ACS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

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Connecting IB Schools
IB SCHOOLS & COLLEGES ASSOCIATION

UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS OFFICERS REPORT

WHAT UNIVERSITIES REALLY WANT FROM STUDENTS IN 2026

An ACS International Schools report, in partnership with IBSCA

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DR ROBERT HARRISON,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
ACS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

FOREWORD

The value of a university education has never been more fiercely debated. Parents watch tuition fees rise while graduate premiums shrink. Employers question whether degrees deliver work-ready recruits. Politicians scrutinise international student numbers. And behind it all, artificial intelligence is reshaping what it means to know, to learn and to work.

These questions land directly on families making consequential decisions about their children's futures. For many parents, the investment in sixth-form education has never felt higher-stakes. Get it right, and you help to set your child up for success. Get it wrong, and you may have spent years preparing them for a world that no longer exists.

It is tempting to rely on familiar assumptions: A Levels are the 'gold standard', universities are only after students with top grades, and subject expertise is what really matters. But what do the people who actually select students, the admissions officers who read the applications and shape the cohorts, actually think? That is the question this report sets out to answer.

A decade ago, we surveyed university admissions officers and asked what they looked for in applicants and how different qualifications compared. Now we return to those questions in a very different context: Brexit, a cost-of-living crisis and AI from science fiction to your mobile phone in three years.

What comes through is that a new consensus is forming among the people who know students best. At a time when universities face intense scrutiny and sometimes highly politicised attacks, it is more important than ever to listen to the professionals on the ground.

Our research challenges these legacy assumptions and offers a clear picture of what universities actually want – and how families can ensure that their children are genuinely ready to thrive.

> "For many parents, the investment in sixth-form education has never felt higher-stakes.
>
> Get it right, and you help to set your child up for success. Get it wrong, and you may have spent years preparing them for a world that no longer exists."

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents results from a survey of 65 university admissions officers from 50 UK institutions across a wide range including selective and highly selective universities, conducted between October and December 2025. It updates and extends research first conducted a decade ago, revealing how dramatically the picture has shifted.

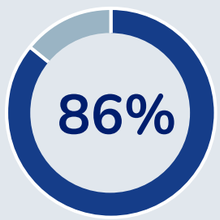
Types of university participating in the survey

Highlights

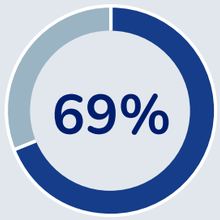
A sector under pressure. Admissions officers report unprecedented anxiety about forces beyond their control. **More than eight in ten cite visa and immigration policy as a negative factor affecting recruitment**, a concern not even measured ten years ago. Worries about student affordability have more than doubled in a decade.

The skills shift continues. Universities are explicitly deprioritising subject knowledge in favour of skills and attitudes. **Admission experts now rate subject knowledge as 15% less important than their counterparts did in 2016**. Critical thinking, self-directed learning and intellectual curiosity now matter more than the ability to retain and reproduce information. What helped students succeed a decade ago is no longer sufficient.

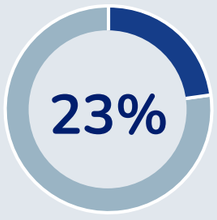
The IB Diploma is the preferred preparation. More than two-thirds of admissions officers identify the IB Diploma as providing the best preparation to thrive at university, rated higher than A Levels on nine of eleven competencies measured. **On average, the IB Diploma scores 23% higher than A Levels across all competencies assessed.**



