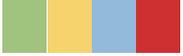


The University Admissions Officers Report 2015





Contents

Page 3	Foreword
Page 4	Summary of Results
Page 5	Trends in University Applications and Offers <i>Have total undergraduate application numbers for September or October 2015 entry – this year – been higher, lower or the same as you expected?</i>
Page 6	<i>Have admission numbers for 2015 entry for your incoming freshman class been higher, lower or the same as you expected?</i> <i>Do you expect total home student application numbers for your university to stay at the current level, increase, or decrease for 2016 entry – next year?</i>
Page 7	<i>Has your university seen an increase in the number of UK undergraduate applications this year?</i> <i>Which qualification is more likely to help a UK student succeed at your university?</i>
Page 8	<i>Does your university make unconditional offers to applicants who have yet to complete their final exams?</i> <i>What percentage of undergraduate applicants to your university this year would you say have offered the IBDP?</i>
Page 9	<i>What percentage of undergraduate applicants with A levels also offer the EPQ?</i>
Page 9	Applying to university <i>Which of the following attributes do you actively look for in student applications to your university in addition to any academic qualifications?</i>
Page 11	<i>Which, if any, of these attributes do you actively consider when making offers?</i>
Page 12	<i>Do you look more favourably on an applicant who has completed either the Extended Essay or the Extended Personal Qualification?</i> <i>Which single one of these intercultural qualities does your university most value?</i>
Page 13	<i>Would you accept three IB Higher Level subjects on their own, without the rest of the IBDP elements, such as the Extended Essay, as an entry qualification to a first degree course at your university?</i> <i>Does your university offer any exemptions from courses or years of study for students who offer high IBDP scores?</i>
Page 14	Comparing exam systems <i>How well do you think each of these exam systems develops the following qualities in students at present?</i>
Page 15	<i>Have you noticed an increase in the number of home applicants who present with vocational qualifications in the current application cycle?</i>
Page 16	<i>Overall, which qualification would you say is a better preparation for students to thrive at university – A levels, the IBDP, Scottish Higher, BTEC or equal vocational qualification – or would you say they are all equal?</i>
Page 17	The International Baccalaureate Awareness and Equivalency <i>Have you heard of the IBMYP education programme before today?</i> <i>Have you heard of the IB Career-related Programme?</i>
Page 18	<i>What do you consider to be the A level equivalent of the IBDP scores?</i> <i>What IBDP score out of 7 – at Higher Level – do you consider to be equivalent to a 5 in the AP?</i>
Page 19	Appendix <i>Methodology</i>
Page 20	About ACS International Schools
Page 21	About the International Baccalaureate (IB) About the IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA)

Foreword

This is the tenth year that ACS International Schools has commissioned its survey among university admissions officers. Our aim in conducting the survey is to help inform current and prospective parents and students about their education choices, to help them identify the best school and education programme for them.

As our world changes and evolves, so too do our education systems, making it important that we continue to benchmark and test the exam systems we offer against others in the UK and elsewhere in the world.

The past decade in the UK has seen a particularly rapid pace of change. An entire new suite of “new Diplomas” for those aged 18 was launched in 2008 and closed in 2013. From September 2015 the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) will be introduced, with new-style exams at the age of 16 in five core subjects: English, maths, a science, a foreign language, and one or other of history or geography. Those wanting to take subjects outside the EBacc core will continue to take GCSEs until new syllabuses are developed. The scoring systems for all these exams will change from September 2017.¹

ACS is introducing new qualifications too, for example our Egham campus is currently the only school in the UK to offer all four International Baccalaureate Programmes, which now include the new IB Career-related Programme (IBCP). ACS Cobham is also the only school in Europe to trial the new Advanced Placement (AP) Capstone Diploma from the US-based College Board.

Parents now have a range of education choices for their children that simply didn’t exist when they were at school, and university and work opportunities that were unheard of when they left school.

We conduct this survey to help parents who are trying to identify what is best for their child, and to help students choose the path they want to follow. Sometimes hearing views from a third party can help, which is why we ask university admissions officers, through independent research, what they think of the different exam systems in their country, and which they think is the best preparation to thrive at university.

This year the survey has been developed jointly with the International Baccalaureate (IB) organisation and the IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA) and we would like to thank them for their involvement and support.

We all share a common goal: to develop the best education for children, which prepares them to thrive in our fast-changing world, and helps them to take their place in our global society.

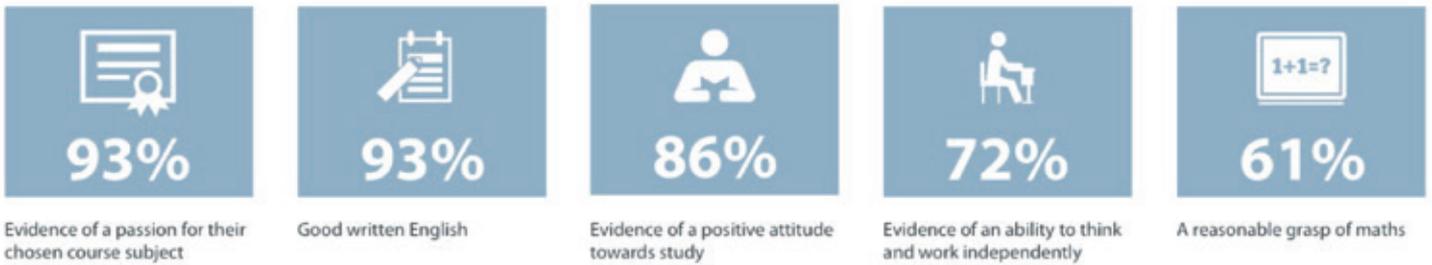


Fergus Rose
Head of Marketing & Admissions
ACS International Schools

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-reforms-to-raise-standards-and-improve-behaviour>
DFE announcement June 2015

Infographic summary of UK results

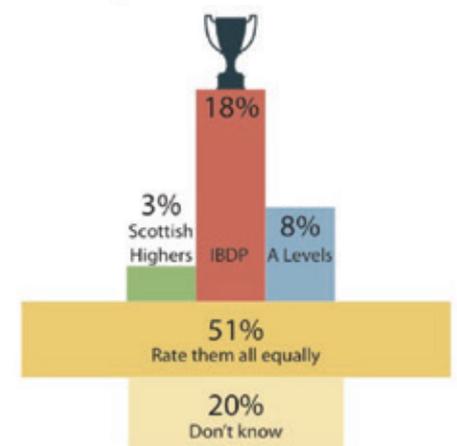
Top five attributes university admission officers look for in student applicants (in addition to academic qualifications and grades)



