



*'The UK Boarding Schools Specialist'*

## What is the IB?

The International Baccalaureate Diploma (or IB for short) is a two year programme for pupils aged 16-18 and is currently offered at approximately 200 schools and colleges in the UK.

Unlike A levels in which pupils will usually study three to four subjects, in depth, over their final two years of high schooling, an IB Diploma pupil will maintain more breadth and study six subjects across the same timeframe. Three of these subjects are at higher level and the remaining three are at standard level. Assessment takes place continuously but end of Year 13 examinations make up a significant proportion of a pupil's final grade. In theory, this means that by taking fewer exams during the year, more 'learning time' can be factored into the school term.

The IB offers six subject groupings and pupils are required to take at least one subject from each:

1. Language and Literature
2. Language Acquisition
3. Individuals and Societies
4. Sciences
5. Mathematics
6. Arts or Electives (choice of Music, Theatre or the Visual Arts OR either another language, another subject from Individuals and Societies or another Science).

On the languages front, English or the pupil's native language as well as a second language must be selected.

The breadth offered by the IB is perhaps suited to the pupil who is undecided on a career, has proved talented across several disciplines or someone who enjoys independent learning. Historically speaking, students who have already set their goals on a particular field, such as medicine, have felt that A levels are the better choice because they allow you to explore a smaller range of fields in more depth and provide more specialised preparation towards further study. On the other hand, an IB pupil focused on maths or science-based study could potentially struggle with some of the less technical subjects which may impact negatively on their final grade.

On top of the six subjects chosen, IB students are required to prepare a 4000 word essay (based on an original piece of research) and undertake an assessable 'Theory of Knowledge' course. Another mandatory program, known as Creativity, Activity and Service (CAS) involves taking part in creative, active and community activities that include a reflective writing component. All components must be satisfied in order to be awarded the Diploma at the end of Year 13. Schools offering A levels will endeavour to include sporting, cultural and volunteering activities into their curriculums but these are not necessarily formal or mandatory integrations. IB enthusiasts argue that the above-mentioned requirements help to broaden education experiences and challenge teenagers to apply their knowledge and understanding within areas of personal interest through individual research and community involvement.

While the defined syllabus boundaries of A Levels may suit those pupils who are clearer in their future plans, IB pupils have the opportunity to develop a range of skills useful for both university and the future world of work that include the ability to think, challenge, evaluate, manage time and make decisions.

So is one qualification deemed better than the other? In short, no, because the reality is that the best path for a pupil will come down to their individual personality and goals. Both qualifications take equally valid approaches but focus on different aspects of a pupil's education. Remember too that when exploring schools offering either or both, be sure to also look at their ethos, the levels of support offered as well as what careers advice is available - all of which contribute to finding a school where your son or daughter will be happy and productive.