Visas/Immigration is the biggest negative factor affecting admissions



IB is the best overall pathway to thrive at university



IB advantage vs A levels

MAIN RESULTS

A sector under pressure

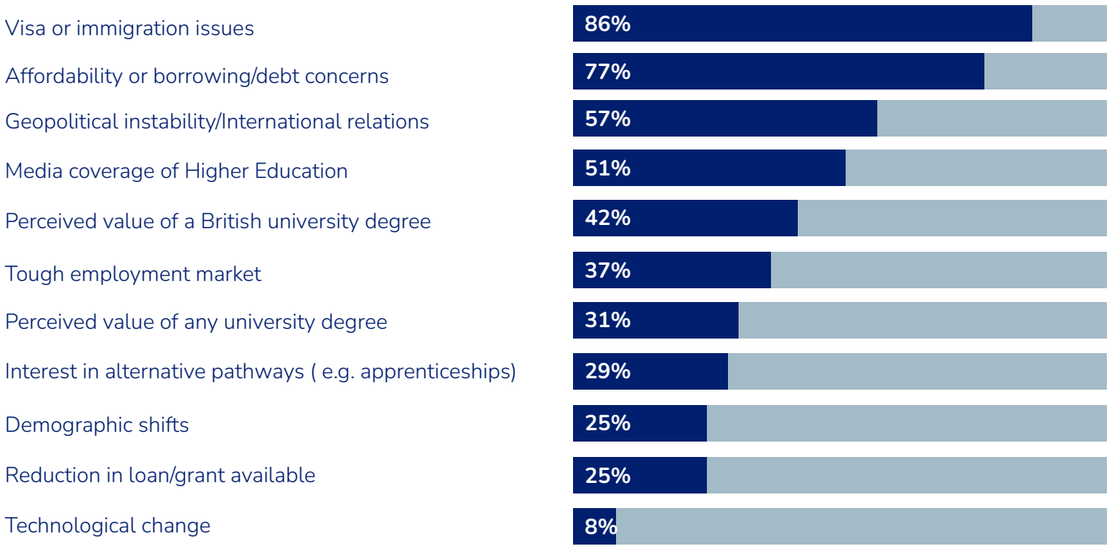
The headlines tell their own story of merger announcements, redundancy programmes, course closures and open speculation about which institution might be the first to fail. The Office for Students[1] has warned explicitly about financial sustainability across the sector. But behind the headlines lies a more varied picture. Not every university is on the edge of disaster with institutions varying hugely in their circumstances and resilience. Yet virtually all are, as one sector leader put it, “paddling very hard underneath the surface” to maintain their position. The structural pressures are sector-wide even if their impact is uneven.

International student fees now account for nearly a quarter of total sector income, 23% according to the most recent HESA data[2]. Home tuition fees, frozen for years in cash terms, have eroded in real value. Training a vet, for example, costs around £20,000 per year but universities receive only £11,000 from fees and government support. The gap has to be filled from somewhere, and increasingly, that somewhere has been international recruitment. What should be the cherry on the cake has become the flour.

This makes institutions acutely sensitive to any recruitment shortfall. And policy uncertainty, particularly around visas and immigration, has made forward planning extraordinarily difficult.

The changes since 2016 have been dramatic. Brexit removed EU students from home-fee status, triggering steep declines in applications from the continent. The pandemic disrupted international pipelines that took years to build. And from 2024, restrictions on students bringing dependants materially changed the market for taught postgraduate programmes, a segment many universities had come to rely upon.

External factors with largest negative impact



1. Office for Students. Financial sustainability of higher education providers in England. November 2025
2. HESA. Higher Education Provider Data: Finance 2023/24. May 2025

86% of admissions officers cite visa and immigration changes as a likely negative factor affecting applications for 2026-27. This question was not even asked in our 2016 survey; immigration simply was not on the radar as a sectoral concern. Today it dominates. When asked to identify the single greatest external factor affecting recruitment, almost 40% pointed to immigration policy alone, double any other factor.

The pipeline of uncertainty looks set to continue with changes to Graduate visa duration taking effect from January 2027. And the proposed International Student Levy will add further unpredictability to institutional planning from August 2028.

77% cite affordability and student debt as a concern, more than double the 32% recorded a decade ago. The cost-of-living crisis has also fundamentally changed how students make choices. UCAS data shows a growing share of students living at home during their studies. Commuting distance increasingly factors into application decisions. The traditional model of moving away to study, the residential campus experience that once defined British higher education, is no longer the default assumption for many families.

Respondents also pointed to specific pressure points such as the reduction of the post-study work visa from two years to eighteen months, the cost of living in London, and what ministers have labelled "rip-off degrees."

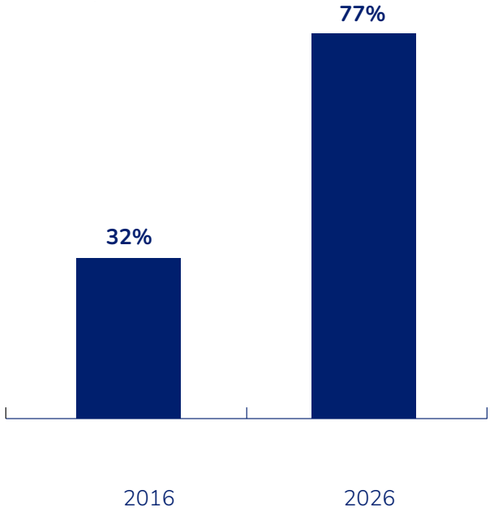
57% cite geopolitical instability and international relations as a concern. In an interconnected recruitment market, war, trade tensions and diplomatic relations all affect where students choose to study – and whether they can get there.