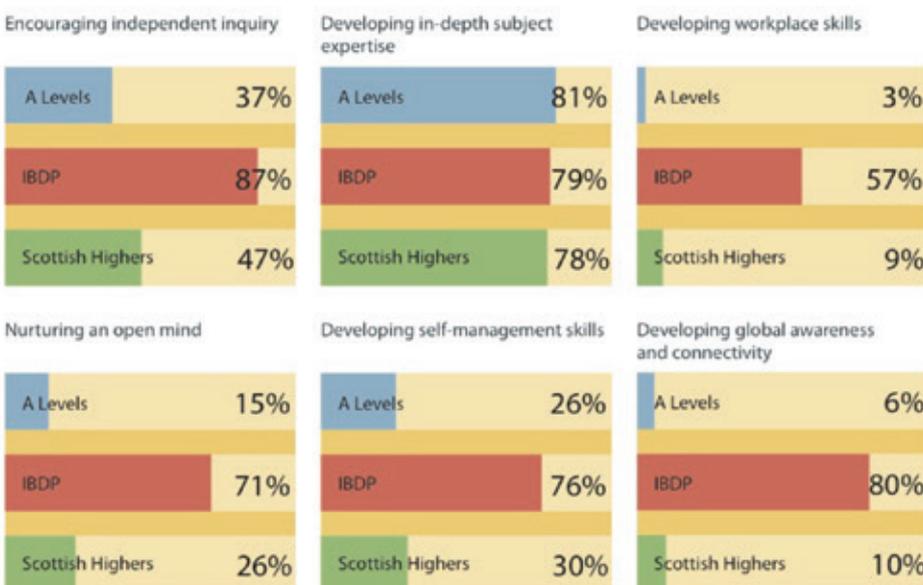
Which, if any, of these attributes do you actively consider when making offers?



What qualification would you say is a better preparation to thrive at university?



How well do you think each of these exam systems develops the following qualities in students at present?



53% of universities make unconditional offers to applicants who have yet to complete their finals exams.

25% of university admissions officers look more favourably on an applicant who has completed the EPQ or IB Extended Essay.

17% of applicants with A levels also offer the Extended Project Qualification.





Trends in University Applications and Offers

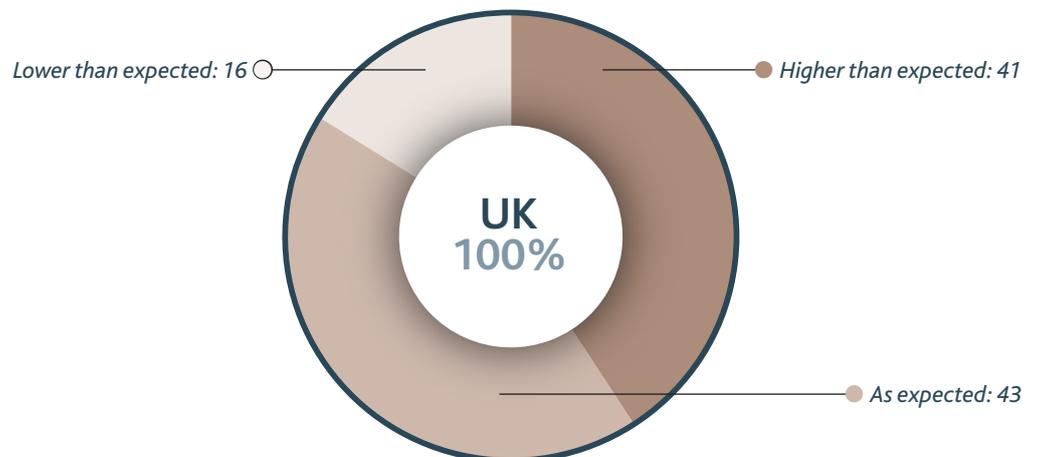
The UK government budget announcement in June 2015² confirmed that university tuition fees can be increased in line with inflation from the start of the academic year 2017/18. The current £9,000 annual tuition fee introduced in 2012 itself marked a dramatic increase from the earlier £3,000 annual cost.

Do fee increases reduce demand for university places? Will it be easier for students to find the place they want in higher education? The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) answers these questions:

“Young application rates fell in 2012 after a long pattern of annual increases, making young people around 5 per cent or so less likely to apply than expected. But higher fees do not seem to have slowed the long term trend of increasing demand. Application rates increased at around their long term trend in both 2013 and 2014, so that demand is now at the highest ever levels.”³

This increase in demand is reflected in the response to our first, introductory survey question, where 41 per cent of university admissions officers report higher than expected application numbers this year.

Have total undergraduate application numbers for September or October 2015 entry – this year – at your university been higher, lower or the same as you expected?



In the US, where there haven't been such dramatic increases in the cost of study, admissions officers are more likely to report that applicant numbers have been 'as expected' as the chart on the following page illustrates.

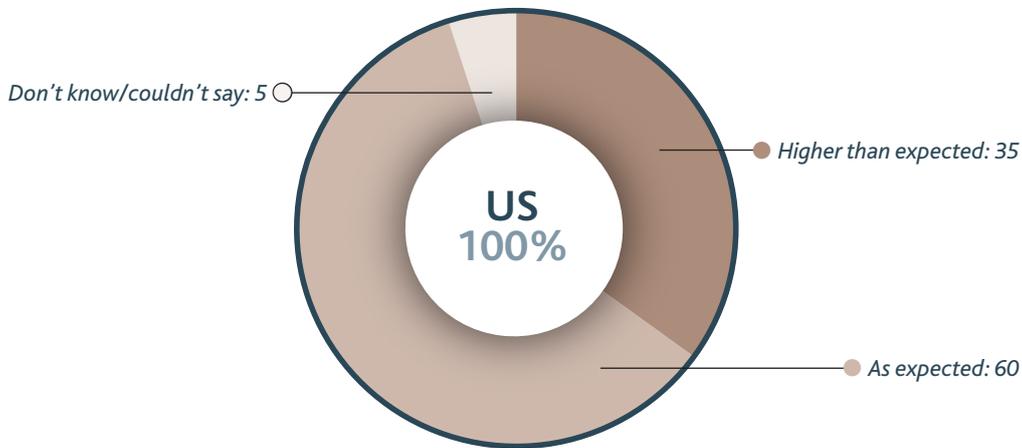
“CAS and the Extended Essay are very useful for later life – the experience of extracurricular activity in CAS, and the involvement of the research element of the EE.”

