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# RESEARCH SUMMARY

*International Baccalaureate students studying at UK  
Higher Education Institutions: How do they fare?*

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**Based on a research report prepared for the IB by**

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## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The International Baccalaureate (IB) aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. This process of preparing educated world citizens goes beyond that of a high school qualification. Evidence-based understandings of the postsecondary pathways, experiences and outcomes of IB diploma graduates are therefore of significant interest to the IB and its community of educators, learners and parents. Such insights may also be pertinent to policymakers and other stakeholders in national and international education sectors worldwide.

With growing numbers of students entering the UK tertiary education system holding IB qualifications, there is now sufficient data available to explore the postsecondary pathways and success of IB students, as well as to understand those patterns and trends in light of other more conventional educational qualifications, such as the A-levels and Scottish Higher qualifications.

To this end, the IB Research Department commissioned the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to examine the characteristics and trends of IB students, as compared to their peers with A-level and equivalent (other level 3) qualifications, in terms of their tertiary enrolment patterns, chosen fields of study, tertiary academic achievement and continuation rates, as well as post-tertiary choices and destinations.

## DATA AND KEY TERMS

To perform the analyses, the Analytics Services Team at HESA combined IB student data with HESA data on students studying at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the United Kingdom. Data has been restricted to full-time first degree students attending, qualifying or leaving HEIs in the UK. The majority of the data has been restricted to the academic year 2008/09 with some comparisons with the academic year 2007/08 for entrants.

In 2008/09 there were 423,455 full-time entrants to first degree courses across the 165 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK. 6,390 (1.5%) of these entrants were identified as students who held International Baccalaureate qualifications prior to starting HE. In comparison, 56.7% of these entrants held A levels and a further 10.8% held A level equivalent qualifications.

Different cohorts of students are used throughout this report: *entrants* refer to the cohort who entered their HEI during the specified academic year; *students* refer to those studying at an HEI during the specified academic year, regardless of their year of study; *qualifiers* refer to students who gained a qualification during the specified academic year and *leavers* are those students who left their institution in the specified academic year. Data on non-continuation rates of students uses both academic years 2007/08 and 2008/09.

For entrants, comparisons can be made between IB and A-level students. For students, qualifiers and leavers who entered HE prior to 2007/08 (the majority of full-time first degree students, qualifiers and leavers), it is not possible to identify students holding only A-level qualifications and therefore comparisons have been made between IB and A-level & equivalent qualifications.

On the whole, the gender and age profiles of IB and A-level entrants were similar, with both groups reporting slightly higher proportions of females than males. Although a higher proportion of IB entrants were aged 17 years and under (6.9%) than of A-level entrants (2.8%), the total proportion of IB entrants aged 20 years and under was less (94.6%) than that for A-level entrants (96.6%) indicating that the age profile of IB entrants was slightly older. In terms of domicile, about two-thirds (64.5%) of the IB entrants in 2008/09 came from outside of the UK, whereas the majority of A-level entrants were domiciled from the UK, with only 3.5% coming from non-UK countries. Further demographic details such as ethnic and socio-economic classification (SEC) backgrounds of IB entrants and their A-level & equivalent peers, as well as region of tertiary institutions enrolled in are available in the full report<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.ibo.org/research/programmevalidation/index.cfm>

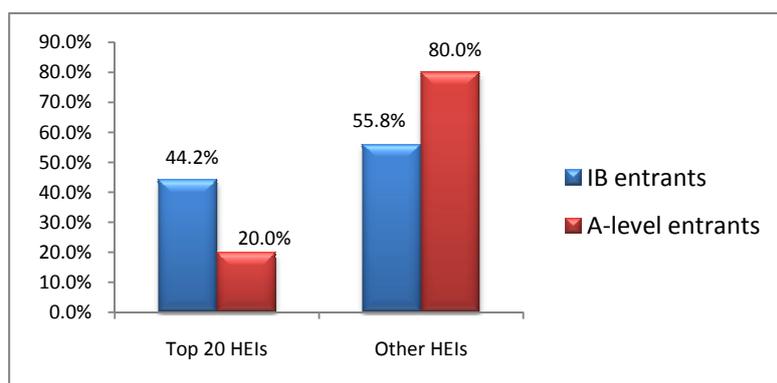
## SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

On the whole, findings indicate that IB entrants were more likely to be enrolled at a top 20 HEI, and 91% of IB entrants holding 44-45 exam points attended a top 20<sup>2</sup> HEI. IB students were, in most subject areas, also more likely to achieve first and second upper class honours degrees and to leave with an award. After university, IB students were more likely to go onto further study, and more likely to be employed in graduate level jobs and in higher paid occupations. These key trends are further explicated below.

### ***Tertiary Enrolment Trends and Fields of Study***

- IB entrants were much more likely to be enrolled at one of the top 20 HEIs than entrants holding other qualifications. As shown in Figure 1, proportion-wise, more than double the amount of IB entrants attended the top HEIs compared with A-level entrants.