29% cite growing interest in alternative pathways, such as apprenticeships, as another downward pressure on student enrolment. With the ongoing debate about tuition fees and graduate outcomes, some prospective students are questioning whether a university degree is the best return on investment.

72% are worried about reaching recruitment targets this year. A further 40% cite "late or changing targets" as an operational concern. The Office for Students notes that many providers are modelling deficits, and small recruitment shortfalls can trigger outsized consequences such as course closures, staff reductions and campus consolidation.

A 2025 survey by Universities UK of how institutions are responding to funding constraints found that "choices available to students are being reduced: 49% have closed courses; 55% have consolidated some courses; 46% have removed module options, and 18% have closed departments". These are trends that are accelerating. Even as the government pledges to put science and technology at the heart of economic growth, science departments are closing because laboratory teaching is expensive. Modern language courses are contracting because fewer school students take them. And even English literature, a foundational humanities discipline, is under threat. The cuts are hitting core academic subjects and not just the margins.

Percentage of students affected by affordability concerns



The outlook: cautious on both international and domestic

The international student outlook remains particularly uncertain. Among respondents, 43% expect more international applications, while a quarter (25%) don't know. Opinion is genuinely split, reflecting the difficulty of forecasting in the current policy environment.

Domestic recruitment appears more stable. Half (52%) expect home student applications to remain steady, with a further 34% expecting growth. But 14% simply don't know. Our survey suggests that growth is unevenly distributed across the sector, intensifying "winners versus losers" dynamics.

International and home student applications expectations

	Home students	International students
Expecting growth	**34%**	**43%**
Same	**52%**	**33%**
Expecting decline	**0%**	**0%**
Don't know	**14%**	**25%**

Reasons for optimism

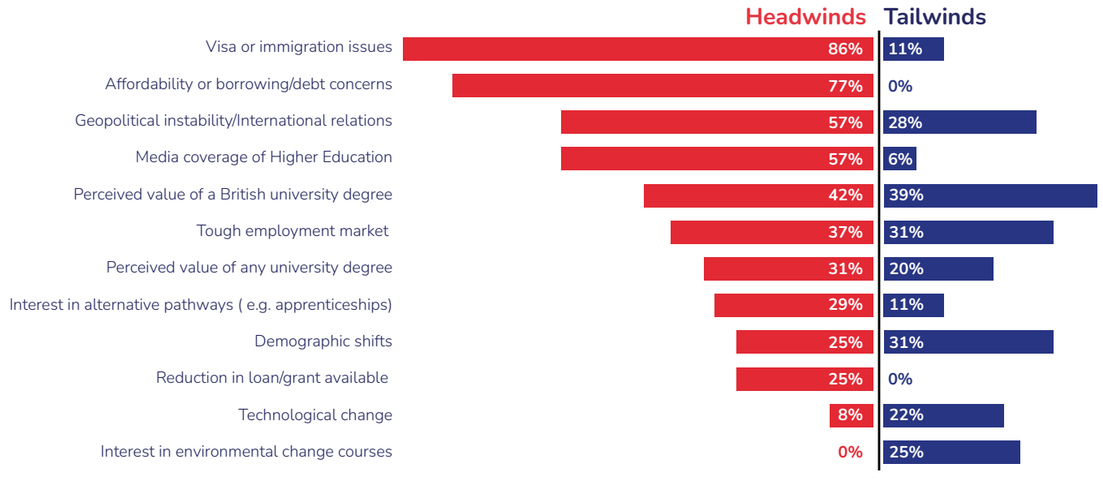
Not all the external factors point downward. When asked what might positively affect applications, admissions officers identified several social and demographic trends.

Two in five (39%) continue to see the perceived value of a British degree as a positive factor. As one leading Russell Group university put it: "The global reputation of UK Higher Education remains our strongest asset."