Sownak Bose, ACS graduate

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/budget-2015-universities-will-be-allowed-to-raise-fees-beyond-9000-says-george-osborne-10375910.html> July 2015 budget.

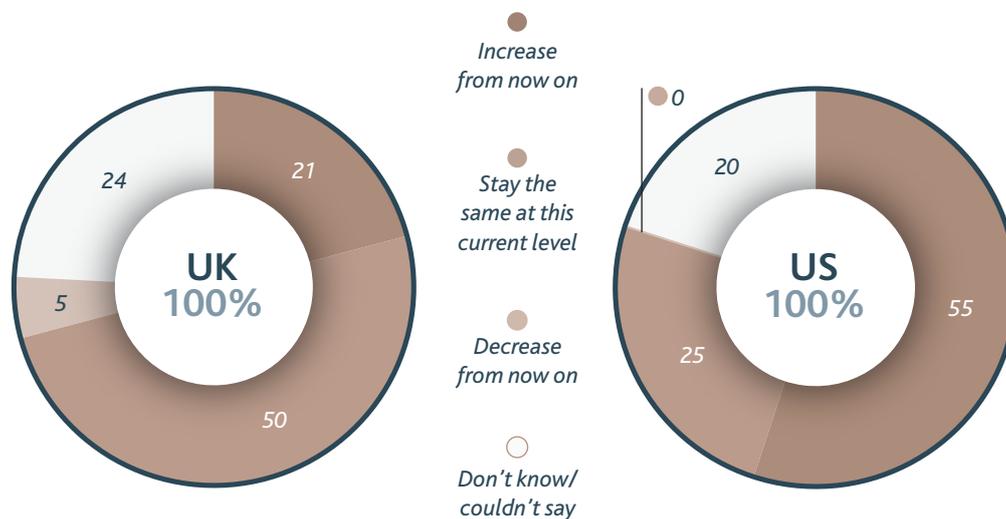
³ <https://www.ucas.com/news/news/update-trends-demand-higher-education> UCAS 2 Feb 2015.

Have admission numbers for 2015 entry for your incoming freshman class been higher, lower or the same as you expected?



Although around a quarter of admissions officers don't feel able to predict future application levels, expectations that numbers will remain at current levels is twice as high in the US as it is in the UK, as the charts below show.

Do you expect total home student application numbers for your university to stay at the current level, increase, or decrease for 2016 entry – next year?

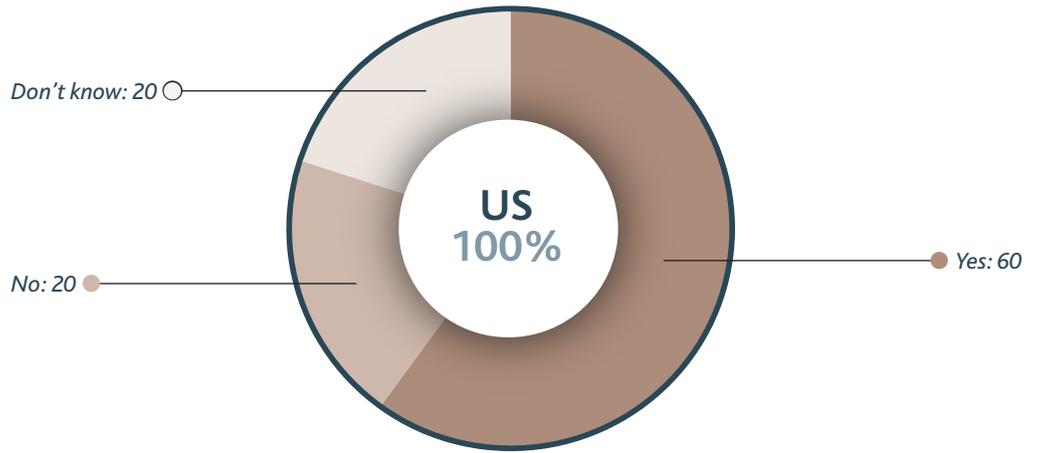




Trends in university applications *(continued)*

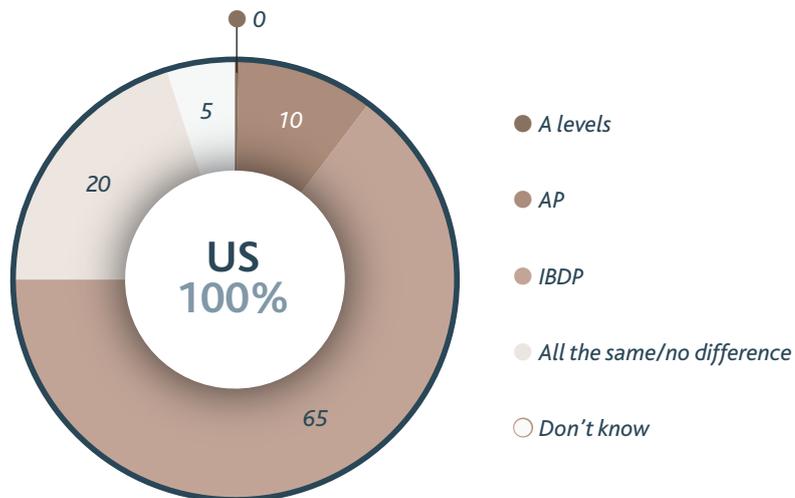
We asked the US sample if they were seeing more applicants coming from the UK, anticipating that higher tuition fees in the UK might make the US a more attractive option for UK students, and this does seem to be a trend:

Has your university seen an increase in the number of UK undergraduate applications this year?



Another very clear pattern which emerges from the US sample of university admissions officers is that they consider the IBDP the qualification most likely to help an incoming UK student to thrive at their university.

For a student coming to study in the US from the UK, which qualification is most likely to help the student succeed at your university? Would you say it was English A levels, the IBDP, or AP, or would you say the qualification type in this situation makes no difference?



Given the differences between the university set-up between the UK and US, we asked a few different questions of the admissions officers in each country.

