
King's High School
HOW MANY
GCSEs?
Aspire. Achieve. Enjoy.

Background

Over the past few years, there has been significant national debate about exams, with a particular focus on the role that GCSEs play in the changing landscape of Higher Education and employment. Viewpoints are varied, with some looking for a radical overhaul of the system, while others point out that GCSEs offer a level of rigour that few educational systems internationally can match. The debate often revolves around a central key question: do young people primarily need to be taught high quality content, or is it more important to give them transferable skills that will be relevant in our changing world?

At King's High we have watched this debate closely, and have concluded that both content and skills are of crucial importance. GCSEs are likely to remain central to our educational landscape during the coming years, and we celebrate the range and depth of the content that GCSEs offer. At the same time, we are aware that sometimes nationally standardised exams cannot keep up with the rapid pace of technological, societal and other wider change.

How Many GCSEs?

Alongside considering the role of GCSEs as a whole, it is also worth asking how many GCSEs each pupil should take. Historically at King's, most pupils have taken ten GCSEs and we anticipate moving forward that this route will continue to feel right for some. GCSEs introduce pupils to a wide range of challenging content that later becomes a powerful currency when applying for university or putting together a CV. For many pupils, doing a higher number of GCSEs provides the right kind of challenge. The prospect of external exams can also provide a helpful level of external accountability.

At the same time, universities and employers tend not to mind whether a pupil has ten, nine or eight GCSEs. Cambridge University, for example, looks broadly for high grades in subjects relevant to the course being applied for. They also make very clear that students taking nine or eight GCSEs will not be disadvantaged in selection for any of their degrees. The same is true of universities more broadly. In fact, the most conservative approach to GCSEs from amongst the more academically selective universities is the calculation of a grade point average of an applicant's top eight GCSEs.

Many schools nationally already stipulate that pupils should take fewer than 10 GCSEs, knowing that this will not have a detrimental impact on university and other post-A Level outcomes.

There are also longer-term questions to consider when deciding upon the number of GCSEs to take. Whilst GCSEs undoubtedly offer rigour, universities also place healthy emphasis on pupils exploring beyond the curriculum and having independent interests and ideas. Skills such as creativity, collaboration and communication are of increasing value in the world of work—and sometimes these skills are learnt most effectively outside the realms of the GCSE curriculum, with its strong focus on memorisation and end-of-course examinations.

Future Ready Courses

Against this backdrop, we are excited to be offering our current Year 9 the option of studying one or more of our three Future Ready courses, alongside eight or nine GCSEs. It is important to note that pupils can also choose not to study a Future Ready course and to study for 10 GCSEs. Each of the courses on offer have been designed by specialist staff at King's High. Each will offer pupils the chance to learn about a range of topics that we believe will be increasingly important in the future. All of them will also have a strong focus on developing key skills – creativity, collaboration, debate, communication – that will enrich pupils as they journey through King's and beyond. Pupils will have the option of studying one or more of the three Future Ready courses on offer. Each pupil's chosen course will be timetabled in the same way as a GCSE, with five taught periods per fortnight; they will therefore act as a direct replacement of a GCSE. The logistics of how to choose GCSEs plus one or more Future Ready courses will be explained fully during the Options Process, but in essence pupils will choose one or more Future Ready courses instead of one of their Options Block subjects.

Here is an overview of what our two new Future Ready courses will involve:

Title	King's High Global Changemaker Programme
Unit	Social Justice
Unit	Global Citizenship
Unit	Climate Change
Unit	Law and the Legal System

Title	King's High Innovation and Entrepreneurship Programme
Unit	AI Futures: Society, Ethics & Influence
Unit	Data Analysis
Unit	Neuroscience
Unit	Entrepreneurship

Title	King's High Science for Change Programme
Unit	Experimental Science
Unit	Conservation
Unit	Sustainable Synthesis
Unit	Medical Physics

Course Subtopics and Assessment

To help you decide whether a Future Ready course is suitable for you, please find below a more detailed outline of what each will involve, as well as the form of assessment that will be used.

