Universities don’t understand it

Universities completely understand, accept and welcome the IB. In fact, 1,000 of Oxford’s applicants for 2012 entry were IB students. The ‘ucas tariff’ details the IB as follows: http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/factsheet/ib although there is currently talk of dismantling the tariff for all qualifications.

The Institute of Education research demonstrates that IB students with points of 37 or more are 5.4% more likely to achieve upper second class degrees than their equivalent A Level colleagues. http://www.ioe.ac.uk/newsEvents/56526.html

An independent survey of qualifications in 2010 by the Education Policy Improvement Center (EPIC) found that:

... 150 university faculty and admissions staff from the UK, the IB Diploma Programme was rated higher than other qualifications based on the breadth of the curriculum; development of critical thinking, time-management and communication skills; and motivation of the students.
   • 97% were satisfied the Diploma Programme prepares students for university.
   • 96% favoured a broad curriculum of the type IB offers.
   • 57% felt the Diploma Programme offers an advantage to students as preparation for higher education.
(https://www.epiconline.org/ib/)

The IB is a new qualification

The IB was founded in 1968. The last major A Level reform (introduction of modules) was in 2000. So, no it isn’t new. The IB is currently studied by 203 schools in the UK and over 2,300 worldwide. That is about 52,000 taking the Diploma examinations every May and another 6,000 in November.

A Levels are changing, as is quite apparent from the reform proposal document published from Ofqual in June 2012. This will give a different and also less certain experience with A Levels to anyone joining the sixth form in September 2013 onwards. It is therefore even more important to be aware of the issues involved

You have to get nearly 100% to get a Level 7

This is a strange myth but we have heard it! It is completely wrong – for example, in a subject such as geography you might need around 76% for a Level 7, in maths may be around 83% and in chemistry 78%. In one particular history paper you only need 69% for a Level 7 so 14 out of 20 in your essay would do the job!

The percentages fluctuate slightly year on year in the standardisation process.

Note – you need 90% in U6th exams to get A* in A Level.

A* is better than a Level 7

A Levels: Over 8% of grades, nationally are A*. About 20% are grade A. More students are getting higher grades and there is a complex mix of reasons for this – partly developments in teaching the examination in schools, partly changes in curriculum content and exam style, partly modularity. University entrance grades are certainly getting higher with over 40% of our own sample of 60 leading courses having grade rises from last year. It is harder to tell the very best students from the very good in the A Level system – this point is generally accepted.

In the IB, there is no government pressure to raise results. There has never been any grade rise year on year since first examined in 1970. Around 7% of results are Level 7 and around 21% are level 6. IB Higher Levels
are done in 15% less curriculum time than A Levels so there may be slightly less in them. However, less does not equal inferior. After all, studying more periods in history does not make one a better historian for example. It depends on how the subject is dealt with in class and examinations. The IB passes this test with flying colours.

Grades are grades – people talk grade inflation in A Level, there must be the same in the IB.

No, there isn’t. In fact there are some pretty big arguments over this issue. See the press article from November 2011 for example [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/secondaryeducation/8870425/Fresh-warning-over-A-level-grade-inflation.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/secondaryeducation/8870425/Fresh-warning-over-A-level-grade-inflation.html)


You really need to get 42 or more points for it to be classed a success

The only university to require up to 42 points is Cambridge and even they don’t for all subjects at all colleges. Oxford might offer 39 points for Law and so might Imperial for Engineering. The government (HEFCE) equates 35 points with AAB in A Level (an important grade for universities for their own funding issues).

42 points would mean around A*A*A*A at A Level. The myth probably comes from the fact that many students feel they absolutely must get an A* for every subject at GCSE, or at least most of them – only the top grade will do! A Level and IB are both clearly a lot harder than GCSEs – aim high by all means but do realise what it all means!
39 points is a lot harder than A Levels of A*AA plus an A or B in an extra AS Level

It is not harder – it is different. It is a bit like comparing an apple and an orange – there are some similarities but they clearly aren’t the same! You can see what you need to get to achieve a Level 7 in terms of percentages. In A Level you need 90% in standardised marks to get an A* - that is clearly not easy either!

The maths is really hard

There are THREE types of maths in the IB. You do one of them – your choice. The easiest type is called Maths Studies Standard Level (SL). It is GCSE standard – no more – but with more application and fewer calculations. It deals with the sort of maths you will need in daily application in business and life. It is a lot easier than Maths SL – in fact you can probably say that you will score 3 points higher on the studies SL exam than the SL exam with the same effort and ability.