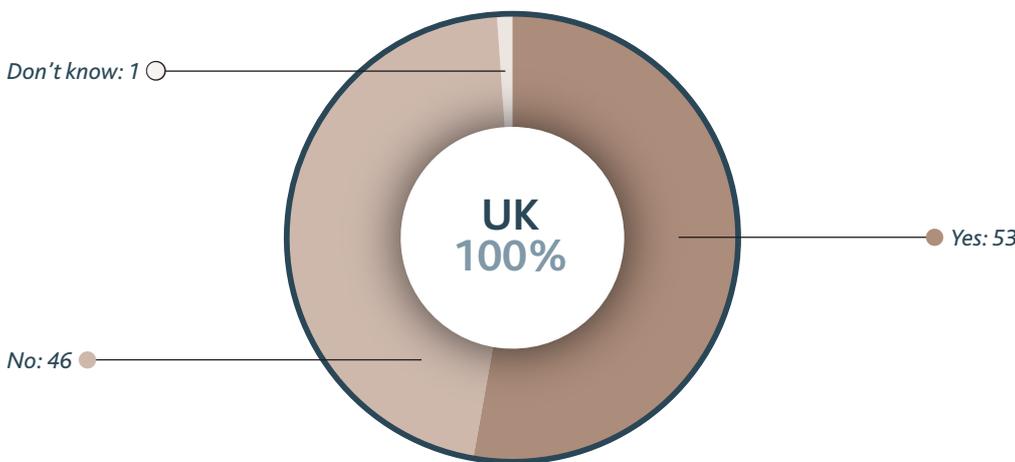
“The first year of university in the UK was easy compared to the IB. I think the IB was a real challenge... a great basis for the rest of the challenges in life.”

Joyce Voogt, ACS graduate

In the US, students make individual, direct applications to the universities they wish to apply for, whereas in the UK all applications are handled centrally by UCAS, and a university place is not normally confirmed until a student has been awarded their final school-leaving exam grades.

In the US, students are offered a place which is not conditional on final exam performance. There was some thought that UK universities might be moving toward the US model, and this was tested in the survey this year with the following question:

Does your university make unconditional offers to applicants who have yet to complete their final exams?



The above chart shows that a slight majority of universities in the UK are making unconditional offers to applicants, ie not dependent on final exam results, as happens in the US. However it must be clarified that this does not mean it is a routine practice, just that it does happen in about half of UK universities nowadays.

In both the US and the UK only a minority of university applicants offer the IBDP, although this figure will surely increase in future, especially in the US, because we asked our US sample if they were seeing an increase in the proportion of applicants offering the IBDP, to which 85 per cent replied 'yes'.

In the current application cycle, about what percentage of undergraduate applicants to your university this year would you say have offered the IBDP?

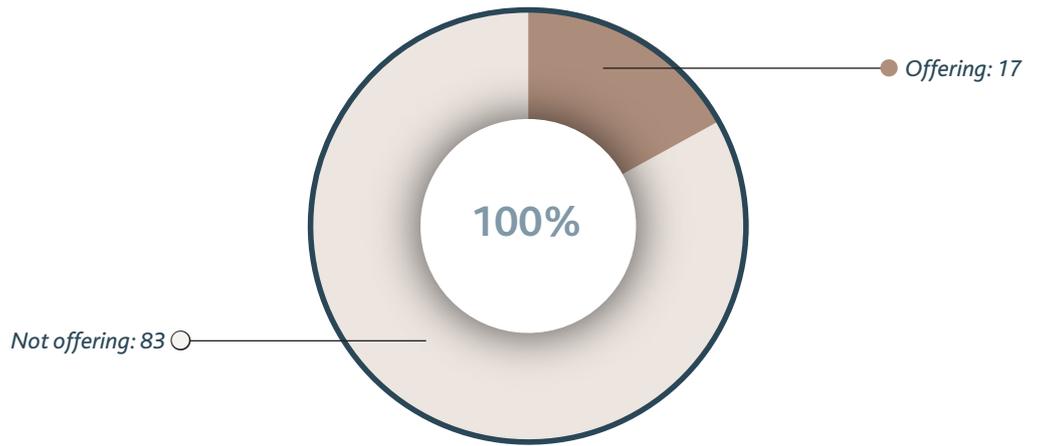
Attribute	UK %	US %
Offer the IBDP	6	8



Trends in university applications *(continued)*

While all students who have successfully completed their IBDP will have written an Extended Essay, in the UK the completion of an Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) – a 4,000 word written essay, is a relatively new concept, and at present only a voluntary optional extra which students of the national exam system, A levels, can choose to complete.

About what percentage of undergraduate applicants with A levels also offer the EPQ?



Given the competition for top university places, it seems likely that more A level students will be following the EPQ route, a 'given' for IBDP students, because, as highlighted later in this survey, a quarter of universities from the UK look more favourably on an applicant who has completed either the Extended Essay or EPQ.

“When I arrived at a top UK university I was one of the few people who was comfortable with both writing essays and doing maths. Most A level students choose one or the other.”

Joyce Voogt, ACS graduate

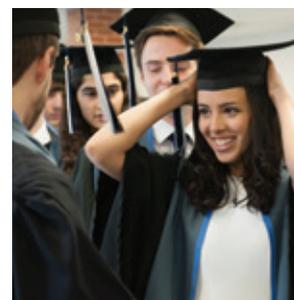
Applying to University

In both the UK and the US the student's university application form is the most important document within the process. The university will use it to help compare each applicant even-handedly. Although in the UK a student will be required to present themselves personally at interview for some courses such as medicine or dentistry, or at interviews for Oxford or Cambridge, it is still an application form which makes the student's initial 'pitch' for a place or interview.

Because of the importance of the application form, which in the UK is limited to 47 lines or 4,000 characters, helping students to present themselves succinctly, with the qualities universities are looking for, is very important. So what qualities do university admissions officers look for?

Which of the following do you actively look for in student applications to your university in addition to academic qualifications and grades, and how important is each, on a scale of 1–5 where 1 is not important and 5 is very important?

Attribute	Attribute rated important or very important	
	UK %	US %
Evidence of a passion for their chosen course subject	93	85
Good written English	93	85
Evidence of a positive attitude towards study	86	90
Evidence of an ability to think and work independently	72	90
A reasonable grasp of maths	61	47
Evidence of success through a difficult start or background	42	30
Having held any positions of responsibility	35	75
An awareness of global or cultural differences	24	70
Work experience	12	10
Evidence of an entrepreneurial attitude	12	*
Participation in community or voluntary services	6	50



In both the UK and the US, the top four attributes universities look for are the same: passion for their chosen course or subject, good written English, a positive attitude towards study, and an ability to think and work independently.

Beyond this level there are some interesting differences between the two countries, probably reflecting the differences in the university course structures between UK and US-style degrees.

