I take A-level Russian?

Do you enjoy learning Russian grammar and how the language works? Do you want to be able to read Russian newspapers and communicate effectively with native speakers? Are you interested in Russian culture and the role of Russia in the world? If so, Russian A-level is an excellent choice for you!

Is it similar to GCSE Russian?

The types of activities you do in lessons are similar to GCSE. You will do a mix of listening, reading, writing and speaking exercises as well as grammar practice and vocabulary learning. At the start of Y12 you will recap GCSE topics and grammar and build on the skills that you have already learnt.

How is it different to GCSE Russian?

Firstly, you will start using authentic reading and listening material. For example, you will read Russian newspaper and magazine articles and listen to news reports. The course content is also different to GCSE and you will develop your understanding further; you will study aspects of Russian culture and society and what life is like in Russian today. You will also study a Russian film and short novel.

Which subjects combine well with Russian?

Russian complements a lot of A level subjects as you acquire a wide range of knowledge and skills. If you have a passion for languages, Russian can assist the learning of French A-level as you will be able to see patterns in how the languages work. Russian also fits with history and geography as you will study the collapse of the USSR and life in a Russian city. There are links to English literature as you will study a book and film in Russian. Furthermore, the logical nature of the Russian grammar system always appeals to maths and science students. In short, there are no subjects which conflict with Russian!

What else do I need to know?

Group size is approximately 6-10 students. This is a real advantage as all pupils are involved in lessons and there is plenty of opportunity for small group work and collaborative learning. Each week pupils will also have a conversational session with a native speaker – this is an excellent opportunity to build up confidence and fluency in spoken Russian and all pupils say how helpful this is for the speaking exams.

Can I study Russian at university?

We are really pleased that every year we have students at Balcarras who develop a real passion for the subject and continue their Russian studies at university. Russian may be taken at university with another language or with another subject, such as history, English, politics or international relations. During a university degree you will have the opportunity to live and study or work in Russia.

What job opportunities does it lead to?

Language skills are highly sought after by UK employers and a degree in Russian can lead to careers in journalism, business and finance, diplomacy and politics, charity, education, translating and interpreting.

I would also stress that an A level in Russian is a really impressive addition to any CV and will help you to stand out from the crowd. At Balcarras we are proud to be one of a small number of schools in the UK to offer this qualification. By studying Russian A level you learn transferable skills such as communicating clearly, public speaking and problem solving, which will be valued by any future employer.

Королева Вурье

What topics do we study?

We study current issues and trends which affect the Hispanic world, the sub topics for which vary widely from cyberspace to equal rights and political dictatorships. Cultural topic areas include contemporary music, gastronomy and world renowned tourist sites. You also have to study a film (*Maria llena eres de gracia*) and a book (*Las bicicletas son para el verano*).

How is A level different to GCSE?

The delivery of the course tends to be more relaxed, given that there are fewer students in the class. We average at about 12 students per A level language class. This means that students often feel more comfortable about talking in Spanish in front of their classmates. Students are encouraged to speak in Spanish as much as possible, and the teacher will do too. The content is more in-depth than at GCSE.

Why should I take A level Spanish?

The vast majority of students really enjoy the A level Spanish course. They enjoy it because it is very different from other A level subjects and also because they take pleasure in learning the skill of how to speak another language proficiently. Former students have travelled extensively in Spain and across Latin America. The sorts of jobs that they have then gone into include the diplomatic service, teaching, the travel industry, marketing, public relations and charity work.

Is there a speaking exam?

Yes, there is. You have to discuss one of the topic areas and also prepare an independent research project (IRP), which is a topic of your choice. We discuss your project in the exam, and our discussion is based on your research. This is conducted entirely in Spanish. This part of the course helps to improve your research and presentation skills prior to university.

Will I be fluent by the end of the course?

As part of the course, you have to spend one half hour a week working one to one with Miss Garcia, our native Spanish Foreign Language Assistant. This is in addition to the nine taught lessons you will receive each fortnight. She will help you to develop your level of fluency and yes, by the end of the course the vast majority of students are able to converse confidently and with ever-increasing fluency.

Are there any trips?

In usual circumstances we run a homestay visit to Málaga for 5 days, where students stay with local families and attend classes in a local language school. We also offer independent work experience visits abroad.

Can I do A level Textiles if I did not study it at GCSE?

Absolutely, we accept students who have done textiles, art or product design at GCSE and achieved the necessary entry grade.

Can I take Textiles if I am studying other practical subjects?

Absolutely, many students often take more than one practical subject, especially if considering a future in the creative industries. Equally you can study the subject to compliment other subjects or to strike a “balance” in your subject choices.

What can I use a qualification in Textiles for?

A level in textiles can be used in many ways. We have students who have gone on to university to specialise in surface design, fashion, costume design as well as textile design and interiors. You can also apply for courses in fashion branding and marketing, so the A level compliments those students who are also studying business. For those thinking of specialising in an area of art or design the work completed in your textiles A level will help you produce a diverse and in-depth portfolio of work for interview.

Is the A level a fashion design course?

Not exclusively. During the two-year course you will have the opportunity to cover construction/garment making, fashion illustration and if you will be encouraged to look at the work of designers but this is only part of the course. The primary focus will be introducing you to lots of new and specialist techniques, exploring the creative potential of materials and learning to create exciting, original responses work through your own style.

What sort of equipment and materials do I need?

Ideally you should have access to art materials as well as basic sewing equipment. If you have a sewing machine that is advantageous but not essential. You will be taught in two well equipped classrooms and basic materials will be provided.