



Hillhead High School
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Head Teacher
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Third Year into Fourth Year Options Choice 'FAQs' and Additional Information - 2024

Placement of options in the column structure:

In Scottish secondary schools timetables are most often built using a column structure. For instance, in third year in our school everyone goes to their Column 'F' subjects first thing on a Monday morning. For some this means going to Woodwork, others to PE, Science etc. Where pupils go at these points is determined by what they picked at the previous options choice exercise. In the menu of choice for S4, there are four elective columns where pupils can make choices; Columns C to F. Pupils need to make a choice from the options available in each column. Deciding what options to place in each column is an incredibly complex task. When working on this **the primary objective is to deliver an options menu where everyone is able to access the subjects they want, at the levels appropriate for their needs.** Understandably, this has to be offset against school resource limitations; staffing and accommodation. The data returned from the scoping exercise combined with the recommended levels of learning and achievement provided by staff has been extensively analysed. This analysis has been undertaken both manually by staff and through the use of computer software. This work has resulted in the options menu column structure presented in the accompanying sheet. The structure identified is one that maximises pupils' ability to combine the different options that they selected in the Scoping Exercise.

Q: If I pick the options on this sheet is it absolutely certain that I will be doing that subject in that column? (For example if I pick Higher Chemistry in Column C and so does my friend, will we both be in the same class?).

A: If you pick a particular level and subject in a particular column there is no guarantee you will be timetabled in this exact section. For the purposes of managing class sizes you may find that you are placed in an alternative section in a different column, if it is compatible with your other options. Additionally, there can be unforeseen eventualities where pupils may later have to select alternative options; For example, if there are staffing changes ahead of commencement of the new timetable, or if there is limited uptake of an option in the final selection exercise.

Scoping Exercise (online survey undertaken before Christmas – concluded early January)

The Scoping Exercise asked pupils in S3 to list their preferred subjects for S4 by order of priority. Pupils were asked to identify four preferred subjects and a fifth 'reserve' subject. This fifth subject is one that they would be prepared to do if any of their four preferred subjects were unavailable. 95.5% of pupils in the year group participated in the exercise. Each year we design the menu of choice with options in each column that allow almost every pupil to be able to select the pathways the identified through the scoping exercise. For a small number of pupils (7%) we suggest they consider selecting their 'reserve' subject instead of their fourth choice. This can be as a result of certain combinations of options not being available or staff reviewing pupil choices and suggesting alternatives. The options previously identified by each child is displayed in the first table in the accompanying letter. In a later table, suggested options are shown for each of the options columns.

Q: A subject I wished to do and had selected in the Scoping Exercise is not available on the final form. Why is this? A: Where indicated demand for subjects is low, and particularly where there have been low numbers of pupils identifying the subject as a 1st, 2nd or 3rd choice decisions have to be taken, sometimes, to remove a subject from the final options structure. This year, few options (Photography, Higher/N5 RMPS/Cybersecurity) have been unable to be offered following inclusion in the Scoping Exercise. This is due to extremely low numbers identifying (<5 selecting as options 1 to 4 or reserve in any) these as preferred choices in the Scoping Exercise. We often offer some of these options in S6. Some might also be offered shortly as part of the Wider Achievement programme.



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Advised Levels of Learning and Achievement as recommended by Staff

Once the school staff receive the information regarding which subjects the pupils had expressed an interest in studying work is undertaken to assess which level of learning and achievement would be appropriate for each child. This task involves every teacher of S3 considering each pupil on an individual basis, before making a decision regarding the recommended level of study. Tracking at departmental and whole school level has been recognised as a key strength within the school. The levels recommended are based on ongoing assessment in class and teacher observations of how pupils have coped with learning this year. Teacher decisions are further supported by tracking procedures which have measured pupil attainment at points in S1, S2 and S3. Additionally, the recommended levels have been reviewed by subject Principal Teachers.

Q: I have been recommended for National 5 for a particular subject – I am disappointed and want to do Higher – can I do this?

A: When making decisions regarding the appropriate level of learning and achievement teachers have been asked to be 'aspirational'. This means that the levels recommended have been arrived at imagining a best possible situation looking forwards into the future. If a recommended level is lower than what you had hoped for it indicates that the staff hold a degree of concern as to whether you would cope with the level above. Additionally, staff make assessment judgements based on your performance over time – not single occasions, for example tests. Staff need to be assured that you can sustain performance over time (two years in S4 & S5) so day to day engagement, effort and attendance is all considered when they make these decisions. You may wish to speak to staff about selecting a level above the level recommended, however you must recognise that there are risks to doing this and going against the recommendations of the staff. For example, if you select Higher in a particular subject and later find that you are not coping you may find it difficult to transfer to a class working at National 5 level without altering your wider timetable.

Q: I selected a particular subject (for example Chemistry or Business Management) as one of my first 4 choices in the scoping exercise. In the suggested courses part of the letter it has recommended that I do one of the alternative courses (for example Business & IT SCQF level 5 or Laboratory Skills National 5). Why is this and do I have to do what it suggests?

A: From their experience of delivering a variety of courses over the last 5 years certain departments have introduced alternative courses that lead to pupils doing something other than N4/N5 over the two-year pathway. If, for example you selected 'Chemistry' in the Scoping Exercise staff might sometimes recommend Laboratory Skills National 5 because they think you stand a stronger chance of achieving a good qualification and having a better experience over the two years. Staff are making these recommendations on the back of years of experience, sometimes seeing learners struggle with courses that they are not ready or equipped for. Also, sometimes if pupils identify that they want to do two Science subjects (for example Chemistry and Biology) they would find that the Laboratory Skills course covers a similar breadth of learning and leaves extra room on their timetable for a broader range of subjects. The alternative courses (for example Laboratory Science National 5 and Business & IT SCQF level 5) are delivered through far more practical work and assessed in alternative ways (not in the form of a final exam). This means that they are accessible to all learners – even those that have not been in related subjects in S3.