In the US a degree course begins with a very wide range of courses, and a subject specialisation or "major" often isn't chosen until the end of the second or sophomore year at university. This contrasts quite markedly from the UK where a specialist subject is chosen from the first year.

The 'liberal arts' approach in the US calls on students to be more involved and participative in university campus life. This may explain why US university admissions officers place a much greater emphasis on applicants having held positions of responsibility, and having an awareness of global or cultural differences. This pattern has been consistent across the six years that ACS has been surveying both university groups.

* This attribute was not asked of the US admissions officers.



Applying to University *(continued)*

We asked the UK university admissions officers a new question this year, about other ways in which the students might be expected to contribute towards university life.

Which, if any, of these attributes do you actively consider when making offers?

UK	%
Propensity to complete their degree	92
Likelihood to contribute to the research life of the university	52
Skills to lead work and study groups	43
Likelihood to study to MA or PhD level	42
A desire and ability to organise clubs and societies	6
All of them	4
None of them	1

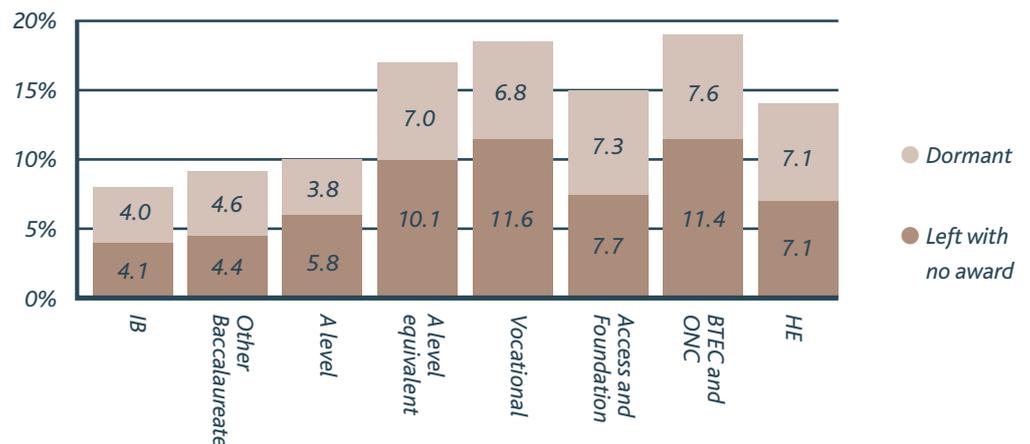
By far the most important factor is an applicant's likelihood to complete their degree, with 92 per cent of university admissions officers saying this is a quality they look for in applicants.

Research conducted by the British Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in April 2011 on behalf of the IB, has studied this subject, 'continuation rates,' based on methodology adopted by Unistats. It proved that IBDP students are more likely to complete their degree than students who followed other exam courses at school.

"The IB definitely prepared me for the workload at university, as well as teaching me about self discipline, which is vital in the workplace, more so than we are led to believe as children."

ACS graduate

Full-time first degree entrants 2007/08 who were left dormant or left without award 2008/09 by type of qualification held.

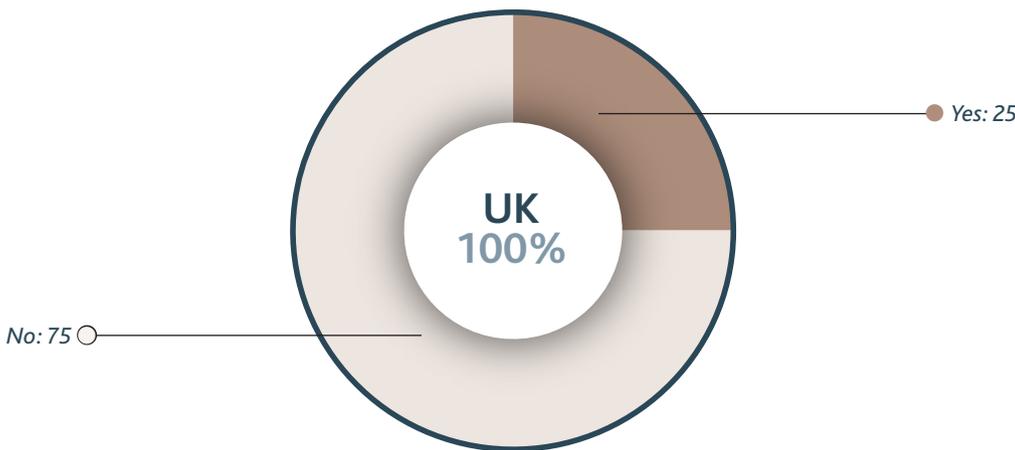


The Unistats method takes a cohort of students in one academic year and identifies what this cohort is doing in the following academic year. In order to do comparisons between IB and A level students, this data has been restricted to entrants in 2007/08. Since the majority of students who drop out of Higher Education do so in their first year, this method gives an indication of non-continuation rates of students.⁴

The full results from this HESA study can be found on the IB website⁵. This report also includes a range of other data, for example an analysis which shows that IBDP students, compared to A level students, are more likely to enrol at a top twenty-ranked university and more likely to achieve a first class honours degree result.

The IBDP's Extended Essay (EE) and the Extended Personal Qualification (EPQ), an optional extra for A level students in the UK, both require independent study and a written report. Both could be considered a good preparation for the dissertation or thesis style of work which is required at university, and for this reason we asked the following question of our UK sample:

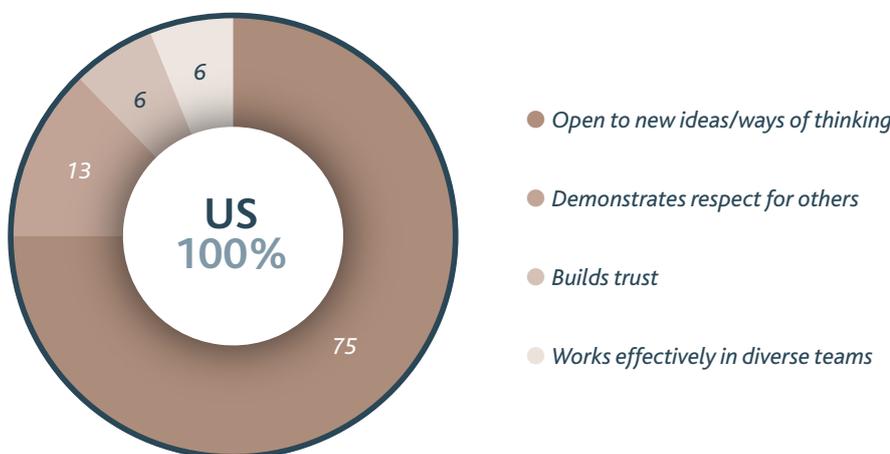
Do you look more favourably on an applicant who has completed either the Extended Essay or the Extended Personal Qualification?