But Maths SL is going to be more highly regarded – I will have to do it

No – not even all medical degrees require Maths SL, although you probably should do it if you are a medic! You only have to do Maths SL if your future degree subject requires it – perhaps for Economics or Medicine or Biochemistry.

It is worth exactly the same number of points – up to 7.

What is Maths HL, then?

As for Maths HL, it is a big boost on Maths A Level. Listen to one of our former students, Hattie. She achieved a total of 34 points and went to Bristol University to read Chemistry. She says:

“...I had to take a maths unit as part of my course this year and I would say that taking higher level maths prepared me extremely well for this. On my course there were four possible modules to take and I chose one that required maths at A-level but was still run by the chemistry department and so was directly related to my course, rather than extending my maths knowledge a lot further as some of the others did. I found that I had a much greater and in depth knowledge of many of the areas we studied than the A-levelers on our course and so was at a great advantage in this area.”

I just don’t need maths – get me out of these classes!

Sorry, we can’t with the IB but then something like 75% of our A Level students take maths too! Why not try Maths Studies SL? Don’t forget, a good level of numeracy is pretty essential – keeping it up to school leaving age makes a big difference to this - [http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9701000/9701609.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9701000/9701609.stm)

Science is not my thing – I just don’t want to opt for sciences

It is true that you have to do a science. For the IB, the important thing is to maintain a confidence in science – a scientific literacy. The option in Standard Level science is called Environmental Systems & Societies. It is an applied course with a mixture of biological science and policy which relates to many issues of current affairs.
I will have no life if I do the IB!

IB students are some of the most involved in student life so, yes, they are busy and they may say they don’t have time for a paid job (although many do!). In our college, IB students have led our charity expedition to the Gambia, coordinated our charity outreach project, been student president, competed in national or international standard sport, been a leading light in the rowing club and performed on stage as musicians or actors.

The workload is ridiculous

Students say time and time again that the key is to be organised. If your file is an absolute mess it isn’t surprising you find the workload hard! Also, you need to learn to shut tasks down – do them and move on ... great preparation for life at university and beyond.

You can’t be a scientist if you do the IB

Absolutely incorrect. You can only take two of the three science subjects in the IB it is true. But then you don’t have to take all three to be a university scientist! The argument can be that studying a range of subjects including humanities, literature and language will make your life as a scientist more portable and you will not forget how to communicate effectively.

You can’t be a medic if you do the IB

Incorrect. We have medical students who have achieved offers from many of the UK’s major medical schools including Oxford, Imperial and UCL. As long as you take Biology and Chemistry HLs you are absolutely fine.

It is all breadth and no depth

First, breadth is often extremely useful! Secondly, HL subjects have extremely good depth. Quite simply, the point is an unhelpful one and a myth.

I just don’t need literature and a foreign language and the IB would make me do them.

Really? In a world which is far more interconnected (globalised) than ever before, can you be so sure? But, you say, everyone that matters will speak English! Again – are you so sure and what about true communication? Put it this way – a senior recruitment consultant for the ICT industry spoke to us recently. When she recruits someone for a Chief Executive position who can speak a second language with reasonable fluency they can command 2 or 3 times the salary. That is something to think about!

Maintaining a second language to age 18 greatly increases your chance of recalling it in the future. Why not therefore take an SL course at least? Or, if you want something different, you can take an ab initio SL route (something new, from scratch to just above GCSE level in 2 years)

But the IB is so hard – 6 subjects!

Nothing at this level that is worth having is going to be easy! You can also make your IB markedly easier by opting for Maths Studies SL and an ab initio language – remember they are all worth the same points! Environmental Systems & Societies SL is also a great science route. Overall, you will have 2 fewer ‘free’ periods if you do IB than you would with 4 A Levels.
All the exams are at the end (modules are easier)

Between 20% and 25% of all IB subjects are made up with internal assessment so you have this completed during the course – a lot of it in the first year. Actually, Art is entirely based on work completed during the course and assessed internally and externally – there are no final examinations at all. Music also has more.

Doing modules might sound good but it does mean you do exams all through your two years. There is little let up and the importance of these examinations will almost certainly be far greater now the A Level reform is moving through. We think it is good thing to have a breathing space to develop, mature and consider the whole of your subject not just bit by bit. Modules will not suit everyone – why should they?

A Level is just as good, it is easier and more recognised

Listen to one of our former students. Lucy came to us from Saffron Walden County High. She ended with 39 points and went to Edinburgh to read Russian Studies. She is spending her year abroad in Perm, Siberia!

“[Lucy's quote]”

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