Course 1: King's High Global Changemaker Programme

Social Justice

This unit is designed to educate students about key issues relating to social justice in our world, including the causes of social injustice and the methods that might be used to mitigate or prevent it. Students will use their understanding of key topical debates in order to devise a strategy for the improvement of social justice in society and the world. The unit will have a particular focus on critical and creative thinking, problem-solving and collaborative learning.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- Definitions of social justice
- Wealth inequality
- Causes of poverty
- Strategies to overcome poverty
- Racism and racial inequality
- Gender inequality

Mode of assessment: written test and TED Talks.

Global Citizenship

This unit encourages students to investigate contemporary issues and consider their role as 'global citizens'. It aims to engage students in developing their knowledge and understanding of local and national issues as well as the inter-connectivity of nation states. It will require students to reflect on politics, economics and global development and will provide an introduction to culturally sensitive themes that will widen their understanding of issues affecting communities and societies. Whilst the module will have a theoretical base, case studies will be used to illustrate the challenges facing humanity today.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- Democracy and the nation state
- International law and human rights
- Economic development and the environment
- War, women and peace
- Technology: social media and citizenship

Mode of assessment: written essay and filmed interview.

Climate Change

This unit aims to teach students about climate science, the natural systems maintaining Earth's climate, the human impacts on these systems, and how scientists monitor climate systems. Students will learn about the issues around managing greenhouse gases on local, national, regional and global scales. The unit will include mitigation strategies, political processes and policy, and market mechanisms. The final assessment will be a creative evaluation of a micro-scale climate change mitigation strategy.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- What influences global climate?
- Historical climate records
- Atmospheric chemistry
- Sources of change over time
- Modern climate monitoring and outcomes (IPCC)
- Impact of climate change on different parts of the globe
- Climate targets
- Solutions: technological vs natural application

Mode of assessment: written test and poster event.

Law and the Legal System

This unit is designed to help pupils navigate the big questions that the legal system poses: How much power should the law have? Does the law have a right to intervene in my private life? Is the law fair to women? How is a court case decided and does the justice system need an overhaul? The unit will give students an opportunity to gain a breadth of knowledge in key areas, as well as practising advocacy skills and reflecting on the nature and purpose of the law.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- What is the law?
- Police powers
- Judges
- Barrister and solicitors
- Human rights
- The law and feminism
- Criminal law
- Law and the media

Mode of assessment: written test and courtroom scenario.

Course Subtopics and Assessment

Course 2: King's High Innovation and Entrepreneurship Programme

AI Futures: Society, Ethics & Influence

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly becoming one of the most influential forces shaping modern life, from education and employment to creativity, media and decision-making. This unit introduces students to how contemporary AI systems work, how they are used in the real world, and the ethical and social questions they raise. Pupils will explore issues such as bias, privacy, trust, misinformation and the responsible use of AI, while developing the critical thinking and communication skills needed to evaluate emerging technologies. Through discussion, case studies and collaborative challenges, students will consider how humans can shape the future of AI in a way that is fair, transparent and beneficial to society.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- What is Artificial Intelligence? (and what it is not)
- Automation, algorithms and decision-making
- Generative AI and synthetic media
- Data, bias and fairness in AI systems
- Privacy, consent and data protection
- Intellectual property and ownership
- Trust, misinformation and deepfakes
- Responsible and effective use of AI in education
- AI, employment and the future of work
- Regulation, ethics and the governance of AI

Mode of assessment: written test and applied project (e.g. policy pitch, documentary or AI use charter).

Data Analysis

Data plays an increasingly important role in society today. When used correctly it allows us to make more informed decisions, solve problems and ultimately make people's lives better. This course will provide students with the tools to be able effectively to analyse and contrast large data sets. It will conclude with students investigating a data set on a topic of their own choosing and presenting a report of their findings.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- GeoGebra and its use in producing diagrams and statistics
- Analysing the skewness of data
- Measures of location and spread
- Box plots
- Dealing with large data sets
- Contrasting data sets
- Bivariate data
- Linear regression
- Sampling methods
- Creating a report

Mode of assessment: written test and presentations.

Neuroscience

This course will develop an understanding of the structure and function of the nervous system, neurons, the brain and the methods we have for 'looking at' the brain. This foundation will lead to consideration of neuropathologies, including those affecting perception, as well as major disorders such as schizophrenia and addiction and approaches to their treatment. Stemming from this, pupils will discuss the bioethical issues surrounding work in this area. Skill development will include histological tasks as well as consideration of employability skills and careers options in this field.