Making final choices and deadlines

We need everyone to adhere to the deadlines set. Creation of the school timetable takes several months so the number of classes, and therefore the number of teachers has to be established at a suitably early point (March). The Scoping Exercise has allowed the school to make a reasonable estimate of the classes and staff we will need. However, in order for the number of classes and teachers to be confirmed we need all final choices to be verified. The initial deadline for the **'Next Steps' Options Choice Form** (04.03.24) asks pupils to do one of two things – either confirm the choices outlined in the letter or request a Pastoral Care/ Careers consultation. Nobody is advantaged or disadvantaged through choosing either option.

Q: If I confirm my options fastest or first does this mean I am in a class first and will be prioritised if the class runs out of spaces?

A: No, If you select that you would like an options consultation with Pastoral Care/SDS you will not be disadvantaged so long as you make the submission ahead of the deadline.

Q: What happens if an option in a column is oversubscribed (full)? Do some people not get a space and how is that decided?

A: Through getting pupils to participate in the Scoping Exercise the school has created what is viewed as a reasonable estimation of what pupils will likely choose at the point of making final selections. In the options choice menu we have published 100% of pupils are able to access their top three choices with 97.5 % of pupils are able to access all choices they identified in the Scoping Exercise. However, pupils are free to make different choices compared to what they selected in the Scoping Exercise. If a class/



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subject becomes oversubscribed the school will of course look to timetable in an alternative way to meet learners needs. However, if this is not possible, and there are not enough places to meet the demand through final choices, preference would be given to pupils considering: 1) whether they had done the subject in S3 2) whether they had identified it as one of their choices in the Scoping Exercise 3) whether they had participated in the Scoping Exercise, and or met the deadline for the final selection form. In recent years the Scoping Exercise system has meant that there has been adequate space in all classes.

Q: What happens if I select 'Request Support Through Consultation'?

A: If you select this option a member of staff (most likely your pastoral care teacher) will be in touch to support you with the choices. They will record the choices for you rather than have you enter them yourself through the Microsoft form.

Q: If you confirm the options what happens next?

A: For a while – nothing. Eventually your new timetable will be given to you. Before this, we will write to you to confirm your choices and provide you more information about Wider Achievement.

Q: What happens if I don't bother to make an entry in the 'Next Steps' Options Choice Form (either to confirm options or to request a consultation) or miss the deadline?

A: Teachers set assignments with deadlines all the time so you should be used to them in school. This deadline is among the most important you will face at any time in school. If you fail to make a return (either to confirm options or to request a consultation) the options you will receive on your new timetable will default to those on the letter. If at a later stage you want to change these, this will be totally dependent on whether there is space in classes and we can offer no guarantees.

Maths and English

As well as the four elective subjects S4 pupils will continue to study Maths and English. Just as other subjects have been considering the appropriate levels of learning and achievement for pupils moving into S4, Maths and English have done the same. The accompanying letter, and related options choice exercise **does not relate** to Maths and English. For these subjects, each pupil will be placed in an appropriate section in line with their attainment and achievement so far in Hillhead High School.

Q: My teacher has told me that I am in N5 Maths for S4. Can I move up a level?

A: If you demonstrate through working hard, and it is evident that you are coping easily with work (doing well in tests and Homework exercises) once in fourth year you may get the opportunity to move sections. This may indeed mean that you work to achieve a Higher even if initially recommended for a National 5 pathway.

Column G Wider Achievement

In Hillhead High School an additional column 'G' is set aside for Wider Achievement. Selection of options for this will take place at the point where the school moves to the new timetable (mid May). Additional information about this will be made available nearer the time, however information about the current wider achievement options available is accessible through the school website.

Guidance and Support

The staff team involved with timetable creation and options choice operations believe firmly that although the selection of options for S4 is an important and pivotal point in a child's life, it should not be a stressful or upsetting one. All of the staff involved would like to do whatever possible to ease any anxieties. The staff are aware of and fully understand; A) Young people may indeed and are entitled to change their minds; B) Young people may not yet have any idea what they wish to do later in life, or connect their aspirations directly to school subjects. With this in mind, the following advice is offered:



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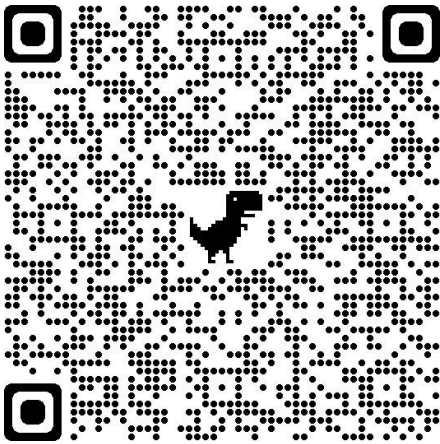


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- If your child changes their mind at any point – tell somebody. Pastoral care staff in the first instance.
- If your child is unsure of their future career aspirations, is uncertain about their choices, they should first and foremost think about; A) what they enjoy the most and would be most motivated to do; B) where they stand the greatest chance of success – eg. gaining a Higher rather than a National 5.
- Remember that this is not the final point in Hillhead High School where options choice is available. At the end of S5 pupils will be able to select options for S6. If your child is selecting subject 'X' instead of subject 'Y' for S4 they should consider if they could then pick up subject 'Y' in S6.

For further information please see the school website sections '**Options Choice Explained S3 into Senior Phase**' and '**S3 into Senior Phase Options Portal**'.

This page also contains links to several other related sections and can be reached easily using the following QR code:



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