

# Subject Matters: A-Level subject choices



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# Why Cambridge?

- World-class education
- Teaching by expert academics – many national and world subject leaders
- Extensive small-group teaching – supervisions
- Superb facilities and resources
- Academic, pastoral and financial support
- Fantastic student experience
- Excellent graduate opportunities, irrespective of degree discipline



# Doing your best in Year 11

- Move to linear A-Levels means GCSEs will probably be your most recent external examination results by the time you apply, so try to do your very best
- BUT don't panic if things don't go exactly to plan – universities do not believe GCSEs are strong indicators of future performance
- Most important thing is to start to make informed decisions about your future education

# Starting to think about what you want to study

- University education in the UK is subject-focused
- Admissions Tutors for competitive courses are looking for students with a proper, well-founded interest in the subject
- Do your best to identify a subject that really interests you and apply for that
- How do you identify the ‘right’ subject for you?
  - What subject are you enthusiastic about?
  - Does the course interest you?
  - How long is the course?
  - How are you assessed?
- Don’t worry if you just don’t know right now – try to narrow down your broader interests

# Course choice and career prospects

- Some careers **require** a specific degree, e.g. Architecture; Engineering; Medicine; Veterinary Medicine
- Some jobs in the commercial or business world (~5% of the total) also require particular degree subjects: typically, Mathematics or Languages