A third (31%) see the tough employment market as a positive driver since students might choose to remain in higher education during economic uncertainty. One prominent university noted: "If the economy remains stagnant, students often choose to 'hide' in education until the job market improves."

Three in ten (31%) see demographic shifts as positive. The rising 18-year-old population should support demand through to 2030, provided participation rates hold, even if a cliff edge is coming as post-2012 birth rates feed through to university-age populations.

Some institutions see opportunity in their specific offerings. A central London university observed: "We teach medical and healthcare programmes which I think appeal due to being highly applied and more AI proof."



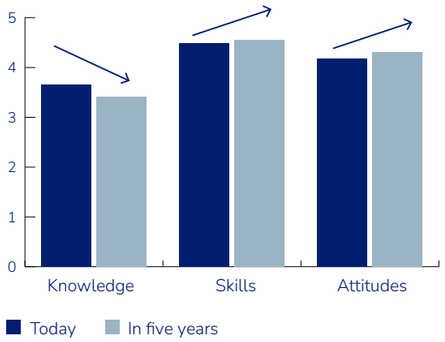
WHAT UNIVERSITIES VALUE: THE SKILLS SHIFT CONTINUES

A decade ago, admissions officers told us that students were arriving at university unable to think and learn independently. It was the most cited barrier to success, with 89% of respondents identifying it as a problem. Alongside it, 88% pointed to poor time management, 74% to weak social skills, and 72% to a lack of common-sense life skills.

These longstanding concerns have not gone away, but responses have sharpened. Universities are now explicitly reprioritising what they look for in applicants, shifting away from in-depth subject knowledge toward a broader range of skills and attitudes.

We asked admissions officers to rate the importance of three broad competency areas: Knowledge (possessing in-depth subject detail), Skills (critical thinking, self-directed learning), and Attitudes (curiosity, motivation, values). We asked about both current importance and projected importance five years from now.

The importance of competency areas now and in five years.



Knowledge is declining in importance, rated 3.66 out of 5 today, projected to fall to 3.41. This does not mean subject expertise is irrelevant, but universities increasingly see it as necessary rather than sufficient.

Skills are the highest priority and rising, already at 4.49, projected to reach 4.55. This category covers the capabilities admissions officers say matter most such as critical thinking, the ability to work independently, self-directed learning and the capacity to synthesise information from multiple sources.

Attitudes and values are also gaining ground, rising from 4.17 to 4.31. Intellectual curiosity, motivation, resilience and ethical reasoning are increasingly seen as predictors of success.

Universities are not rejecting academic rigour, and achievement in sixth form remains the key gatekeeper for admission. Students must be prepared with foundational knowledge and the ability to manage complex material. But increasingly, universities are recognising that knowledge alone is not enough. In a world where information is abundant and AI can retrieve facts and structure knowledge instantly, what matters is what students can do with what they know – how they think, question, synthesise and apply.

> “Universities are telling us clearly that they want students who can think and not just recite facts for a test. The survey shows knowledge declining in importance while skills and attitudes rise. This reflects a fundamental shift in what success looks like, and schools need to respond.”
>
> **Mark Wilson, Head of School at ACS Egham**

This shift reflects broader changes in higher education and the graduate employment market. The UK economy depends heavily on knowledge-intensive industries. Every industrial strategy priority sector, from life sciences to creative industries, clean energy to financial services, requires graduate-level skills. Employers consistently report that they value problem-solving, communication and adaptability over specific technical knowledge. This aligns with findings[3] which show that SMEs ranked communication (88%), an enquiring mind (78%) and critical thinking (76%) as the most important skills for future employees.

Degree programmes increasingly emphasise research methods, collaborative projects and independent study. The students who thrive are those who arrive already knowing how to learn. And curricula that prioritise breadth, independent research and transferable skills are better aligned with what universities now say they want. While redesign of UK qualifications and entrance requirements lag, approaches like the IB Diploma and Career-related Programme have already aligned themselves with this new world.

3. ACS Future Skills Report, 2024

QUALIFICATION SYSTEMS COMPARED

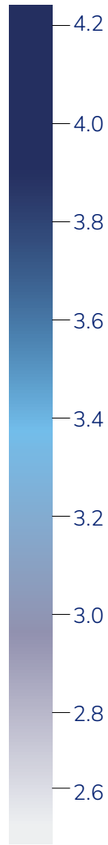
The findings raise a practical question: how do different qualification systems perform against the competencies universities now prioritise?

