

Wellington College Festival of Education: Thursday 21st June 2018

IB's 50th Anniversary: what has the IB ever done for us?

The Wellington College's Festival of Education is the largest educational event of its kind in the UK, with 4000 visitors over two days, hundreds of speakers and dozens of sessions.

To celebrate IB's 50th anniversary, IBSCA presented a panel session about the impact of IB. The panel consisted of:

Richard Markham: Principal of Hockerill Anglo European School, a state boarding and day school, with a range of international students which offers the Middle Years Programme and the Diploma Programme.

Simone Lorenz-Weir: Head of Sixth Form at Oakham School, an independent co-educational boarding and day school, which has offered the Diploma Programme for over 20 years and which is about to introduce the Middle Years Programme in September 2018.

David Howells: Head of Undergraduate Admissions, University of Bath.

Esther Ujah: a Year 12 Diploma student at Wellington College.

The panel was chaired by **John Cloughton**, IBSCA's Development Manager.

Richard and Simone briefly described the context of their schools. Richard said that offering IB had enabled Hockerill 'to be itself', to follow its own educational principles and to devise a broad curriculum and a way of teaching in which it believed. Both of the programmes encouraged an interdisciplinary way of thinking and the MYP programme enabled the school to deliver the necessary content in a way which was much more engaging and interesting. He also said that he was proud that the MYP programme enabled the school to offer Drama, Music and Art – and 21 languages – at a time when those subjects were under pressure elsewhere. Of course, one of the issues about IB is recruitment: often parents can see very well the value of what IB offers, but, not least with the narrowing of A levels, students are attracted by the pragmatic simplicity of choosing three A levels.

Simone explained that Oakham had been offering the Diploma programme for nearly 20 years in a mixed economy with A levels with considerable, and growing, success. The decision to take on the MYP was prompted by the desire to embed the IB ethos lower down the school and to create greater continuity between teaching pre- and post-16. The school believes inquiry-based learning, which they developed as their own framework FOSIL, is the best possible way of preparing all students for the future and this was one of the driving forces for the implementation of the MYP for years 7, 8 and 9.

Simone also emphasised the impact of IB on the teaching staff: it allows them to have the conversations about education they all want to have. The IB allows teachers to be and remain enthusiastic about teaching and learning and to work collaboratively on curriculum design and assessment design. It is also a striking feature of IB that it encourages collaboration between schools, in both the state and the independent sector. At this point, John Cloughton said that IB

conferences were always inspiring, in striking contrast to other conferences which heads had to attend.

The panel all agreed that one of the great advantages of IB is that students do not get trapped down cul-de-sacs, having made ill-informed A level choices at A level. Whereas, a potential medic almost certainly has to do Maths, Chemistry and Biology at A level, an IB medic will often be able to choose a non-scientific subject at Higher Level.

David Howells started by saying 'I love IB', but realised that he might need to say a bit more than that. So, he did. The University of Bath now has 10% of undergraduates from IB and the offers have been changed to encourage IB applications. The university sees great qualities in what IB brings to students: the breadth of study; the capacity to make links across subjects and to question; the ability both to write – and write extensively – and to use mathematical data. He said that IB was particularly good preparation for subjects like Architecture or Psychology, which are not linked to any obvious prior subjects of study. And, from his point of view, the stability and reliability of IB was a great boon in contrast with the constantly changing design and assessment of A levels.

Esther told her own story. She had studied in a comprehensive school in Tottenham for her GCSEs. At that time, her thoughts were that she would need to study 'facilitating subjects' at A Level to ensure that she found her way into a successful career. She came to Wellington as a Prince Albert Scholar to study the Diploma because it offered her a very different way of thinking. IB has enabled her to do the subjects that she really loves (Higher Level English, History and Art, Standard Level French, Maths and Astronomy) and to think about a university choice in International Development. She emphasised how the breadth of IB has encouraged her to think across disciplines and see the interconnected nature of study: her Maths Internal Assessment seemed to link Maths and Donald Trump. In addition, Esther talked about her work in CAS, tutoring three Syrian refugee children. And she emphasised how CAS encouraged all students to engage seriously and meaningfully with the local community – rather than just run a cake stall.

Thereafter, the conversation widened out to the audience. In that conversation, there was an urgency to slay some of the myths that beset the thinking of parents and students:

Myth 1: IB is not just for all-rounders or those who cannot make up their minds. Even those who know where they want to specialise benefit from breadth of study: scientists need to write and communicate, humanities students need some mathematical and scientific competence. Indeed, a weakness in a subject, perhaps Maths or English, is not so much a reason to give that subject up, but a reason to stick with it.

Myth 2: IB is not right only for the most able. All IB schools are clear that often the biggest beneficiaries of IB are middle-ground students, achieving around 30 points, in terms of university entry. The nature of the IB, with a great deal of contact time, is particularly valuable for these students.

Myth 3: IB is not good for certain subjects, particularly Medicine. Everyone in the place agreed that all data point in the opposite direction: students arrive better equipped for interview and for tests like BMAT from a Diploma programme.

John Cloughton: 2nd July 2018