



A success story: the International Baccalaureate

In his recent book *What Works* Hamish McRae identifies twenty of the world's organisations and communities that have achieved success in these "stressful times". Along with, for example, IKEA and Bangalore's rebirth as a hi-tech city, McRae selects the International Baccalaureate, to which "schools all over the world are turning to as a way not just to give their students a global academic credential, but much more to equip them to be good citizens of the world in their own individual way".

The statistics appear to bear out McRae's claim. From a small industry only twenty years ago, the IB is now studied by more than 889,000 IB students at 3,105 schools in 140 countries. What are the reasons behind its extraordinary success?

First, the IB has grown at the same time as many schools and educationalists have become increasingly disillusioned with their own national qualifications systems. A case in point is that of my native country, the UK, where twenty five years ago A Levels stood as the undisputed gold standard. Now their value has become tarnished by successive governments' attempts to make the qualification more 'accessible' and by rampant grade inflation which has prevented many universities from being able to rely on the qualification to select for their courses.

One of the keys to the IB's success lies in it being an independent organisation, free from interference by politicians motivated by short-term political advantage rather than a commitment to the fulfilment of an educational principle.

Another, of course, is its attractiveness to parents concerned with providing an education for their children that has both international acceptance and, crucially, responds to the demands of an increasingly globalised world. It is no accident that

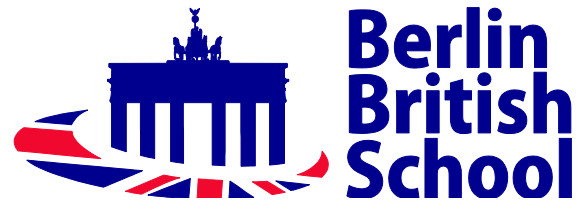


the IB's growth has been accompanied by a rapid expansion of international schools in response to mobility of labour and globalisation of education in general. An internationally recognised - and hence transferable - qualification has thus become increasingly attractive to such schools as well as to their student body: the global citizens of the future.

But that is only part of the explanation. The main reason for the IB's success lies of course in the quality of the product itself: chiefly recognised for being a qualification for entry to universities around the world, the IB is in fact made up of three programmes of learning spanning the 3 to 18 age range, all of which are underpinned by an educational philosophy which is as important as the content of each of the three individual programmes. Its bold mission statement to *develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect* stands in striking contrast to the utilitarian values, that stifle creativity and visionary thinking, of many countries' national educational systems.

The IB Diploma, the 16 - 18 programme and the jewel in the IB crown, offers a prescribed breadth of subject choices, so that to be awarded the full Diploma students have to study at least one science, a modern language and a humanity, as well as maths and their first language. With three subjects at Higher and three at Standard Level, Theory of Knowledge (a course in critical thinking) and an Extended Essay (of four thousand words on a subject of the student's choice) to hold the structure together, the IB Diploma has a coherence and balance, as well as breadth, that educationalists and universities applaud.

The Diploma also recognises, through 'Creative, Action and Service' (the third component, along with ToK and the Extended Essay, of the Diploma's 'core') that



education should not be confined to the classroom. All Diploma students have to complete Creative work, Action (sport), and Service to the local or wider community.

At Berlin British School (whose motto, *a British education today for the global citizens of tomorrow*, encapsulates its philosophy) we not only practise the IB's philosophy, which we hope infuses all aspects of the school's life, but value it as a passport to the world of work, as well as university. Employers are attracted to bilingual applicants who are also literate and numerate. And, as the IB continues to boom across the globe, it seems that other countries recognise that a post-sixteen curriculum which embraces coherence, balance, breadth, rigour, compassion and a commitment to 'lifelong learning' is vital for their economic prosperity, cultural development and general well-being.

Many students at Berlin British School – and elsewhere – will continue to find the IB Diploma very challenging. But, if their success in recent years is anything to go by, they will continue to secure places at top universities as well as be provided with a firm foundation on which to build their futures.

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