A quarter of UK universities look more favourably on a candidate who offers either the EE or the EPQ. As shown earlier, 17 per cent of A level candidates currently offer the EPQ, so this figure may rise in future years, given the additional value it can add to a student's application. All IBDP students already complete an EE as a matter-of-course as one of the three core elements of the programme.

A question specific to the US sample of university admissions officers asked about how highly they valued a range of intercultural skills, previously identified by the British Council as being important intercultural qualities in an employee.

Which single one of these intercultural qualities does your university most value, would you say?



“It helped me in many ways to handle a large amount of work and to stick to deadlines.”

ACS graduate

⁴ Source: HESA, April 2011.

⁵ http://www.ibo.org/contentassets/d74675437b4f4ab38312702599a432f1/hesaukpostsec_final_report.pdf

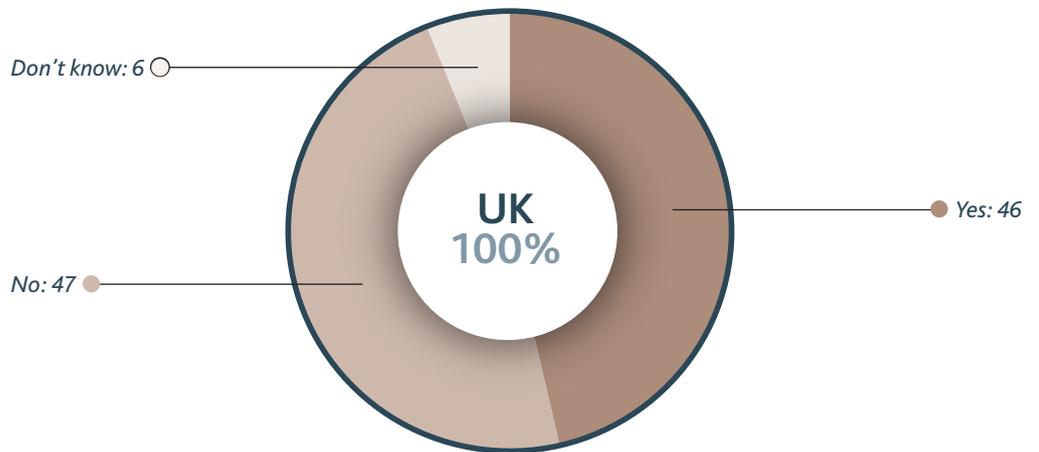


Applying to University *(continued)*

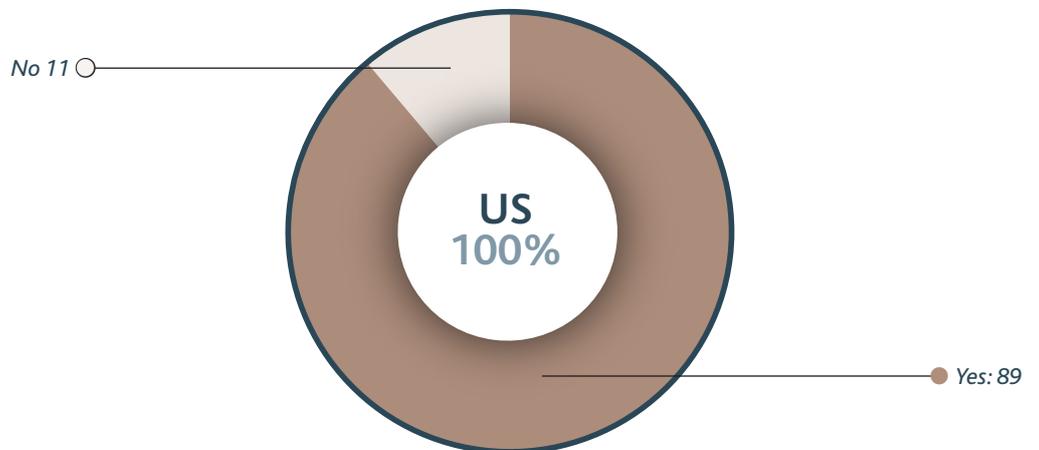
The answers to the previous question, show that 'being open to new ideas or new ways of thinking' is the most highly-valued of these qualities among US university admissions officers.

Results from this survey and other sources such as HESA suggest the IBDP is an excellent preparation for university success; we therefore asked UK universities if they will accept elements of it alone without the full Diploma award, or in the US, if they will grant exemptions for certain university courses.

Would you accept three IB Higher Level subjects on their own, without the rest of the IBDP elements, such as the Extended Essay, as an entry qualification to a first degree course at your university?



Does your university offer any exemptions from courses or years of study for students who offer high IBDP scores?



"The IB helps in being able to argue different points of view; being experienced in researching material in preparing for essays and seminars; having a broader knowledge base than your average UK university student."

*Diana Granger-Taylor,
ACS graduate*

Of those US admissions officers who confirmed their university offers exemptions for years or course of study, the average IBDP score required to achieve these exemptions was 30 points.

Comparing exam systems

We have examined the qualities universities look for in student applicants. In the competitive market for places at top universities, parents and students will want to take every step that will help them the most, including choosing the right educational system and school for them.

Which exam system will be the best preparation for university success? And what about life beyond university, finding a good job, taking your place in our global community?

The results show that the IBDP is highly regarded in every respect, in both the UK and the US, compared to other exam systems in each country.

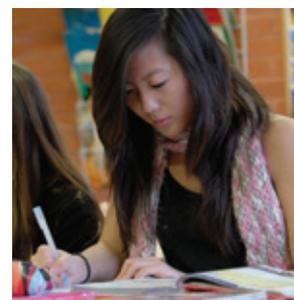
How well do you think each of these exam systems develops the following qualities in students at present?

Please use a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is 'does not develop the quality well' at all and 5 is 'develops it extremely well.'

