



Dear Fifth Form Parents and Guardians,

## Sixth Form Options

I hope this finds you safe and well.

I apologise for the length of this letter, but there are several important matters to cover relating to Sixth Form options. Your son has also been given a copy of this letter.

The letter is divided into the following sections:

1. **Sixth Form Subject Options:** what choices do boys have to make and by when?
2. **Qualification for Sixth Form:** a reminder of our Sixth Form entrance requirements
3. **The Sixth Form Curriculum:** what courses your son will be following in the Sixth Form
4. **Sixth Form Subject-Specific Considerations:** supplementary details to those provided in the previously issued course guides for those considering mathematics, computer science, physics, economics and business studies, Art and DT in the Sixth Form
5. **University Course Specific Considerations:** some advice for boys intending to study particular courses at university
6. **Sources of Advice:** some suggested websites for helping with decision-making
7. **Making Changes to Options** once the deadline has passed
8. **A Note for German native boys:** regarding Sixth Form subject choices

### 1. Sixth Form Subject Options

All Fifth Form boys are now required to indicate their chosen Sixth Form subject options; the Options Forms are available via the following links:

- [IB Diploma Options Form](#)
- [A-Level Options Form](#)

We ask that a parent or guardian completes the form, to give permission for the combination of subjects and courses.

Boys must indicate whether they wish to study IB or A-Levels, and which subjects within each curriculum, so that we can plan next year's timetable. Completed forms must be received by **Monday 8 February**. Whilst the school endeavours to meet the requests of all boys, this is subject to timetabling feasibility and sufficient numbers opting for subjects. We reserve the right to remove subjects subsequently from the option blocks, and may request boys to alter their options subsequently.

Boys opting to study IB should indicate on the IB form their choice of **six subjects, one from each group**, with three subjects at Higher Level and three subjects at Standard Level.

Boys opting to study A-Level will need to ensure that they select **one subject from each block**, totalling four subjects. In some instances, a boy's preferred subject combination may not fit the blocking system. These boys are still required to select and indicate one subject from each block on the form but may, *additionally*, indicate at the bottom of the form their 'ideal' subject combination. Whilst we cannot guarantee to be able to

accommodate these choices, we will look to see whether there is any way the timetable can accommodate this combination and be in touch with your son about this in due course. The proposed A-Level blocking system can be seen on the website [here](#).

Further information about Sixth Form options can be found on the school website (Upper School – [Sixth Form](#)). There is also an opportunity for you to discuss subject choices at the Fifth Form Parents' Evening on Monday 1 February. If you have specific questions about the [IB course](#), please [contact Mr Adrian Finch](#), Director of IB.

## 2. Qualification for Sixth Form

May I take this opportunity to remind you of the Sixth Form Entry requirements indicated in my email sent at the end of last term, and also printed in the [Sixth Form Course Guide](#). Boys will need to meet the GCSE grade requirements stated to study their chosen subjects in the Sixth Form. In the event that a boy fails to meet this requirement, they may be asked to pick an alternative subject in which they have secured the required grade (subject to spaces being available in sets) or, where this is not possible or the minimum grade level for entry has not been achieved, we may not be able to find an appropriate combination of courses to enter the Sixth Form.

## 3. The Sixth Form Curriculum

### • International Baccalaureate

The IB curriculum, which the school has followed for almost two decades, continues as before. Boys opting to study the IB at Sixth Form will follow the same curriculum pattern as previous generations of IB students here. More information about the IB Diploma at Bedford can be found [here](#).

The IB is highly regarded by universities globally. A recent survey of UK and US university admissions tutors revealed that the IB is the most highly regarded of all qualifications, in particular because it:

- develops global awareness and creativity;
- develops communication skills and numeracy;
- develops self-management skills;
- nurtures an open mind; and
- encourages independent enquiry

As a result, university offers to IB students are often **very generous**, with many Russell Group universities offering IB candidates places at significantly lower levels than their A-Level counterparts.

Nationally, research by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) showed that IB students were almost twice as likely to win a place at a top 20 UK university compared to A-Level students (the study did attempt to control for student background and school type). At Bedford, too, we have seen a higher rate of entry to the most competitive courses from our IB candidates.

It is worth noting that we have observed this across all pupils taking IB, regardless of their attainment at GCSE. There is often a misconception that the IB programme is for the more able candidates, but the higher rate of entrance to Russell Group universities (or overseas equivalent) is common to those boys who average a B grade at GCSE and go on to take the IB course.

### • A-Level

Conversely, you will be aware that all A-Level qualifications have been changed at a national level over recent years. The AS qualification, which used to comprise 50% of the complete A-Level, has been

decoupled from A-Level. A-Levels are now linear courses, which means that exams for them will all be at the end of a two-year course.

Boys will choose four subjects to pursue in the Lower Sixth; they will then decide whether to drop a subject for the Upper Sixth and take either three or four subjects through to A-Level in the Upper Sixth.

We have carefully considered all the possible models and consulted with schools that are similar to us in terms of academic strength and size. The route we are choosing gives Bedfordians a breadth of rigorous academic study within a framework that has been freed from the limiting nature of the bite-sized, modular system we were operating under for over a decade. Sixth Form pupils now have the space and time to explore their subjects properly without the spectre of an exam coming at them over the horizon almost as soon as they have started! Moreover, the new two-year linear approach to Sixth Form study allows us to regain time in the Lower Sixth for education in its most useful sense, and fits with our philosophy as a school that wishes to educate the whole child.