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- Structure and function of the nervous system
- Neurons: structure and function
- The brain: structure and function
- Localisation and lateralisation of the brain
- Techniques for studying the brain
- Neurodiversity (autism, ADHD and dyslexia), neuromarketing and the future of AI
- Neuropathology & neuropharmacology
- Current applications
- Bioethics
- Careers & employability skills

Mode of assessment: viva and research task with presentation.

Entrepreneurship

The purpose of the course is to investigate the basic principles behind business and enterprise. It will look at the theoretical background to running a venture and then put these principles into practice through the running of a student-designed venture. Students will gain relevant knowledge, apply this knowledge, and then evaluate their outcomes, asking: Have I successfully run a venture?

Here is an indication of the key topics to be covered:

- What is business and enterprise?
- Understanding markets
- Business planning
- Building a business
- The importance of team (HRM)
- Marketing
- Finance
- Operations
- Growing and delivering a venture
- Evaluating a venture

Mode of assessment: written test and running & presenting on a venture.

Course Subtopics and Assessment

Course 3: King's High Science for Change Programme

Experimental Science

"**But why?!**" is a question young children ask all the time—this module aims to reignite that curiosity. Students will explore the real world of practical science, building confidence, technical skill and scientific thinking through hands-on investigations. Experiments are the backbone of the course, encouraging students to move beyond the textbook and experience how scientific knowledge is actually generated. Working across Biology, Chemistry and Physics, students will develop core competencies in data collection, interpretation and presentation, and gain a deeper understanding of how science is applied in the wider world. Students will practise safe lab work, use specialist equipment, test ideas, and draw evidence-based conclusions, mirroring the processes used by real scientists. They will also develop their planning, problem-solving and communication skills valuable in all areas of their future careers.

Some example practicals that may be covered include:

- Biology: Microscopy, Microbiology & Aseptic Technique
- Chemistry: Extraction & Analysis
- Physics: Light & Sensors

Mode of assessment: students will be assessed throughout the course in the classroom against the practical competencies framework, alongside a practical logbook.

Conservation

This module explores the science and strategies behind conserving biodiversity in a rapidly changing world. Students will investigate the principles of classification, the scale of global biodiversity and how we measure it, and the urgent challenges posed by species loss. They will then explore conservation law and strategies, including de-extinction, before undertaking a case study on a threatened species, with action plan for its conservation. Through practical research and real-world engagement, learners will develop the knowledge and skills to become active contributors to conservation efforts.

Here is an indication of the topics to be covered:

- Understand classification and biodiversity
- Analyse global biodiversity estimates and species loss
- Investigate causes of species loss
- Explore conservation law and strategies
- Evaluate de-extinction
- Project: Conservation Case Study and Action Plan.

Mode of assessment: written test and conservation case study and action plan presentation.

Sustainable Synthesis

This module explores how green chemistry can transform the way we design and use chemicals in a world facing increasing environmental pressures. Students will investigate the 12 Principles of Green Chemistry and discover how innovations in modern chemistry reduce waste, energy use and harmful by-products. They will apply these ideas to greener methods for producing esters, bioplastics and environmentally responsible soaps and detergents. Through hands-on experiments, testing and real-world case studies, learners will develop the creativity and scientific insight needed to design cleaner, safer products. The module concludes with a group project creating and evaluating a sustainable household product.

Here is an indication of the topics to be covered:

- Understand the 12 Principles of Green Chemistry
- Analyse green chemistry metrics
- Investigate greener synthetic methods
- Explore green polymers and bioplastics
- Examine green soaps and detergents
- Project: Design, produce and test a sustainable household chemical product.

Mode of assessment: written assessment and green product design academic poster.

Medical Physics

How can we see inside the body? How can we use our knowledge of physics to explore a diagnosis for a patient? This module explores how the laws of physics can be applied to medical imaging to inform a medical professional to assist with better patient outcomes. Through patient case studies, potential hospital visits and a combination of student and expert led research pupils will discover and evaluate a range of imaging modalities to understand the principles behind them and gain awareness of their merits and limitations.

Here is an indication of the topics to be covered:

- X-ray imaging
- MRI imaging
- Ultrasound imaging
- Near Infrared Spectroscopy
- Other imaging modalities

Mode of assessment: the module concludes with a group project to plan and present an appropriate diagnosis path to a panel for a given case study.