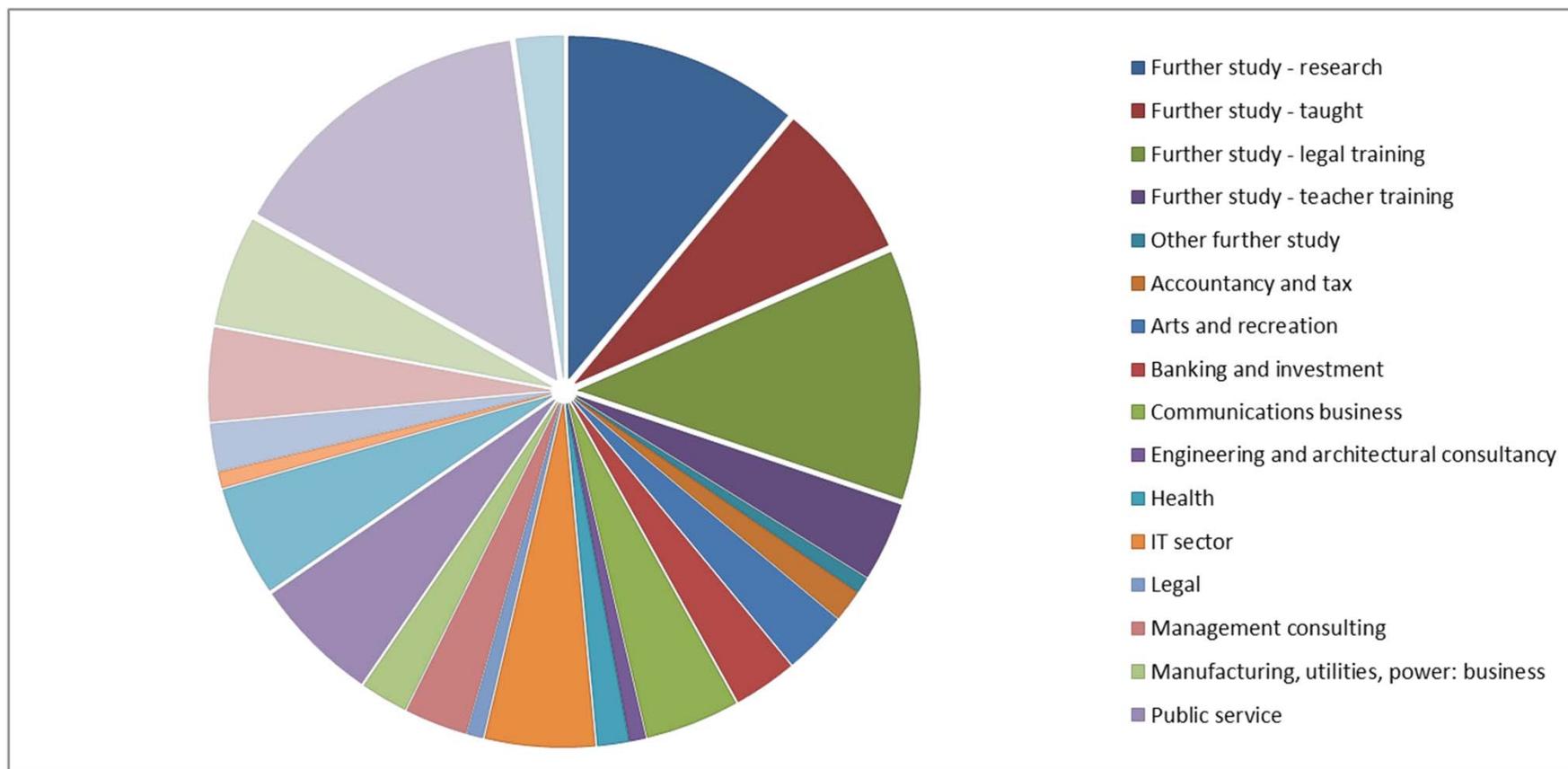


# Course choice and career prospects

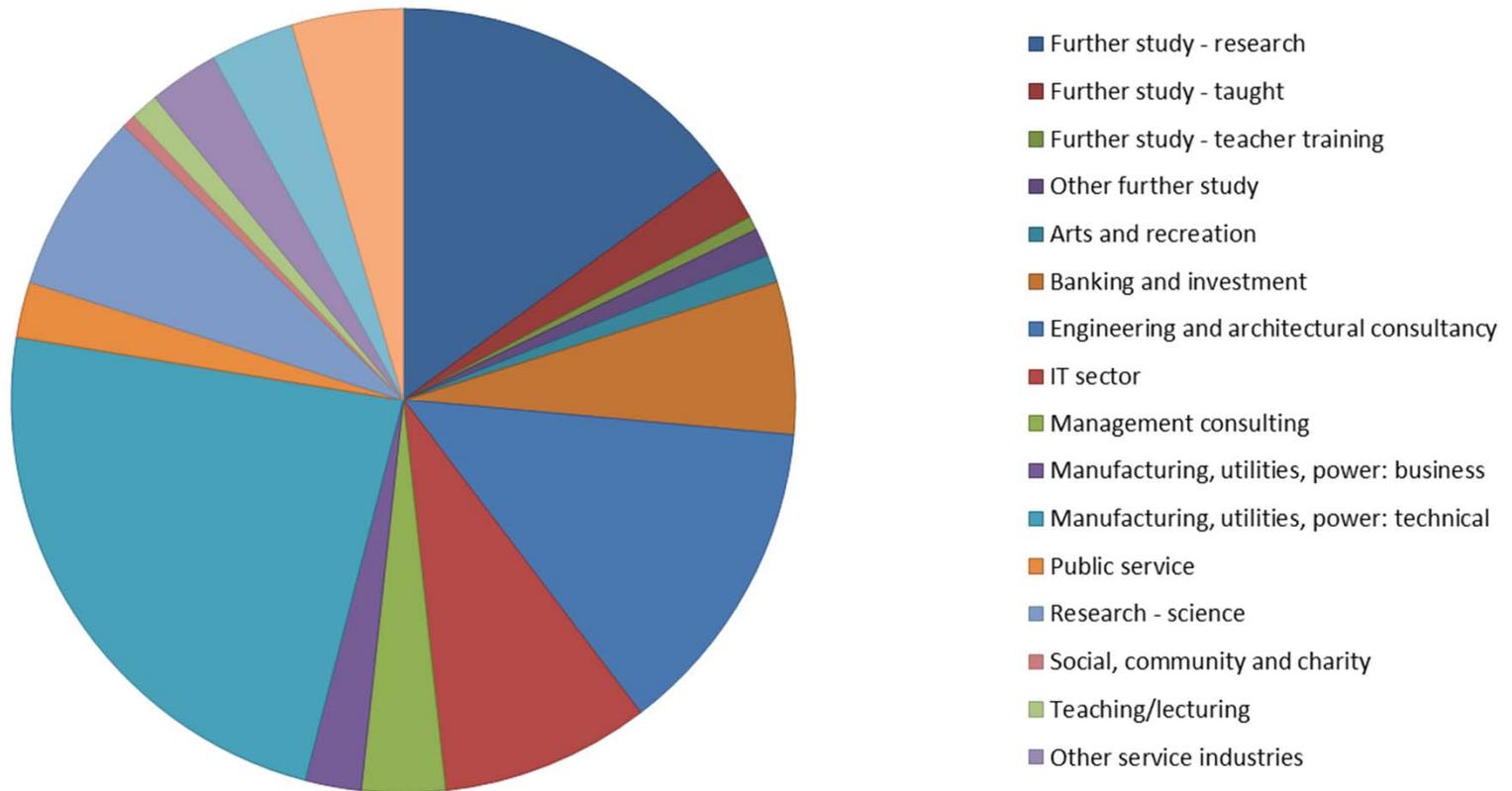
- The majority of top jobs **don't** specify a degree subject – they ask for a good degree (Class I or II.1) from a good university, in **any** subject (and if necessary professional training follows). Work experience is often important, though.
- Typical 'open access' careers include:

