

# INSIDERS' GUIDE

Students are increasingly seeing the benefits of the IB – so what do they and their parents need to know in advance? By *Eleanor Doughty*



LEFT: St Edward's, Oxford.  
RIGHT: King's College School, Wimbledon

## THE PANEL:

**Anna Fielding**

*Director of IB, St Edward's School, Oxford*

**Anna Saunders and Dr Victoria Sherwood**

*IB DP Coordinator and Head of Professional Guidance Centre and Assistant Head of Sixth Form, Cheltenham Ladies' College*

**David Cass**

*Director of IB, King's College School, Wimbledon, recently awarded Parent Power Independent International Baccalaureate School of the Year*

**Ed Pyke**

*Head of IB, Bryanston School*

### How does the IB differ from A levels?

Unlike the study of A-levels, where pupils study three or four standalone qualifications, the IB requires students to study six

subjects across various disciplines, including languages, humanities, sciences and mathematics. Pupils study three subjects at higher level and three at standard level, with the standard level subjects having a reduced content. *David Cass*

### What is a 'good' IB score?

Achieving the IB Diploma is evidence of a student who has embraced depth, breadth and international mindedness in their post-16 studies, and as such, any score which achieves the IB Diploma is a good score. *Anna Saunders*

### What is the most popular work experience sought?

Banking and finance. There are various schemes [in those sectors],

but when they're younger than 18, they tend to be offered work shadowing. *Ruth Davis*

### What are the best subjects to choose?

Pupils study three Higher Level (HL) subjects and three Standard Level (SL) subjects. The HL subjects are likely to lead them to their future degree or employment, and it is often the case that there are links between them. SL subjects can either complement the HL subjects or offer alternative areas of interest. SL Maths would help a future geography student use the data from a field trip, for example. *Anna Fielding*

### Do you need to include a second language?

Yes, pupils need to choose a subject from 'group 2', which means

an additional language. At King's, pupils can choose from French, Spanish, German, Greek, Latin and Mandarin – both classical and modern languages are equally popular. We want our young people to thrive in a globally competitive world, and studying an additional language until the age of 18 is worthwhile. *David Cass*

### What is the Theory of Knowledge?

Unlike A-levels where you're thinking about individual subjects, the IB is a complete curriculum, and the Theory of Knowledge is at the heart of the IB. It's a taught piece of the programme, unlike the extended essay which is self-directed. It asks students to reflect on the nature of knowledge and how we know what we claim to know. So much

of what we're taught at school we take in and don't question, but the IB expects students to reflect on what they've learned, and this forms part of every subject.

*Ed Pyke*

### Can you explain the CAS element?

CAS encourages pupils to take part in Creative, Active (sport) and Service activities, and is similar to the activities on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. The CAS programme also encourages pupils to reflect on the skills that they have acquired; the resilience of getting back on the hockey pitch after a defeat, the leadership skills needed to run a debating team, the empathy when volunteering at a local care home. *Anna Fielding*

### Do universities prefer A-levels over the IB?

Universities respect both the IB and A-levels equally. We spend a considerable amount of time working with students individually to support them to decide which pathway they wish to follow. We take an individualised case by case approach, advising students to consider their strengths, and see equal success in university applications for both IB and A Levels in all our applications. *Dr Victoria Sherwood*

### What do employers think of IB?

This is something that parents usually ask about universities, and British universities are now fully aware of the benefits of IB. For employers it's a little bit greyer and it depends on the employer. International

PHOTOS: KING EDWARD'S OXFORD, KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL, WIMBLEDON



employers know all about it, but local employers are like our parents here – not necessarily knowing so much about the IB and knowing more about the English system. But there is so much one can look up that they quickly get comfortable. **Ed Pyke**

**Do American universities recognise the IB?** Yes, in the same way as they recognise A-levels. The breadth offered in the IB can be a good foundation for the broader curriculum in US undergraduate degrees. However, it is also perfectly possible to offer this breadth through your A-level choices. **Dr Victoria Sherwood**

**Is it suitable for any student?** Absolutely! In the past, there was a myth that the IB was the preserve of the most able pupils, but this couldn't be further from reality. The IB offers a good structure and is therefore an ideal antidote to the well-documented problems of teenage procrastination. Learning how to manage the six academic subjects and the

demands of the 'core' is a skill that will benefit them throughout their lives. **David Cass**

**Can you swap to A-levels if you aren't enjoying IB (or vice versa)?** We have lots of conversations between pupils, teachers, tutors and parents which helps pupils to understand their own strengths and interests. As a result, we find that pupils generally find themselves on the course most suited to their learning style and aspirations but there are occasional reasons when pupils need to change courses, and this can be accommodated depending on the circumstances. **Anna Fielding**

**What is the IB alumni programme?** It's something that the IB has tried to create but the nature of it means that it just doesn't fizzle as much as a school alumni network, as the IB has no buildings around which to centre. It's not something that we have pushed, or that students have mentioned to us. The students' fond memories are of school itself. **Ed Pyke**

## LAST WORDS FROM THE IB OFFICE...

'Some might tell you that the IB is 'too much work' but most schools carefully plan the schedule of coursework and provide the necessary support to ensure that it is achievable. This enables pupils to fulfil their course requirements in good order and with less pressure from all assessments being on the final exams' **Anna Fielding**

'Students often ask which is 'better' and there is no single answer to this question – each student must decide which pathway is right for them.' **Anna Saunders**

'One of the questions we are asked is about the workload, but the support systems in place, including dedicated teachers and a collaborative learning environment with a good size cohort of students studying IB, help students manage their workload effectively. Many students find that the skills they develop in the IB are invaluable in their future academic and professional lives.' **David Cass**

'Parents and students sometimes ask whether the IB is more work, and the answer has to be yes – but I tell students not to make the mistake of thinking that they can sit back with A levels.' **Ed Pyke** ■