Important Questions and Answers

1. **Is there any risk to taking eight or nine rather than ten GCSEs?**
   Our research into this issue had made clear that pupils will not be at a disadvantage if they apply to university with eight or nine rather than ten GCSEs. The most conservative approach amongst Russell Group universities is at Cardiff Medical School, who require eight GCSEs for applicants. Russell Group universities such as York, Cambridge, Exeter, Edinburgh and many others make very clear that having ten rather than nine or eight GCSEs offers no advantage when applying for undergraduate courses, and some schools already stipulate that pupils only study for nine GCSEs.

2. **Will the courses be accredited, and how will they be marked?**
   The courses will be accredited by EduQual, a regulated awarding body with whom we have worked in the past on our well-established King's High Baccalaureate. Pupils who take one of the Future Ready courses and achieve the necessary requirements will be awarded a Level 2 qualification at the end of the two years of study. Pupils will then be awarded a level between 1 and 9, like a regular GCSE.

3. **Why are you offering these courses?**
   We want to ensure that all pupils in Year 10 and 11 are able to pursue a course of study that suits and inspires them. For many pupils, this will mean taking up the traditional route of ten GCSEs. For others, taking one of the Future Ready courses will offer an opportunity to study new, cutting-edge content and to be assessed in an innovative way.

4. **What kind of pupil should take these courses?**
   There is no set pupil type, but we want to be clear that our Future Ready courses will be rigorous and demanding. They will appeal particularly to pupils who want to think outside the box, who would enjoy working collaboratively, and who want to develop their communication skills. The courses will be of benefit for pupils considering top level university applications, as well as to those who want to throw themselves into being creative and independent in their learning.

5. **Can I take more than one course?**
   Yes. Some pupils each year choose to take eight GCSEs and two courses. Going below eight GCSEs can be appropriate for some but this would need agreement in conversation with Dr Seal.

6. **Will the courses be easier or harder than GCSEs?**
   The courses will be rigorous and will require full commitment from all pupils who enrol on them. They will not have a final, 'terminal' assessment like GCSEs, and there will be more of an emphasis on creativity. Unlike a GCSE, however, pupils on these courses will be tested on each of the four units involved. The courses are neither harder than a GCSE nor easier; they simply offer a different model of education.

7. **What will the value of the courses be?**
   The courses will be accredited by EduQual at Level 2. Although the courses are not a GCSE, they will add significant value through the knowledge and skills that pupils learn along the way. The courses have been designed to be as useful as possible to pupils who will navigate a changing world in the 2030s and beyond. They will also be of use to pupils when writing documents such as Personal Statements, which require an increasing focus on what pupils have learned beyond the regular exam curriculum.

8. **How many pupils will take the courses?**
   Around three quarters of pupils tend to take one or more of the courses. They are popular and have had significant positive impact across the cohorts who have studied them. Current pupils will be speaking with pupils to explain what their experience of the courses has been.

9. **When will the courses be taught and who will teach them?**
   The courses will be taught during Year 10 and 11, with two units per year. The courses will be delivered like a regular GCSE, with timetabled lessons and a homework allocation. From time to time, the courses may require pupils to attend after-school events such as a poster evening. Each unit will be delivered by a different subject specialist teacher.

10. **Why does every unit have a written test?**
    The courses are designed using the philosophy that excellent learning combines high quality content with skills such as creativity and independence. The written tests will assess foundational knowledge, and will ensure that each unit is rigorous and challenging. We also firmly believe that pupils need a strong knowledge base before they can enter into the process of thinking meaningfully about big ideas.

11. **What makes you confident that the content and skills covered in the courses will be of use?**
    As educationalists, we have a strong sense of the emerging topics that will shape learning in the future. In order to ensure that the courses will be genuinely useful, each unit designer has also been in touch with academics and industry experts who have advised on the content and delivery of the courses. Working with EduQual towards accreditation of the courses has also ensured that the courses are externally accountable.

12. **Who should I contact with any further questions?**
    These courses are a new venture for King's, and we understand that you may have further questions. Please be in touch with Dr Seal, Senior Deputy Head (Academic) at **p.seal@kingshighwarwick.co.uk** if you would like to learn more.

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