We asked admissions officers to rate four qualification systems: UK A Levels, the IB Diploma, the IB Career-related Programme (IBCP), and US College Board Advanced Placement®. They rated each across eleven educational objectives, from subject expertise to global awareness, workplace skills to independent inquiry.

The eleven competencies we assessed were drawn from the OECD’s Learning Compass 2030 framework, which defines the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values students need to thrive in an uncertain world. They range from subject expertise and independent inquiry to communication, creativity and global awareness.

How do different qualification systems perform against the prioritised competencies

	A Levels	IB Diploma	College Board APs.	IB Careers Programme
Developing citizenship	2.67	4.04	2.79	3.68
Communication skills	3.29	4	3.11	3.9
Coping with pressure	3.44	4.02	2.89	3.74
Developing Creativity	2.95	3.74	2.75	3.41
Developing an Entrepreneurial approach	2.8	3.53	2.75	3.97
Developing Global awareness	3.17	4.24	2.65	3.76
Independent Enquiry	3.52	4.2	2.8	3.68
Open Mindedness	3.26	4.02	2.85	3.74
Self Management	3.52	3.98	3.15	3.98
Depth Subject Expertise	3.97	3.98	3.3	3.49
Workplace Skills	2.48	3.41	2.49	4.19



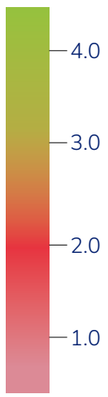
Common ground: academic rigour

On developing in-depth subject knowledge, A Levels and the IB Diploma are rated virtually identically, 3.97 and 3.98 respectively. Both are seen as academically rigorous routes that prepare students for specialist degree study.

A key research university in Central England was direct about IB rigour: “It’s an incredibly rigorous qualification. To have an IB Diploma with a good score is in itself an indicator of academic ability and/or commitment.”

Where the gaps appear

	A Level	IB Diploma	IB Careers Programme
Depth subject knowledge	**3.97**	**3.98**	**3.49**
Developing creativity	**2.95**	**3.74**	**3.41**
Developing entrepreneurialism	**2.8**	**3.53**	**3.97**
Workplace skills	**2.48**	**3.41**	**4.19**



The differences show in broader competencies, precisely the areas universities say are rising in importance.

The IB Diploma is rated highest on nine of the eleven measures. On average across all competencies, the IB Diploma scores 23% higher than A Levels (mean score 3.92 vs 3.19).

The largest gaps appeared in citizenship and global awareness. On citizenship, the IB Diploma scored 4.04 compared with 2.67 for A Levels. On global awareness, the gap was similar: 4.24 versus 3.17.

A Levels also scored notably lower on workplace skills (2.48 versus DP 3.41) and citizenship (2.67 versus DP 4.04), areas increasingly valued by employers and universities alike.

The IB Career-related Programme

The IB Career-related Programme, launched in 2012, combines academic study with career-focused learning. Though less well-known than the Diploma, it is the IB’s fastest-growing programme and it led in three categories:

Workplace Skills:	**4.19** (highest of all qualifications)
Self-management:	**3.98** (highest of all qualifications)
Entrepreneurialism:	**3.97** (highest of all qualifications)

For students oriented toward vocational pathways, the IBCP offers a distinctive combination of practical preparation and academic breadth.

US Advanced Placement

Admissions officers were less familiar with US College Board Advanced Placement (AP) exams, reflecting their relatively recent growth as a route to UK universities. Where views were offered, APs were rated positively for subject knowledge, self-management and communication, but less so for workplace skills. When compared directly with the IB Diploma, 83% preferred the IB.

Why IB students thrive

When asked why IB students are more likely to complete their degrees, admissions officers pointed consistently to the programme’s combination of breadth, depth and independent study.

A newer Scottish University highlighted the advantage that IB students bring to life as an independent university student responsible for their own learning.

An admissions official in one of the University of London’s 17 member institutions emphasised the IB Diploma’s intellectual range: “It encourages a more polymathic approach. While students can specialise in a broad subject area (i.e. STEM), they are still required to study other subjects… which helps students bring a different mindset and skill set to their future specialism. They are less pigeonholed and perhaps later more comfortable taking on tasks outside their comfort zone.”

