

Destined for the top

John Sprague, director of IB at Sevenoaks School in Kent, tells you all you need to know about the International Baccalaureate Diploma

What is the IB?

The International Baccalaureate® (IB) Diploma Programme is a two-year curriculum aimed at students aged 16 to 19. The IB was founded in 1968 as a non-profit educational foundation by a group of forward-thinking teachers from the International School of Geneva, with help from other international schools. It is administered worldwide from three global hubs: in the US, Europe and Asia.

The vision of the IB is premised on a notion of what being well-educated means. And this is that an 18-year-old school-leaver should be numerate, literate, be able to apply rigorous scientific and mathematical thinking to the world, while being able to engage in foreign cultures. These are the basic requirements in living in the multi-faceted world of the 21st century.

The IB has remained remarkably consistent over nearly 50 years in its identity, content and quality. This consistency has been maintained alongside huge growth. In 1971, 750 students in seven schools took the IB; in 2013, 1.1 million students in 3,580 schools completed the same programme.

How is it structured?

Students take six subjects, including a foreign language, maths and English – three to higher and three to standard level. They must also write an extended essay (a 4,000-word independently researched project), take the theory of



As well as learning the core materials in the IB subjects, students are encouraged to think around the topic

knowledge course which focuses on developing thinking and reasoning skills; and follow the creativity, action and service programme by engaging in sports, the arts and voluntary work.

There are seven points available for each of the six subjects, and three more points for the core programme, totalling a possible score of 45 points.

One step ahead...

Even though the IB's main agenda is broader than simply university entrance, the depth and rigour of the programme means it is no surprise that IB students have the edge in UK university entrance. "If we are hesitating about making an offer at all, we would be more likely to make an offer to an IB student than an A-level student," says Geoff Parks, director of admissions at the University of Cambridge. In addition, the

experience gained in various elements like the Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge and independent learning and time management skills mean that students are ready for the rigour of university study and often find the first year of university easier than their final year of IB. The Russell Group is beginning to recognise the importance of the wider portfolio of an IB student.

Sevenoaks has been a flagship school for the IB for years. Introduced in 1978, 2006 saw the first full IB sixth form cohort. We like the IB's unique balance of the pragmatism, vision and pedagogy. We are now one of the world's leading IB schools, with a points average of 39.4 (10 points higher than the world average).

For the future

The IB provides what employers want: "A broad set of so-called employability skills. That is, being able to work in a team, to solve problems, to communicate effectively, to understand how businesses work and the ability to manage their time," says John Cridland in *Changing the Pace: CBI/Pearson education and skills survey 2013*.

Pupils are encouraged to be reflective and questioning in their own learning as well as mastering the material in their broad and deep academic courses.

The benefits of a broad curriculum are many, and profound. We want our scientists to be good communicators, our humanities specialists to appreciate the methodology of science and the beauty of mathematics. We want successive generations to think critically, challenge accepted views and appreciate and analyse multiple perspectives more than we want them to memorise facts.

The IB has proven its ability to better prepare students for university and its single vision is an attempt to prepare young people for a life of learning in an unpredictable future. 

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