

# IB at university

Director of admissions **Paul Teulon** explains why the IB Diploma is such good preparation for university

**K**ing's College London receives tens of thousands of undergraduate applications every year from students all across the world. The increasingly globalised nature of education and student mobility means that universities are considering hundreds of different qualifications each cycle, making it a challenge to judge application pools fairly and equitably (though it also makes reading individual applications more enjoyable).

As most students don't have a choice as to what qualification they study at high school, it would be wrong for any university to prefer one qualification over another, but admissions staff can see the inherent qualities of a qualification when reviewing a student's application. At King's we receive over 5000 applications from IB Diploma students, making it the second most prevalent qualification we receive, and hundreds of IB students join us each year.

## Numeracy and literacy

One of the great virtues of the IB Diploma is that all students have a strong level of numeracy and literacy. The nature of most careers and indeed university degrees is that candidates are required to have a wide skill set. Mathematicians and engineers are expected to be able to write clearly and convey their ideas in simple terms, social scientists engage with data and humanities students benefit from having basic numerical skills. At King's the interdisciplinary nature of many of our programmes — such as international relations, global health and social medicine, and digital culture — suits the skills developed through the Diploma.

The extended essay is of great interest to admissions officers, either referenced on the application form or discussed in an interview. The independent nature of the research and ability to explore a new topic in great depth often adds richness to applications.

## Synoptic vs compartmentalised

At many universities, while there is a curriculum to follow, you are encouraged to forge your own path and explore beyond the technical boundaries of the curriculum. The IB Diploma often allows teachers to choose their own preferred texts and this allows you to discover a much wider range of authors, periods and languages. We often read about these in IB students' personal statements, and they make for an interesting change from the usual popular books for that year. Admissions officers love to be told about works that they themselves are yet to encounter and how these have influenced your learning.

Diploma students that I meet on campus have a synoptic approach to learning. They are never satisfied with learning facts in isolation, but rather wish to understand the connections between elements of their studies. The linear nature of the IB Diploma is

similar to the style of learning at university, with learning building on learning. As the complexity of the content with which you engage increases, it is not effective to learn in compartmentalised ways. The IB's academic subject training combined with TOK will provide you with a strong platform for university learning.

## Grit and determination

One of the hardest things to assess when reviewing applications is how hard a student will work at university. My experience of IB students is that they are full of grit and determination. The structure of the IB Diploma and its linear nature means that students have resilience, work at a high level over an extended period and have strong organisational skills — all excellent assets for university.

At university, as in your future careers, there will likely be elements of your chosen course that you find difficult and challenging, and that, bluntly, are not your first-choice activities. The structure of the IB Diploma with its six main subjects mirrors this and means that it is likely that there will be one subject that you will really need to apply yourself to. This is a good test, especially as university learning is self-directed for substantial periods.

## Admissions vs transition

IB students are often interested in whether the Diploma will give them an advantage during the admissions process. This is understandable — everyone wants to maximise their chances of gaining admission to the best programme they can.

From my point of view, the question is not solely of admissions, but also of transition — does the qualification allow students to move seamlessly from high school to university? In my experience the IB Diploma certainly provides you with a strong basis to make this transition. While this might not seem important now as you begin to apply to university, speak to first-year university students and they will let you know exactly how important this is.

The discussion surrounding the Diploma and admissions is most commonly in terms of offers — how many points in total and how many at higher level — but the reality is much more subtle than that. It is the skills you develop that build strong foundations for your success in the future. Good luck with your applications, and remember, when you are finding the Diploma tough and difficult, that grit and determination are extremely important qualities that will take you far.

**Paul Teulon** is the director of admissions at King's College London. He led the reform of IB offers at King's, which no longer asks for more than 35 points for any of its programmes.