



The IB Diploma Programme - Frequently Asked Questions

Is the IB harder work and are there fewer free periods?

Yes, the IB will take commitment and effort but so will A Levels if you want to be a competent student who achieves good grades.

It is true that with the IB you have a few less "frees", but remember free periods are not meant to be spent relaxing; they should be used for independent study, extending your learning or pursuing activities, which will broaden your skill sets.

The IB course builds independent learning time into your timetable, often you are spending lesson time working independently but under the guidance of a teacher. CAS and Extended Essay guidance time is also built into your IB timetable, so you are covering all elements of your Sixth Form experience through your timetable and all of it is counting towards your final qualification.

Is it difficult to manage workload with the IB?

At the start of Year 12, some students naturally find all Sixth Form study a challenge, but for many the structure of the IB programme helps as they have a structure to work to.

Self-managing competing deadlines is an important life skill and one you will need to master. It is better you make mistakes whilst in school where you are in a supportive environment rather than at work or university.

Interestingly, from feedback we have had from past students, IB alumnae adapt to the multi-tasking nature of university very well and universities tell us how quickly IB students adapt to study.

Do you have to be very clever to do the IB?

This is a common misconception. You just have to be open-minded and curious. At Redmaids' High the criteria for entry onto the IB courses is the same as A Level. The flexibility of the IB means that you can play to your strengths to maximise your overall points, so you can create a combination of subjects that will collectively help you achieve the overall point score you need rather than being reliant on just three subjects.

All subjects at both Higher Level and Standard Level are marked from 1 to a maximum of 7 points, with an additional 3 points being awarded for the Extended Essay and Theory of Knowledge. The IB is out of a maximum of 45 points and a minimum of 24 points are required to pass (with additional caveats).

The IB is perfect if you enjoy a diverse group of subjects – for example studying mathematics, biology and art may seem rather unconventional but as part of the IB it makes perfect sense with Standard Levels offering support to them. It also allows all students to continue with subjects they enjoy as well as helping them develop the key academic and wider life skills they need. It allows individuality of choice.

The IB makes me continue with subjects I do not enjoy. What if I don't want to continue with mathematics, science or English?

Mathematics, English, science and a foreign or classical language are compulsory when studying the IB, but these are all skills that you will be using throughout your life. Research shows that by honing them until the age of 18 you are much more likely to maintain a lifelong proficiency. You need to look beyond the content of the courses and think about the skills these subjects will enhance.

If you feel weaker at **mathematics** there is even more reason to do the IB as you will need the ability to manage your finances as an independent adult and a majority, if not all, jobs require some element of mathematical skill. Taking it as part of the IB will give you proficiency in those skills. Remember there are two different options for mathematics (**Analysis and Approaches** and **Applications and Interpretations**) allowing each student to continue with the subject in way which they find relevant to them. If you enjoy studying pure mathematics, then look at **Analysis and Approaches**. If you are more interested in developing mathematical skills for real life, then **Analysis and Interpretations** provides that opportunity.

Studying **English** will also give you the chance to develop your presentation, research, reflective and writing skills and you will be expected to demonstrate all of these at university as well as in the working world. Developing them whilst still at school is the sensible thing to do. The **Literature and Performance** course offers students unsure about continuing the study of Literature a very fresh way of looking at this discipline and offers great value to them.

Similarly, **ESS** allows students to study a science in a more humanities-focused manner (and vice versa as ESS is interdisciplinary and can count for both your science and humanity allowing students to pursue more options from elsewhere in the IB).

At Redmaids' High, all students have studied at least one language until GCSE, with many studying two. Why throw away all the knowledge and hard work for just 18 more months of study? Fluency in a second language is a big advantage for employability and will help you stand out from the crowd. Or pick up **Italian** for something new. Studying a second language demonstrates that you have cultural sensitivity, intellectual understanding and an open mind-set; they are key skills for operating in a global workforce.

Can A Level and IB students feel isolated from each other?

Other than the academic lessons, all other aspects of Sixth Form are mixed. The nature of six subjects means that students often work in small groups and sometimes in individual tutorials, such as in your supported independent study time in IB.

The majority of trips in the Sixth Form are open jointly to A Level and IB students. The students work in wider groups for CAS and a Group 4 science project and both IB year groups often collaborate on aspects of the curriculum. IB and A Level students are mixed in their tutor groups and all other aspects of Sixth Form life.

Is it true that it is hard to prepare and revise for IB exams?

Sixth Form is a step up and preparing for A Levels or IB exams is a very different process than preparing for GCSE exams. Part of the role of your teachers in the Sixth Form is to help you understand and develop the skills you need to be exam ready. You will need to work hard in the Sixth Form and there is no such thing as easy revision!

One aspect of the IB is that there is at least 20% coursework in every subject, so you are not relying entirely on final examinations. Coursework helps improve your understanding and grades. The mix of Higher and Standard level subjects means that you do not have to put the same amount of effort into all the subjects and planning where to focus your priorities really helps students manage both the workload and the assessments.

Do Higher Level subjects allow me to study in much more depth?

