



Dear Parents and Guardians of Lower Sixth A-Level boys,

Sixth Form Curriculum

I trust your sons are enjoying the start of their Sixth Form studies. As we approach the end of the first term, I write regarding the curriculum for this year.

Our default position is that A-Level boys study four subjects in the Lower Sixth, with most reducing to three subjects as they start the Upper Sixth (although some will complete four A-Levels at the end of the Upper Sixth – especially those studying sciences and all those studying further mathematics).

We adopt a four subject A-Level curriculum for a variety of reasons (some philosophical – others more pragmatic!), which include:

- Our belief in ‘education for education’s sake’ which enables boys to develop their academic interest in a wider range of subjects irrespective of whether there is a grade or exam at the end of a course. The study of any subject for as long as possible is of value, therefore.
- The skills the boys develop by the breadth of study in the Lower Sixth can enhance their performance in their other subjects, because of the transferable skills involved and (for many boys) the complementary nature of their subjects.
- Maintaining a breadth of education will also help our boys stand out from other university applicants when it comes to UCAS applications, as we detail the wider academic skills developed in our school references to universities. This can be especially important in the context of more competitive applications.
- There is repeated evidence from previous generations of boys who “absolutely knew” which subject they planned to drop from the start of Lower Sixth, who actually ended up changing their minds later in the year. Indeed, it is common for boys to change their mind about a subject next term, as they further develop their skills and engage in deeper study of each subject. This can be especially true when boys have in their combination a subject they have not studied previously (i.e. business, classical civilisation, economics, politics or music technology). A ‘safety-net’ at this stage is, therefore, prudent.

Bedford boys (both before and after A-Level exam reforms) have always studied four subjects in the Lower Sixth and have still been in a strong position to secure excellent results at the end of the Upper Sixth. This remains the case, and therefore there is no evidence to suggest that studying a broad curriculum in the Lower Sixth will have a detrimental effect on their overall outcomes at the end of the Upper Sixth.

Nevertheless, we understand that a reduction to three subjects before the end of the year may be appropriate for a small number of boys. As such, have introduced the possibility of boys reducing their core curriculum before the end of this term (to three A-Level subjects).

For boys who adopt this route, their additional curriculum time will be timetabled to include:

- Independent study periods (of which some are supervised), in order to

- complete additional learning relevant to a boy's future university/career aspirations (e.g. completing MOOCs or other online courses, entering essay competitions, preparing academic subject society presentations)
- complete additional learning towards a boy's Bedford School Independent Project (BSIP) or Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)
- complete consolidation and extension learning in a boy's remaining three A-Level subjects (although we would expect the majority of this consolidation and extension to take place in the 'prep time' made available by studying fewer subjects)
- community service placement (remote, currently) and reflection on placement.

There will be a form available next week for boys (and their families) to complete if boys wish to request an earlier curriculum reduction. This form will require a boy to articulate their rationale for a reduced A-Level curriculum, their university/career intentions and how they would propose to use their independent study periods to enhance their learning and skills profile.

Upon submitting the form, a boy's teachers and Tutor will be able to review the request in the context of their progress across their subjects, such that we can give boys the most informed advice about their curriculum for the rest of their Sixth Form. We would rarely advise boys to 'lock' themselves into subjects that may not return them a creditable A-Level grade, especially where qualification to a particular A-Level subject was more marginal based on their GCSE results.

The boys will be given more guidance about these considerations in an Assembly on Monday, and we will be asking any boys considering making this request to discuss the matter carefully with their family and Tutor. For most boys it is likely to be too soon to narrow their curriculum to three subjects, but we wish to support those for whom it may be appropriate. There will be second opportunity to request a curriculum reduction in February, which we anticipate will be a more natural reduction point for some boys.

Finally, a word on community service. Boys at Bedford School have always carried out community service via a variety of outlets at the school - not least through Duke of Edinburgh, CAS (a compulsory part of IB) and their own endeavours. Learning to give of your own time to others who need it is an important part of growing up, and brings with it critical skills of empathy, humility and communication. However, as is already the case for many boys, it is entirely possible (and desirable) to complete community service alongside four A-Level subjects.

I hope this information is of help to you and your sons; please do drop [Mrs Smith](#) (your son's Academic Year Head) or me a line if you have any questions.

With best wishes,

Sam Baldock
Deputy Head (Academic)