Figure 1: Full-time first degree entrants by type of qualification held and type of HEI, 2008/09



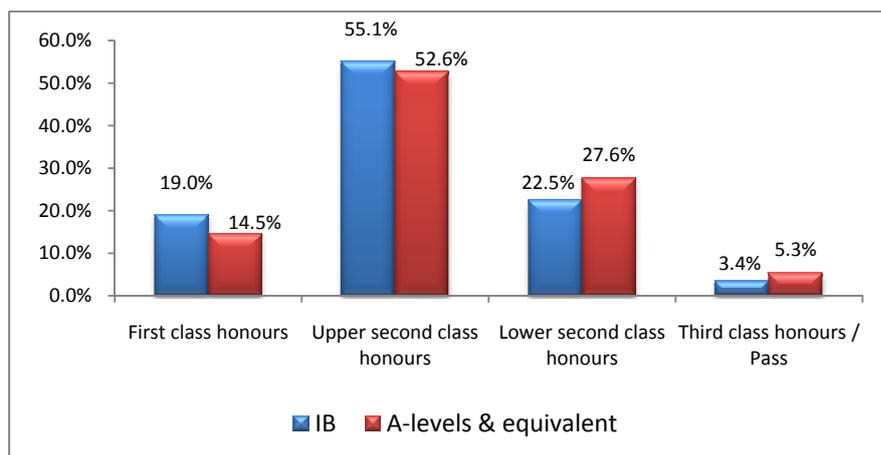
- IB entrants holding 35 or more IB points were more likely to attend a top 20 HEI. In particular, 91.0% of IB entrants holding 44-45 points attended one of the top 20 HEIs.
- The most popular subject areas studied by IB entrants were *Business & Administrative Studies* and *Social Studies*. IB entrants were almost twice as likely to study *Medicine & Dentistry* as A-level entrants, but less likely to study *Biological Sciences*. Note that a more comprehensive analysis of fields of study is provided in the full report.

### ***Tertiary Academic Performance***

- Of the students who qualified in 2008/09 with a full-time first degree, IB students outperformed A-level students in terms of class of degree (see Figure 2). This trend held true for the majority of subject areas. Specifically, IB students were more likely to achieve a first class honours award than A-level students in all subject areas except in *Mass Communications & Documentation*.
- A clear positive relationship was seen between number of IB points held and proportions gaining first class and upper second class honours degrees.
- Although the majority of IB and A-level & equivalent students obtained their first degrees in their third year of study, a higher proportion of A-level & equivalent students than IB students qualified in their fourth year. Much of this difference may be attributed to subject of study.

<sup>2</sup> 'Top 20' HEIs created from the following sources: (i) The Guardian, University Guide 2011, and (ii) The Complete University, University League Table 2011.

Figure 2: Full-time first degree qualifiers by class of degree, 2008/09



- In terms of ethnic and socio-economic classification, White UK students generally reported better academic performance than Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students, while UK students from the higher socio-economic classification groups (i.e., SEC groups 1-3: Managerial and professional occupation backgrounds) tended to perform better than those from other SEC backgrounds. The former trend was more apparent for A-level & equivalent qualifiers, while the latter was more evident for IB qualifiers.

### **Tertiary Continuation Rates**

- IB entrants reported better tertiary continuation rates than A-level and equivalent entrants. Specifically, as compared to entrants holding other types of qualifications, IB students were less likely to leave their institution in the following year without gaining an award. This trend held true across all subject areas, except for (i) *Languages*, and (ii) *Architecture, Building & Planning*.
- For UK IB entrants, there was little difference between the proportions who left with no award across the different socio-economic classification groups. However, for both IB and A-level entrants, White UK entrants were slightly more likely to both continue into the following year and also to leave with no award than UK BME entrants.

### **Post-Tertiary Pathways, Employment and Income Trends**

- IB leavers were more likely to go into further study only after leaving their HEI than A-level & equivalent leavers.
- Of those leavers entering further study, IB leavers were more likely to study for a Higher Degree than A-level & equivalent leavers.
- A greater proportion of IB leavers than A-level & equivalent leavers were employed within *Professional, Scientific and Technical* activities. Lower proportions were employed in *Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles*, and *Human Health and Social Work* activities.
- IB leavers were less likely to be unemployed and more likely to be working in graduate level jobs.
- The overall median annual salary of IB leavers was higher than that of A-level & equivalent leavers. In particular, the median salaries of IB leavers were similar or higher than those for A-level & equivalent leavers across all subject areas with sufficient IB leavers, with the biggest differences observed in *Historical & Philosophical Studies* and *Social Studies*.

This summary was developed by the IB Research Department.  
 A copy of the full report prepared by the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency is available here: <http://www.ibo.org/research/programmevalidation/index.cfm>.  
 For more information on this study or other IB research, please email [research@ibo.org](mailto:research@ibo.org)