#### **4. Some Sixth Form Subject-Specific Considerations**

In addition to the subject requirements outlined in the Sixth Form Entrance criteria, please note:

- **Mathematics**

Our experience over a large number of years shows that boys need to secure very high GCSE maths grades to be able to thrive and secure good Sixth Form results in this subject. In line with many other similar schools, we therefore only permit boys to take Maths at A-Level or IB Mathematics: Analysis and Approaches Standard Level if they have achieved a grade 7 in GCSE Mathematics.

Boys considering these courses should be securing solid 7 grades or above in their GCSE Maths, therefore; a Sixth Form mathematician is most likely to do well if they have a high score which takes them comfortably over the grade 7 boundary at GCSE.

If boys who have opted for these courses do not meet these entry criteria they will be asked, following the release of the GCSE results, to make an alternative subject choice. Experience tells us that this is for their own benefit in the longer term.

Please note that this entrance requirement does **not** apply to boys considering IB Mathematics: Applications and Interpretations.

- **Further Mathematics at A-Level and IB Higher Level Mathematics**

Given the complexity of these subjects in Sixth Form, boys are required to achieve at least a grade 8 in GCSE Mathematics to be permitted onto these courses. Boys will be asked to make an alternative choice of subject in the event that they do not secure these grades in their GCSE.

Boys opting for Further Mathematics A-Level are advised that they should plan to continue with all four chosen A-Level subjects in the Upper Sixth in order to ensure they demonstrate sufficient breadth of study when it comes to university applications.

- **Computer Science at A-Level**

The Computer Science course is highly mathematical, and a boy must have very strong mathematical ability and interest to have the potential to secure a good grade in this subject at A-Level. Boys opting for Computer Science are therefore required to secure at least a grade 7 in Mathematics (in addition to a grade 7 in Computer Science) to be permitted entry onto the course.

- **Physics at A-Level or IB Higher Level**

Given the increasingly conceptual and mathematical nature of the subject at Sixth Form level, boys wishing to study Physics are required to achieve at least a grade 7 in Mathematics **and** in Physics. If boys who have opted for Physics at Sixth Form level do not meet these entry criteria they will be asked, following the release of the GCSE results, to make an alternative subject choice.

- **Economics and Business A-Level**

Whilst the school does permit boys to study both Economics and Business at A-Level, anyone considering this is advised that a minority of universities may not consider such a choice to demonstrate sufficient breadth of study (since the subjects are closely related). Boys thinking of making these subjects two of their choices should therefore check that any application to institutions they are likely to apply to after school will not be affected by their choice.

- **Art and Design and Technology**

It is possible to take both Art and DT in the Sixth Form. However, it is also the case, and boys should be aware, that both subjects have high expectations with regards to coursework, and regular attendance at after school opportunities is essential for this particular combination.

## 5. Some University Course-Specific Considerations

- **For boys intending to study Mathematics or a Mathematics-related course (e.g. Engineering) at university**

*N.B. This advice applies most specifically to the top research universities.*

If a boy wishes to take a pure Mathematics course at university, then the A-Level Single Maths and A-Level Further Maths courses (in total two A-Levels in Mathematics) involve a broader study of mathematics topics when compared to Higher Level IB Mathematics and so it may be advisable for such boys to consider A-Level rather than IB. However, if a boy is considering a joint honours with Mathematics, there is possibly less requirement to have as much exposure to Mathematics in the Sixth Form – though we would always advise boys to double check this with any university they might possibly end up applying to in advance of making their choices, just to be certain. It follows, then, that the study of IB Mathematics is certainly respected by universities when candidates are applying for a non-pure Mathematics-related course. Indeed, a boy studying Higher Level Mathematics at IB will be stretched further in his study of Mathematics than a boy taking Single Maths A-Level only. However, we would normally advise boys wanting to take Maths-related courses at university who want to study IB at Sixth Form to **also** study Physics (either Higher or Standard) Level since the IB Mathematics: Analysis and Approaches course does not include Mechanics, whereas the core of Physics IB does include Mechanics.

- **For boys intending to study pure Economics**

The study of Mathematics at A-Level is essential (with Further Maths if possible) if any boy intends to study a pure Economics course at a Russell Group (or other equivalent) university. The 'top' universities usually require IB candidates wishing to study pure Economics to study HL Maths, but this is not always the case; boys are advised to check with any possible university choices before completing their options.

- **For boys intending to study Medicine**

Boys should be sure to include both Biology and Chemistry at IB or A-Level in order to make a competitive application to a range of medical schools. We strongly recommend Mathematics is included in their combination, as well.

## 6. Sources of Advice When Making Choices

If boys have any questions about specific subjects and their aptitude for them at Sixth Form, they should speak to the relevant subject teacher or Head of Department in the first instance. Their Tutor and/or Housemaster is also available for consultation, as is the Head of Careers and the Deputy Head (Academic).

Additionally, boys and parents may find the online resources below helpful:

<http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/coursesearch/>

You can use this website to search for the specific subject requirements of different degree courses at different universities.

<https://www.informedchoices.ac.uk/>

This contains some very helpful advice from the Russell Group of universities, including details of what subjects are required for certain university degree courses (a hard copy of which was given to boys this week).

There is also a wealth of Careers materials available for boys via the [UCAS and Careers Firefly site](#).

## 7. Making Changes to Options

If boys wish to make changes to their subject options after Monday 8 February, they should contact me as soon as possible with their amended choices. Whilst we will try and accommodate such changes, the school cannot guarantee to be able to do so because timetable, staffing and grouping arrangements for next academic year will be based on the information we receive by Monday 8 February.

## 8. A Note for German Native Boys

Any German native considering applying to a German university will need to ensure that the subjects they opt for meet the requirements of the German education authorities for university admission. Full details can be found in the [Sixth Form Course Guide](#).

As always, if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With all best wishes,



**Sam Baldock**  
Deputy Head (Academic)