

How Baccalaureate outshines the 'gold standard' A-levels

By Sarah Harris
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SIXTH-formers who study for an International Baccalaureate instead of A-levels are taking an academically superior qualification, it was confirmed yesterday.

The body in charge of college admissions has developed a points system which means the value of the baccalaureate can be compared to the A-level for the first time.

It shows even a modest baccalaureate score is worth more points than four A-level passes at A grade.

The rating is another blow for the tarnished 'gold standard' of the A-level and will further enhance the growing credibility of the alternative qualification, which requires pupils to study both the humanities and the sciences.

Under a new tariff system developed by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service an International Baccalaureate score of 38 points out of a maximum of 45 is deemed to be equivalent of five A grades at A-level.

Oxford and Cambridge typically ask for 40 points. A relatively modest baccalaureate score of 35 points is worth four-and-a-half A grades at A-level.

Even 30 baccalaureate points reflects three-and-a-half As at A-level which is enough to secure entry to most academically selective universities. A baccalaureate pass is worth two As, according to the tariff

TWO WAYS OF THINKING ON SIXTH-FORM EDUCATION

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

CREATED in 1968 and seen as a tougher, alternative sixth-form qualification, it requires pupils to study both the humanities and the sciences. They typically study six subjects, including English and maths, a foreign language, a science, a social science such as history or geography, and a creative subject such as drama or art.

In addition to doing volunteer work such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and taking music lessons, students also get credits for sporting successes, must write a 4,000-word essay and study critical thinking.

The qualification uses elements from education systems from around the world, incorporating both the breadth offered by some and the specialisation of others.

A-LEVELS

INTRODUCED in 1951. The modern version of the A-level is made up of AS levels and A2 units, the former is taken in the lower sixth and the latter sat in the upper sixth.

Results are graded from A to E, along with a fail grade, U or Unclassified. The number taken can vary, although three is usually the minimum required for university entrance.

The A-level system has been criticised for providing a lack of breadth. There are also claims that students are able to choose soft options with subjects such as media studies and theatre studies. Exam boards have been criticised for failing to maintain the 'gold standard'. Last summer pupils passed nearly a quarter of exams with A grades compared with less than 10 per cent 25 years ago.

being introduced in 2008. A report by Ucas justifies the huge number of points credited to the top end of baccalaureate achievement, claiming that 'it is not the fault of an IB candidate... that the assessment system for GCE A-level does not recognise the differ-

'Critical thinking'

ence between a good pass and a bare pass at grade A'.

Tory education spokesman David Willetts said: 'This shows why people are losing confidence in the standard of A-level. The IB does seem to offer a rigour that is hard to get from A-levels now.'

'It's important that children

have the opportunity to do the IB as well as doing A-levels if that suits them better.'

The baccalaureate is considered superior to A-levels because it provides a broader education and involves more study. There is also a requirement to study arts and sciences - offering a more rounded and rigorous education.

It also avoids the criticism often aimed at A-levels - that high grades can be gained by learning subjects 'by rote'. Students have to pass philosophy and critical thinking exams - proving they can think for themselves.

Rising numbers of state and independent schools are turning their backs on A-levels because they believe they are no longer sufficiently stretching bright pupils and that universities are being inundated

with straight 'A' applicants. They are phasing in the baccalaureate alongside A-levels or aiming to offer it as the sole sixth-form qualification.

The number of state and independent schools registering to teach the alternative qualification in the United Kingdom has almost doubled from 45 in 2001 to 87 this year.

Numbers are expected to soar to 200 over the next few years.

But Dr John Dunford, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, insisted A-levels were here to stay.

He said of the tariff system: 'It could either make schools want to do IBs more because they count for so many points or it could put schools off because it suggests they're so difficult.'

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Wednesday's lottery results

Lotto numbers
7, 17, 29, 33, 42, 45 Bonus 24
Three ticketholders share the £2.3m jackpot

Thunderball draw
5, 8, 10, 19, 22 Thunderball 9
Two winners of the £250,000 top prize

Lotto Extra
6, 11, 15, 21, 37, 41
No winner: £2.9m jackpot

Last night's result

Daily play numbers
2, 5, 6, 12, 13, 15, 24
No winners of the £30,000 top prize

INSIDE: Sudoku 47 & 48, Jonathan Cainer 50, It's Friday! 54-61, TV 65-68, Letters 78-79, City 80-83