UK	A levels	The IBDP	Scottish Highers
	Combined 4 + 5	Combined 4 + 5	Combined 4 + 5
	%	%	%
Encouraging independent inquiry	37	87	47
Developing global awareness and connectivity	6	80	10
Developing in-depth subject expertise	81	79	78
Developing self-management skills	26	76	30
Developing ability to cope with pressure	56	72	69
Nurturing an open mind	15	71	26
Developing workplace skills	3	57	9
Nurturing communication skills	37	45	35
Encouraging creativity	15	37	14
Developing an entrepreneurial or positive approach to risk taking	4	23	3
Total % score	285	702	325

A levels in the UK are a national exam system with a standard curriculum and exam structure throughout the country. The High School Diploma in the US is not standardised, which should be considered when reading the table on the following page.

Perhaps the most interesting points to note for the US are both how highly-regarded the IBDP is, and also that the Advanced Placement performs much better than A levels in the UK.



“ Studying for the IBDP I feel I gained excellent analytical skills, which was very noticeable at university in comparison with A level students. Those analytical skills, combined with the international nature of the school, have put me in very good stead career-wise.”

ACS graduate

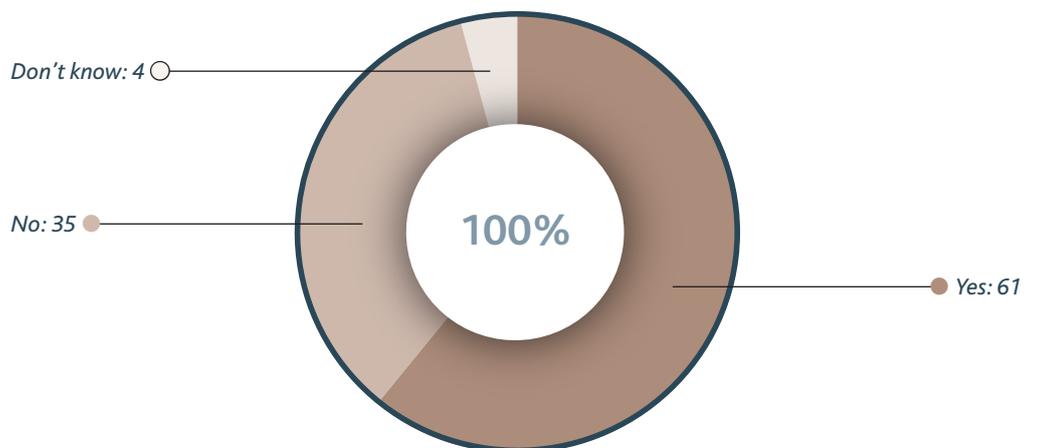


Comparing exam systems *(continued)*

US	High School Diploma	The IBDP	Advanced Placement
	Combined 4 + 5	Combined 4 + 5	Combined 4 + 5
	%	%	%
Encouraging independent inquiry	-	95	89
Developing self management skills	11	95	89
Nurturing an open mind	-	89	89
Nurturing communication skills	11	84	89
Developing global awareness and connectivity	5	79	58
Developing ability to cope with pressure	11	74	68
Encouraging creativity	5	68	72
Encouraging citizenship	37	63	58
Developing business skills	5	37	26
Total % score	85	684	638

Vocational qualifications are an alternative to the purely 'academic' education routes and can be an ideal choice for students who have particular career or work-based interests. In the UK a new national type of vocational qualification was launched in 2008 called 'new Diplomas' and then subsequently closed in 2013. However, the vocational route remains a popular one in the UK as the following question shows.

Have you noticed an increase in the number of home applicants who present with vocational qualifications in the current application cycle?



“Having to work hard while studying the IB and learning valuable study techniques made the transition into university a breeze.”

Dr Miriam Balteskard

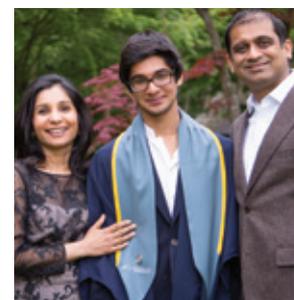
To conclude this section comparing exam systems, we asked which one overall is considered the best preparation to thrive at university.

Overall which qualification would you say is a better preparation to thrive at university – A levels, the IBDP, Scottish Higher, BTEC or equal vocational qualification – or would you say they are all equal?

UK	%
IBDP	18
A levels	8
Scottish Higher	3
BTEC or equal vocational qualification	-
Rate them all equally	51

US	%
AP	-
IBDP	23
High School Diploma	-
Rate them all equally	77

While the majority of admissions officers in both countries say they rate all exams systems equally, where one is considered better than any other, it is the IBDP overall.



“ The IB has helped me the most for my future and where I am heading.”