> “IB students generally transition to university more smoothly than those from other routes. The IB teaches students to manage a heavier and more varied workload than A levels, and they often arrive at university already used to balancing multiple subjects.”

The Extended Essay, a 4,000-word independent research project, featured prominently during conversations with admissions officers. One post-1992 university connected this directly to university expectations: “The programme encourages breadth of thinking. It also invites students to work on projects which develop independent thinking and research skills that match the UK HE landscape.”

QUALIFICATION SYSTEMS COMPARED

Another former technical institute emphasised the importance of independent research for student success: “It is because the IBDP is more holistic in its approach, but mainly because all candidates, regardless of Higher Level subject choices, have to carry out independent research and critical thinking.”

DP students have high rates of academic success, with one university noting:

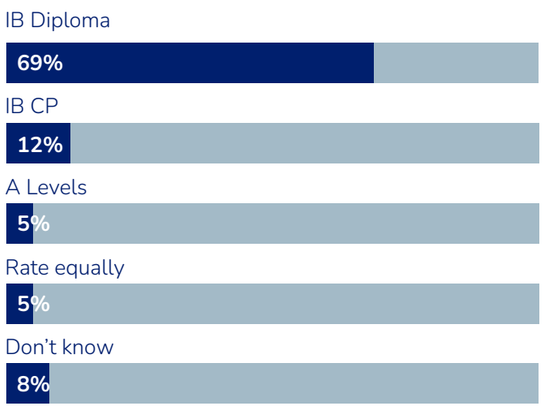
> “57% achieve a 1st Class Honours degree. 70% graduate 2:1 or above.”

ACS Egham Head of School Mark Wilson supports these observations from the other side of the university admission process: “IB students arrive knowing what university study demands: independent research, managing competing deadlines and thinking across disciplines. In a sector where every dropout represents fee income that cannot be replaced, completion matters. Universities know this, which is why they value students who arrive ready and prepared.”

The verdict: best preparation

When asked directly which qualification provides the best preparation to thrive at university, 69% identified the IB Diploma, up from approximately 20% a decade ago.

Which qualification best prepares students to thrive at university?



Mr Wilson added that the data should challenge long-held assumptions. “We should be asking ourselves whether we are still chipping students down to fit a narrow, outdated ideal, or whether we are helping them carve out their own path.”

This perception is reflected in outcomes. UCAS data on offer rates at competitive universities (2021-2024, aggregated across all fee statuses) shows strong acceptance of IB applicants.

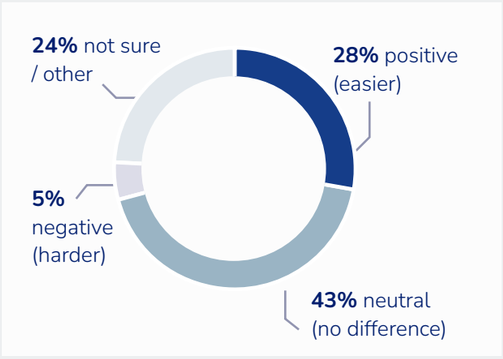
University	IB Offer Rate	UCAS 2025 Offer Rate
Warwick	**77%**	**71%**
Manchester	**75%**	**58%**
Bristol	**73%**	**68%**
King’s College London	**55%**	**44%**
Edinburgh	**49%**	**44%**

THE NEW UCAS PERSONAL STATEMENT

From 2026, UCAS is reforming the personal statement, moving from a blank page to structured questions. We asked admissions officers how this might affect their ability to identify the qualities they seek.

The response was cautiously optimistic. Around 28% believe the new format will make it easier to identify the qualities they seek, only 5% view the change negatively.

Admission officers from some noted Russell Group universities welcomed the structure: “The new framework should assist applicants to structure their thinking and also identify and reflect on the skills and experience that will best support their application. It should help focus the applicants’ minds on what we are actually looking for, rather than flowery prose.”



THE EVIDENCE BASE: IB RESEARCH AND OUTCOMES

The survey results align with a growing body of independent research on IB programmes and student outcomes.

High-impact education. The Brookings Institution has identified the International Baccalaureate as one of just seven educational systems globally that provides genuinely transformational education, setting high expectations for both academic learning and rounded student development. This recognition reflects the IB’s integrated approach to curriculum design, which embeds research skills, critical thinking and intercultural understanding throughout the programme.

