

LETTERS TO EDITORS**Telegraph, 27 November 2019****Better than GCSEs**

SIR – It is welcome news that St Edward’s School in Oxford (report, November 25) is putting experiential learning ahead of reductive testing by launching an alternative to GCSEs.

At Bedales School alternatives were introduced in 2006, as GCSEs were too restrictive. The English GCSE, for example, is a mass-market exam at the mercy of short, cheap and accessible store-cupboard staples, such as Of Mice and Men and An Inspector Calls.

In the Bedales Assessed Course, students study a range of pre- and post-1900 prose, poetry and drama, such as Hedda Gabler, The Turn of the Screw, Racing Demon, and poetry by Daljit Nagra and Simon Armitage. Eight texts are studied, against three for GCSE, and as well as an exam at the end of each year, there is continuous assessment and an oral presentation. Knowledge, skills and understanding are tested, not just memory.

The “reformed” GCSEs are really just a high-stakes pub quiz.

Magnus Bashaarat
Head, Bedales School
Petersfield, Hampshire

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2019/11/27/lettersprospect-catastrophic-hard-left-government-ever-seen/>

The Times, 21 November 2019**Scrapping GCSEs**

Sir, The consensus building among head teachers that GCSEs are outdated is long overdue (“GCSEs belong in the Victorian era, say heads”, Nov 20). We know that cars driven by combustion engines are bad for the environment and for people’s health and government measures to wean us off them have been relatively uncontroversial. The same should be true in the sphere of education given the damage to young people that GCSEs inflict.

It would help, of course, if government could itself agree on the validity of GCSEs: Robert Halfon, the eminently sensible chairman of the education select committee and former education minister has dismissed them as “pointless”, while the serving minister for school standards Nick Gibb has described them as “a national treasure”. That there should be such a chasm in perspectives among those who have held education briefs for the same government suggests that policy makers must now pay the issue proper attention. In the meantime, those head teachers who decry the lack of educational authenticity in GCSEs should have the courage of their convictions and provide something else in their place.

Magnus Bashaarat
Head of Bedales School

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/times-letters-the-leaders-debate-and-manifesto-promises-qkxhl5pjr>