Law  
Teaching  
Business  
Journalism and publishing  
Public administration  
IT  
Accountancy and finance

# Graduate destinations of Cambridge historians (2016)



# Graduate destinations of Cambridge engineers (2016):



# Why are A-Level choices important?

- Cambridge and other top universities look for students who have studied subjects that prepare them for their university course
- Some subjects (particularly sciences) have compulsory A-Level requirements – without these you are exceptionally unlikely to be offered a place
- Research the courses you are interested in to check whether you need something you might not have thought about
- Think carefully about the number of subjects you want to study – our standard offers are A\*A\*A or A\*AA, so would you stand a better chance doing just three A-Levels?

# Know what you want to study?

- For **Medicine** you will need chemistry and *at least* one other science/maths.
- **Biological Natural Sciences**: three sciences/maths, including chemistry.  
**Physical Natural Sciences**: three sciences/maths, including chemistry and/or physics.
- **Mathematics**: maths and further maths are compulsory at Cambridge.
- **Economics** is very maths-focussed at Cambridge. Mathematics and (ideally) further mathematics are your best preparation – economics is not necessary.
- **Computer Science**: maths and (ideally) further maths – computer science is not necessary.
- **Psychological and Behavioural Sciences**: at least one science or maths is helpful.
- **Architecture**: art can be an advantage, and maths or physics is also a plus.
- Most successful applicants for **History** have history; for **English**, English literature or lang. & lit.; for **Geography**, geography, and so on. But it's not true of **Law**!

# Want to keep your options open?

- It's easier for Arts/Social Sciences courses than for Sciences (except Psychological & Behavioural Sciences).
- One or two A Levels in Arts subjects and one or two in Sciences/Maths will be fine – even attractive – for most Arts/Social Sciences courses, but can narrow your options in the Sciences.
- Generally, try to choose one or two 'Keystone' subjects, and one or two additional subjects that are relevant to your interests and add something to your profile.
- It's always better to excel in three subjects than to perform modestly in four.
- Extended Projects can be a good way to explore your interests.

# You are interested in arts/humanities/social sciences...

- Keystone subjects:



- Other good choices, likely to be useful:
  - An additional Language, Ancient History, Classical Civilisation, Economics, Further Maths, Geography, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Sciences (Biology, Chemistry or Physics)
- Useful depending on the course you are applying for:
  - Archaeology, Citizenship, English Language, English Lit & Lang, Environmental Science, Government & Politics, History of Art, Law, Music, Psychology, Sociology

# You are interested in science/mathematics...

- Keystone subjects:



- Also very useful for maths, physics, engineering and computer science:
  - Further Maths
- Useful depending on the course you are applying for:
  - Computing, Statistics, Design & Technology, Electronics, Geology, Psychology

## Subjects you might not have considered

- Interested in international development, environmental policy, or NGOs? Consider Land Economy.
- Human, Social and Political Sciences is our flagship social sciences course, incorporating politics, international relations, sociology and psychology.
- There are now many joint degrees combining history with other subjects (History and Politics; History and Modern Languages; HSPS; History of Art) or you can look to specialise (Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, Archaeology, Classics, Asian and Middle Eastern Studies).
- Like arguing about ideas and learning about how people think? Philosophy or even Theology might be for you.
- Think you want to study Medicine? Sure? Depending on your interests, consider Biological Natural Sciences or Psychological and Behavioural Sciences.

## Where can I find out more?

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/courses>

Your one-stop shop for information on all the universities courses, including guidance on the subjects you should take at A-Level

<https://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/events/subjectmatters>

Our subject guidance page, where you can download our guidance booklet

[aces@chris.cam.ac.uk](mailto:aces@chris.cam.ac.uk)

My email – I'll be happy to answer your questions