International-mindedness. Research conducted across six countries found that IB Diploma and Career-related Programme students demonstrate higher levels of global mindedness than comparison groups, reflecting the programmes’ emphasis on intercultural understanding, multiple perspectives and social responsibility. In an increasingly connected world, these competencies are valued by universities and employers alike.

Academic rigour. Country alignment studies confirm that the IB Diploma offers world-class courses that meet or exceed international standards, supporting considerable depth and breadth of learning. The programme’s requirement that students study six subjects across different disciplines, while also completing the Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge components, ensures both specialist depth and intellectual range.

UK outcomes. In 2024, nearly 4,000 students in the UK received the IB Diploma, the fifth highest total globally. An additional 435 students received the IB Career-related Programme certificate, the third highest worldwide. Among UK students who sent transcripts abroad, the most popular destinations outside the UK were the United States, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands.

Social mobility. A pilot programme in Kent, launched in partnership with Kent County Council in 2012, offered the IB Career-related Programme to students from disadvantaged areas. A 2021 evaluation found a 92% completion rate. Of participants, 55% progressed to university, 17% to employment and 16% to apprenticeships. Staff emphasised that the programme opened pathways to higher education and careers for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who might otherwise have had limited options.

RICHARD MARKHAM,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF IBSCA UK AND IRELAND

Higher education is navigating a period of uncertainty unlike anything in recent memory. Against that backdrop, this research points to a clear shift in what the gatekeepers to university places value. Subject knowledge still matters and academic rigour remains non-negotiable. But admissions officers are increasingly explicit that knowledge alone is not enough.

The direction of travel is towards skills and attitudes that enable students to thrive in a world where information is abundant, and tools can reproduce content instantly. Critical thinking, self-directed learning and intellectual curiosity are not viewed as optional extras. They are becoming the defining predictors of success. In other words, the question is not simply whether students can retain and reproduce what they have been taught, but whether they can interrogate ideas, synthesise competing information, manage a complex workload, and sustain motivation and resilience when study becomes difficult.

This is where the International Baccalaureate's value proposition becomes especially clear. This report's findings suggest that the IB Diploma is widely seen by admissions professionals as the strongest overall preparation for university study. It is not because the programme dilutes academic standards. On the contrary, admissions officers rate the IB Diploma and A Levels as virtually identical on developing in-depth subject knowledge. The difference lies in the broader competencies that universities increasingly prioritise. Across the competencies assessed, the IB Diploma is rated highest on nine of the eleven measures and, on average, it scores substantially higher than A Levels overall. When asked directly which qualification best prepares students to thrive at university, a clear majority identify the IB Diploma.

The IB Diploma delivers top-tier academic depth while leading the market in critical thinking (Independent Inquiry: 4.20/5) and character development
(*Open Mind:* 4.02/5)

The qualitative evidence helps explain why. Admissions officers repeatedly highlight the benefits of breadth combined with depth, and the advantages that come from sustained independent study. Students who have balanced multiple subjects and competing deadlines, undertaken independent inquiry, and developed the habit of structured reflection often arrive better prepared for the realities of university learning. They are more likely to cope with ambiguity, to engage with unfamiliar material, and to take responsibility for their own progress. In a sector where every withdrawal represents a personal disappointment as well as a financial loss, readiness for the transition matters.

IB programmes provide a 'complete' education – delivering the academic rigour universities demand and students with future-ready skills they desperately need

21% advantage
in Global Awareness

34% advantage
in Workplace Skills

SUMMARY

Compared to other qualifications, IB programmes offer students a

12-15%

edge in OECD 2030 competencies.

For the school sector, the implications are practical. First, schools should take seriously the message that universities increasingly value transferable skills and learning dispositions alongside grades. Curriculum and pedagogy that develop independent inquiry, critical thinking, and intellectual courage will better align with the emerging consensus in higher education. Second, schools should recognise that breadth is becoming a strategic advantage, not a sentimental attachment to a liberal ideal. Where students are supported to study across disciplines, to write and research independently, and to connect ideas, they are more likely to arrive at university equipped to succeed. Third, families should be supported to make choices based on what universities say they need, rather than relying on inherited assumptions about prestige and preparation.

