



INFORMATION FOR UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS OFFICERS: SCHOOL CONTEXT

Banbridge Academy is an 11-18, co-educational, Local Education Authority controlled, selective grammar school, founded in 1786. The school has an enrolment of over 1,300 pupils, including approximately 180 pupils in each Sixth Form year group. The school's central aim is for everyone to be happy at school, known personally and cared for individually. Our emphasis is on nurturing the whole person and to that end, a rich diversity of artistic, dramatic, musical and sporting activities are offered as part of our extra-curricular and co-curricular programmes.

General impact of Covid-19 on 2023 applicants

Like all schools in Northern Ireland, Banbridge Academy was closed for in-person teaching between January and April 2021, when current Upper Sixth pupils were preparing to complete their GCSE studies. This year group missed the opportunity to sit public examinations at GCSE level and were awarded Centre Determined Grades. In considering GCSE results as part of any application, admissions officers will wish to bear this in mind. While the school had adapted to deliver the best possible model of remote learning during 2021, pupils still experienced significant disruption to learning and to the wider school experience. In 2022, pupils in this Upper Sixth cohort sat AS level examinations: their first public external examinations. Specifications for these examinations saw a reduction in examined content in line with JCQ regulations for exam boards across the UK.

Qualification framework

In Sixth Form, pupils mostly take three A-levels, with a minority taking four, from a choice of 24 subjects. Most subjects at GCSE and A-level follow specifications from the Northern Ireland examination board (CCEA), though the school also offers a small number of subjects from other examination boards, some of which are linear at A-level (Psychology, Drama). Decisions on which examination boards' specifications are followed are taken by Heads of Department.

Prior to the pandemic, CCEA awarded A-levels on the basis of a combined AS and A Level two-year course. While the AS Level can be taken as a standalone qualification, it also comprises 40% of the overall A Level. This will again be the case for AS level examinations taken in summer 2022.

Results

The table below shows a breakdown of the school's A-level results over the past four years:

Year	Overall % pass rate	% Achieving 3+ A*-C
2018-19	99.8%	85.1%
2019-20	100%	91.6%
2020-21	99.6%	91.5%
2021-22	100%	91.1%

Post-18 destinations

Almost all pupils in this cohort will apply to university, with around 90% likely to take up a place following A-level results. Over 50% of pupils were awarded places in the two local universities in 2022 - Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University – with others taking up places at English and Scottish universities. A growing number of pupils each year are taking up places on Higher Level Apprenticeship schemes.

UCAS predicted grades

The school recognises UCAS advice that “A predicted grade is the grade of qualification an applicant’s school or college believes they’re likely to achieve in positive circumstances.” Predicted grades are determined by subject teachers at the beginning of the Upper Sixth year. As most pupils take AS level examinations under CCEA specifications (which comprise 40% of the overall A-level) these grades are usually taken as a starting point in arriving at predicted grades. Where UMS marks suggest a pupil is close to a grade boundary, teachers’ professional judgement is important in determining whether the predicted A-level grade should match the AS level grade.

Work experience

Under normal circumstances, all pupils are given the opportunity to undertake two days’ work experience in February of their Lower Sixth year. Pupils in this Upper Sixth cohort were not able to avail of this due to ongoing coronavirus restrictions throughout the 2021/22 year. Many sought opportunities through the online virtual experiences, while a number were able to secure short in-person placements. Those applying for competitive courses such as medicine and nursing found this especially challenging.

Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities

Pupils in Banbridge Academy have access to a wide range of co-curricular activities, including traditional sports and musical societies, but extending to many pupil-led organisations. In sixth form, pupils are encouraged to exercise leadership roles within extra-curricular organisations.

The school’s prefect system offers sixth form pupils the opportunity to take on areas of responsibility which contribute to the enhancement of the school community. Approximately 35% of pupils are appointed as Prefects in Upper Sixth. The prefect team is headed by a group of eight senior prefects including the Head Boy, Head Girl, and Deputies.