Abbie Newton, ACS graduate

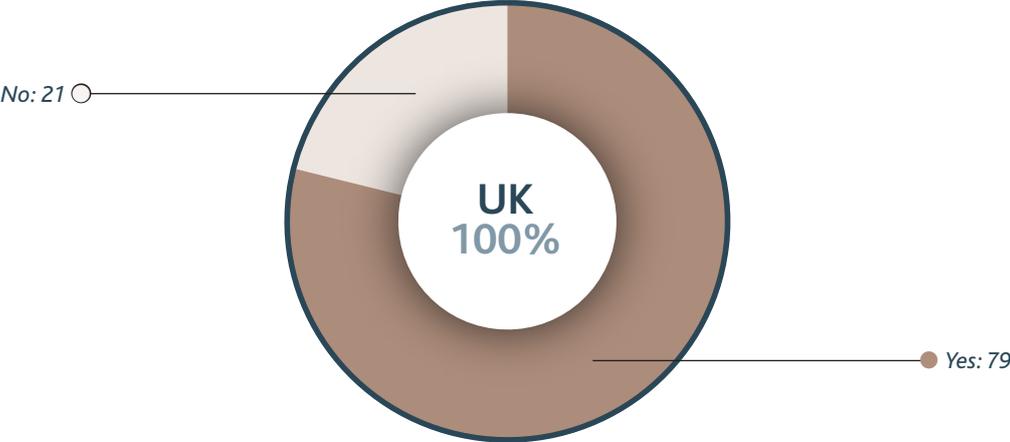


The International Baccalaureate Awareness and Equivalency

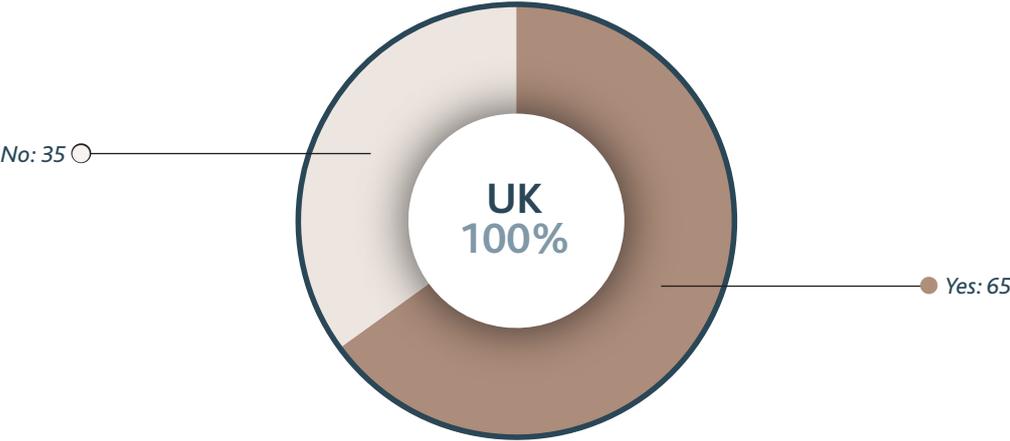
This research is designed primarily to measure views about the final exams and education systems which students follow before leaving school, for young adults aged 16–18.

We have however also explored understanding and views on other aspects of an IB education including the IB Middle Years Programme (IBMYP).

The IBMYP is the educational study system which culminates at age 16 for students following the IB programme. Have you heard of this level of the IB education programme before today?



One of the more recent vocational qualifications is the IB Career-related Programme (IBCP). Have you heard of this qualification?



“The Extended Essay made me aware of how to work and research with little help... from teachers.”

Dhina Kara, ACS graduate

Both the IBMYP and the IBCP are well known in university circles, but all levels of the International Baccalaureate may be less well known to parents or students who are looking at school choices outside of their national exam system for the first time. For this reason we ask some questions about exam result equivalencies, and these questions are shown below.

The top score in the IBDP is 45. What do you consider to be the A level equivalent of the following IBDP scores?

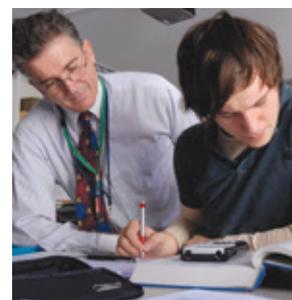
UK	40 points	36 points	30 points
A level score	% respondents	% respondents	% respondents
A*A*A*	26	3	-
A*AA	24	3	2
AAA	9	21	-
AAB	-	41	-
ABB	9	15	20
BBB	-	18	34
BBC	-	-	32
CCC	-	-	2

For the IBDP, students must study three subjects at Higher Level and three subjects at Standard Level. In each subject they are awarded a score out of 7, with 7 being the highest score. An AP top score is 5.

What IBDP score out of 7 – at Higher Level – do you consider to be equivalent to a 5 in the AP?

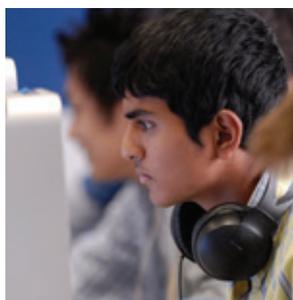
US	Equivalent to 5 at AP
IB Score	% respondents
1	-
2	-
3	-
4	-
5	5
6	90
7	-
Don't know	5

As the above tables show, in both the UK and the US, the IBDP is a programme of education which is well understood and respected among university admissions officers.



“CAS was a lot of fun. TOK and having to write the extended essay was frustrating at the time, however it enabled me to learn how to critique my source of information, which is very useful in my chiropractic profession today.”

Dr Miriam Liparachi



Appendix

Methodology

The research was conducted through telephone interviews with 80 university admissions officers in the UK and 20 from the US from 16th March to 8th May 2015.

In the UK the sample covered around a third of all universities, including 12 per cent Russell Group; 17 per cent Million Plus Group; 16 per cent 1994 Group; eight per cent Guild HE & Associates; 20 per cent University Alliance.

The distribution of universities in the UK by mission group is illustrated in the following table:

UK University Mission Group	Number of respondents	Percentage of sample (%)
Guild HE & Associates	6	8
Million +	13	17
1994 Group	12	16
Russell Group	9	12
UKADIA	-	-
University Alliance	15	20
Unaffiliated English	21	26
Unaffiliated Scottish	4	1
Unaffiliated Welsh	-	-
Total	80	100

In the US the survey included a range of universities by geographical location and type but included four of the universities in the US News top twenty-ranking.

The survey was carried out on behalf of ACS International Schools, the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the International Baccalaureate Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA), by an independent organisation working to Market Research Society (MRS) standards.

“ The IB gave me a stronger work ethic and better time management skills.”

Nikolas Szpak, ACS graduate

About ACS International Schools

Founded in 1967 to serve the needs of global and local families, ACS International Schools educate over 3,700 students, aged 2 to 18, day and boarding, from more than 100 countries.

We have three schools in the UK in Greater London: ACS Cobham, ACS Egham and ACS Hillingdon, and one school in Doha, Qatar – are all non-sectarian and co-educational. We offer a choice of curriculum including all International Baccalaureate (IB) Programmes, and US programmes including Advanced Placement (AP) courses and the new AP Capstone and International Diplomas.

The strength of our university preparatory programmes ensures that ACS students are consistently able to gain places at leading higher education institutions in the UK, the US and around the world.

For more information about our schools, please visit our website www.acs-schools.com



ACS Cobham



ACS Egham



ACS Hillingdon



ACS Doha

About the IB

The International Baccalaureate (IB) was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1968 as a non-profit educational foundation.

The IB is more than its four educational programmes. At our heart we are motivated by a mission to create a better world through education.

We value our hard-earned reputation for quality, for high standards and for pedagogical leadership. We achieve our goals by working with partners and by actively involving our stakeholders, particularly teachers. We promote intercultural understanding and respect, not as an alternative to a sense of cultural and national identity, but as an essential part of life in the 21st century.

Our programmes for students aged 3–19 are:

The Primary Years Programme (PYP)

The Middle Years Programme (MYP)

The Diploma Programme (DP)

The Career-related Programme (CP)

For more information about the IB and our programmes please visit www.ibo.org.

About IBSCA

The IB Schools and Colleges Association offers membership to all schools in the UK and Ireland offering IB programmes.

IBSCA exists to:

- provide a network of support for teachers through a range of professional development opportunities
- provide tailored support for individual schools
- liaise with Higher Education institutions and other relevant bodies to increase understanding of the value of the programmes.

For more information about IBSCA please visit the website www.ibsca.org.uk

Find us on:



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