Finally, these findings raise a wider question about the future of post-16 education in the UK. At precisely the moment when universities face acute pressure and uncertainty, it would be short-sighted to narrow access to programmes that admissions professionals consistently rate as the best preparation for success. The case for protecting and strengthening high-quality, breadth-based pathways is not ideological. It is grounded in what universities themselves report they need from the students who will shape their cohorts and, ultimately, the future of the country's graduate workforce. Ensuring that the IB remains available, viable and accessible within the school system should therefore be seen as part of a serious national conversation about readiness, resilience and educational standards in a changing world.

69% of admissions officers surveyed hold the IB Diploma as the best preparation for university.

ABOUT ACS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS

Founded in 1967 to serve the needs of global and local families, ACS International Schools educate around 2000 students, aged 2 to 18, day and boarding, from more than 100 countries. Our schools in Greater London are all non-sectarian and co-educational.

At the heart of our approach is the idea of readiness – we empower our students with the skills and knowledge to thrive in a world that is changing fast. Our world-renowned curriculum includes all International Baccalaureate (IB) Programmes, and top US programmes including Advanced Placement (AP) courses and the AP Capstone and International Diplomas.

Our students leave ACS as well-rounded global citizens with the academic and emotional intelligence to empathise and engage with tomorrow's big issues, turning compassion into action as they stand ready for a future full of opportunity.

ACS is a registered UK charity (1179820). ACS undertakes a wide number of programmes to further its charitable aim to advance education, including partnerships with other organisations and offering financially assisted places to students who otherwise would be unable to attend ACS schools.

For more information about ACS International Schools, please visit the website www.acs-schools.com

ABOUT IBSCA (THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES ASSOCIATION)

IBSCA is a membership organisation open to all UK and Ireland schools and colleges which are recognised as IB World Schools. With members drawn across all IB Programmes and extensive connections worldwide, IBSCA is a vibrant and well-connected expert in IB matters. IBSCA works to promote the IB mission, values and programmes by supporting member schools and engaging external stakeholders and communities in the promotion and enhanced understanding of the intrinsic value of an IB education. As an IB Association of World Schools, IBSCA benefits from a close working relationship with International Baccalaureate staff, and works hand-in-hand with the IB to advocate on IB matters in the UK.

As an International Baccalaureate Association, IBSCA exists for the benefit of its members, and over the past 25 years has developed its services to meet the ever changing needs of schools and teachers.

Supporting schools is the primary function of the Association and this is done through the provision of professional development opportunities; research and advocacy on behalf of schools; and a close working relationship with the IB.

At the heart of what IBSCA does is the facilitation of collaboration. We are strong advocates of the benefits of peer learning, and this can be seen through our conferences, seminars and workshops. Schools and teachers are often at different points of their IB journey and enabling individuals to take stock and learn from other schools is of paramount importance. Our formal and informal networks of schools offer advice and guidance for all IB programmes

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METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted online by FieldworkHub between October and December 2025 on behalf of ACS International Schools and IBSCA.

The survey gathered responses from 65 university admissions officers representing 50 UK institutions. Half of the respondents were Heads of Admission or Senior Staff. The sample included universities across all tariff bands and mission groups, from Russell Group research-intensive institutions to teaching-focused post-1992 universities, ensuring a broad and representative cross-section of the sector. Respondents included admissions directors, heads of recruitment and senior officers with direct responsibility for undergraduate selection.

Where possible, results are compared with research conducted in 2016, which surveyed 81 UK admissions officers. Core questions on student preparedness and qualification comparisons were retained to enable longitudinal analysis, while some questions have been updated to reflect the changed context.

The survey was conducted to Market Research Society (MRS) standards. Due to rounding, percentages may not always total 100%.

The following universities participated in this study: Abertay University, Anglia Ruskin University, Aston University, Brunel University London, City St George's, University of London, De Montfort University, Durham University, Falmouth University, Imperial College London, Keele University, King's College London, Lancaster University, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University, Loughborough University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Newcastle University, Queen Mary University of London, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Royal Holloway, University of London, SOAS University of London, The London School of Economics and Political Science, The University of Law, University for the Creative Arts, University of Aberdeen, University of Bath, University of Birmingham, University of Brighton, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, University of East Anglia, University of Edinburgh, University of Exeter, University of Gloucestershire, University of Greenwich, University of Leeds, University of Leicester, University of Manchester, University of Oxford, University of Plymouth, University of Salford, University of Southampton, University of St Andrews, University of Stirling, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of Warwick, University of Westminster, University of York, UWE Bristol.

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