

Perceptions of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme

A Report of an Inquiry carried out in 2003 at UK
universities and institutions of higher education

Executive Summary



Aims of the project

The aims of the project were to:

- evaluate the IB Diploma Programme as a suitable preparation for degree studies in the UK
- establish the IB Diploma Programme's strengths and weaknesses and the level of enthusiasm shown for it throughout the higher education sector
- make some comparisons between the IB Diploma Programme and predominant national qualifications.

Methodology

A questionnaire was designed to elicit statistical information and commentaries from respondents. With the cooperation of Universities UK and SCOP (Standing Conference of Principals), this questionnaire was distributed to all institutions of higher education in the UK, and specifically to their pro-vice-chancellors. This ensured that the responses were representative of the institutions approached, and 122 replies from 71 institutions were received.

Of the 71 institutions surveyed, 20 were selected for follow-up interviews, and 34 respondents were involved in these interviews.

The information received from the questionnaires and interviews was analysed under the following headings:

- The depth and rigour of the IB Diploma Programme
- The breadth of the IB Diploma Programme
- The core elements of the IB Diploma Programme
- The "whole package"
- Skills and assessment

Depth and rigour

Comments on the level of preparation of IB Diploma Programme students for degree studies were received from representatives of a wide range of disciplines. Comments were overwhelmingly favourable with 96% of respondents satisfied with the preparation of Diploma Programme students. The A-level system was seen to have greater depth by some respondents, but this was less the case with Curriculum 2000.

For most respondents the differences between A-levels and the Diploma Programme were not significant.

Breadth

The majority of respondents (96%) favoured a broad curriculum and were particularly enthusiastic about this aspect of the Diploma Programme. A small number were concerned about dilution, but most appreciated the confidence, wide knowledge and skills that the breadth of the Diploma Programme seemed to endow. The numerical rating given by respondents placed the Diploma Programme ahead of national qualifications for this aspect.

Core elements

Attitudes to the IB Diploma Programme's core elements— theory of knowledge (TOK), extended essay and creativity, action, service (CAS)—were investigated.

A majority of respondents (91%) approved of TOK. Comments received included its suitability in preparing students for the tutorial style of university education, and the flexibility and adaptability of the thought processes it seemed to assist.

There was greater enthusiasm for the extended essay with a 96% rating in its favour. It was seen to assist both research skills and the preparation of dissertations.

CAS was also seen as an asset, but not in academic terms where it plays little part in the consideration of lecturers and tutors. Its 70% approval rating relates mainly to its value in helping to produce rounded personalities. There was some specific enthusiasm from the medical professions who see the service element as good preparation for medical studies.

The “whole package”

There was enthusiasm for the IB Diploma Programme hexagon and core model although many were unclear as to what was compulsory in the programme. Some respondents (57%) felt that the Diploma Programme conferred an advantage to its students, and 40% were of the view that it neither conferred advantage nor disadvantage.

Skills and assessment

Consideration of higher skills needed for advanced studies was investigated by comparing three versions of the national GCE A-level system with the Diploma Programme for four skill areas (critical thinking, communication, self-management and motivation). For each area there was a significant majority of the 78 respondents to this question who rated IB Diploma Programme students as more accomplished than those following the A-level systems.

This summary was developed by the IB Research Department. A copy of the full report is available at <http://www.ibo.org/research>. For more information on this study or other IB research, please email research@ibo.org.

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