The depth of the IB comes through your Higher Level subjects, which is then balanced with the breadth of your Standard Level subjects. Standard Level subjects perform a supporting role and often bind the understanding of the subjects together. This overall diversity makes for a very fulfilling Sixth Form experience.

I know what I want to study so why do I need all of these subjects?

Most importantly, the IB is preparing you for life beyond school, in university and the workplace. It is giving you skills for the job market and in doing so will enable you to approach your degree with confidence. It will open doors, not close them and even if you are already very fixed on one subject for a degree course, it will still require you to have proficiency across a number of skills; you will need to work independently, research, write, present and communicate your expertise in your chosen field. The IB helps you develop competency in these skills because subjects do not sit in isolation of each other allowing you to see this and draw on wider understanding.

In addition, if you are passionate about a certain area you can develop this before going to university and use it as a basis for your Extended Essay, and explore it in the Theory of Knowledge, so that you arrive for your course ahead of the curve.

Will CAS take up too much time?

Two things to remember, firstly guidance elements of the CAS programme are scheduled into your timetable and you are doing most of what is required already without realising it. Secondly CAS is about crediting and learning from all the extra-curricular you already enjoy or want to undertake both inside and outside of school. Examples of this include:

Creativity: this can range from music, speech and drama, and dance to organising events and service projects (such as House Drama). Most of you are doing this, so why not make it count towards your qualification

Activity: Being physically active and working towards personal fitness/sporting goals. All students at Redmaids' High have to have opportunities to be active in and out of school you are automatically covering this off

Service: Charity and community work. Whether that involves running clubs for Junior School students, fund-raising for school charities, planning an awareness campaign or volunteering at the weekends. This is inherent in the Redmaids' High values and the IB recognises it as an important part of your education.

Can I still do Gold D of E?

Yes, all aspects of Gold D of E count as CAS and the things you do as CAS count as your Gold D of E. Two for the price of one!

Do universities understand the IB?

It is a myth that universities don't understand the IB and in fact they positively endorse it because students come prepared and able to study independently, juggle priorities and understand the roots of knowledge. Students are gaining points across six subjects so have a wider remit and more flexibility around how to gather the overall points required. Remember the IB is taken all around the world and is over 50 years old, so university admissions tutors have been opening doors to IB students for a long time! The offers are at least comparable and sometimes favourable with other qualifications universities deal with (which is many!).

Take some time to look at potential degree courses and see what the average IB offer is for a course you might be interested in. When you consider that you can build toward those points across six subjects you will start to understand how flexible the IB can be in helping achieve your ambitions.

Do employers understand the IB?

Employers reflect that they want students who can communicate, problem solve, be creative, independent and reflective. The IB embeds these skills and more. Another important benefit is that it is an internationally recognised qualification and as you will be competing on a global stage for jobs it offers a level playing field. It is well-regarded internationally, making it easier for multinational employers to benchmark against international candidates. The world of work is changing rapidly and the thinking skills, knowledge and soft skills the IB offers is perfect preparation to adapt to this. Across the globe employers understand the benefits that the programme brings to the students.

Furthermore, you also become part of a global community of IB alumnae and the opportunities for networking and support from this community should not be underestimated.

Can I swap my Higher and Standard subjects?

Another of the benefits of the IB is that you do have some flexibility to change your subjects around. All six options will cover the Standard Level syllabus and with Higher Level subjects building on as additional elements, you will have therefore covered the Standard Level specification if you switch a Higher and a Standard Level subject.

Remember, if you move a Higher down to Standard Level you will need to move another subject up as all students must complete three Higher Level and three Standard Level subjects.

It is always useful to have an eye on what you might want to study at university before changing your Higher and Standard Level options. Some undergraduate courses do specify certain subjects at a Higher Level as part of the entrance requirement.

I love studying textiles but how can I follow this interest if it isn't a subject offered by the IB?

The joy of the IB Visual Arts course is that you can use a variety of mediums; if textiles is your preferred route then you can explore your artistic journey and create a portfolio, which centres on the use of textiles. The course really focuses on developing inquiry, creativity and personal reflection; opening your eyes to the artistic experience rather than refining technical skill sets.

Can I choose a subject as part of my IB which I have not taken at GCSE?

Yes, it is possible although suitability for specific subjects is best discussed with subject teachers before you make any decisions. There are lots of new subjects to look at too including global politics, ESS, psychology, literature and performance, economics and Italian. All students opting for these are new to the subject. Other subjects such as humanities often have students in them that have not taken GCSE as is the case at A Level too.

When do I have to make my choices?

In the Autumn Term of Year 11, students and parents start to seriously consider their Sixth Form options. You and your parents are invited to the Sixth Form evening; students also attend Sixth Form taster classes; current Sixth Formers mentor Year 11 forms and individual subject specialists will spend time with you discussing appropriate options. We then ask for draft choices before Christmas. Following mock GCSE exams you can revisit the choices and have further discussions with your Guidance Mentors. Choices will be "finalised" in the Spring Term but can be revisited in the Summer Term and after GCSE results. We are here to support you at each stage and to make sure you feel confident and inspired by your Sixth Form options.

The IB also lends itself well for making adjustments to the study programme within the first term of Sixth Form.

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