



Dear Parents/Guardians,

Families and pupils may have seen news stories at the end of December relating to a perception that IGCSE qualifications are easier than GCSE qualifications and so independent schools who elect to offer IGCSE courses may put their pupils at an advantage for university admissions. These stories arose as the government is requiring state-funded schools to phase out the IGCSE courses that many have taught previously, instead requiring these schools to teach the new, reformed GCSE qualifications.

At Bedford School we teach a mixture of IGCSE and GCSE courses, as we have done for many years with success. As an independent school, we have the ability to choose the courses that we feel will best develop the skills and understanding of our pupils in that subject, as well as prepare our pupils for further study. Historically, IGCSE courses were perceived to be the more challenging option - but we still elected to offer these courses in some subjects because we felt that they offered the best intrinsic educational quality.

In terms of relative demand, the IGCSE awarding bodies take care to align the standards of IGCSEs with equivalent qualifications using statistical evidence and comparability studies. There have been no studies to suggest there is actually any difference in cognitive demand between GCSE and IGCSE qualifications. The perception of 'easier' in the recent news stories has arisen because the government have promoted the new, reformed GCSEs as 'more rigorous' than their predecessor GCSEs. IGCSE qualifications have always remained a reliable and rigorous alternative, unaffected by government intervention. Certainly, there is no distinction made by universities or employers between GCSE and IGCSE courses; to all intents and purposes they carry, and have always carried, the same weight.

That some IGCSE subjects see a higher proportion of candidates awarded A*/A (or equivalent) is a reflection of a greater number of academically selective schools choosing to take these qualifications. Our pupils and teachers have demonstrated that they can achieve excellent results in the new, reformed GCSE courses as well as in IGCSE courses. For example, 22% of our 2018 GCSE cohort achieved grade 9 (the highest possible grade) in the reformed Mathematics GCSE course against just 3.6% of candidates nationally.

We have always given our choice of examination courses very careful thought, and continue to do so, to ensure we give the best educational experience to our pupils. If you do have any questions on our curriculum, I would be very pleased to help; please do get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Sam Baldock

Deputy Head (Academic)