

# PUSH IT TO THE LIMIT

## Switching over to the IB Diploma Programme after O Levels

SALMA MOHAMMAD ALI

Thousands of Bangladeshi students are enrolled in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP), an assessed programme for students aged 16 to 19, both locally and across the globe. While students belonging to the IB background complete the preceding Primary Years Programme and Middle Years Programme, a portion of DP students are actually “transfers” from the O Levels background who choose the DP over A Levels.

The DP curriculum focuses on academic breadth and widespread learning over the narrow specialisation which is rather common in the A Levels. Students take one subject (either at Higher Level or Standard Level) from each of the five groups - studies in language and literature, language acquisition, individuals and societies, sciences, and mathematics; and may take an extra sixth subject from the groups - arts, additional science, language or social science. The subject options available allow unusual combinations such as Spanish, English, Chemistry, Mathematics, Psychology and Art which would be practically unheard of in most A Level schools.

At the heart of the curriculum lie three core requirements: Theory of Knowledge (ToK), Creativity, Action and Service (CAS), and Extended Essay (EE) which are intended to make students think critically, participate in various ECAs, sports and voluntary service and be practically prepared for the sort of research that is crucial in undergraduate programmes. Simply put, not just excel in academics but a diverse range of areas.

For most courses, written examinations at the end of the DP (two-year period) form the basis of the assessment, unlike A Levels which comprise of separate AS and A2 exams. Scores for each attempted course range from 7 to 1, with 7 being highest. The final Diploma result score is made up of the combined scores for each subject. A maximum score of 45 can be obtained – 7\*6 for each subject, and additional 3 points for completing the core requirements. The diploma is awarded to students who gain at least 24 points.

“Philosophy and critical thinking are huge aspects of the IB curriculum. So is learning way more outside the classroom. In fact, it’s got so many more things in the curriculum that are mandatory, like hours of CAS, tons of involvement and awareness, and you’re forced to work with all kinds of people and out of your comfort



zone. The rigor of the programme and every skill IB teaches are things I'd pick over a narrow range of subjects that I have to study all the time and memorise, any day," admits Muhtasim Shams Dibbo, 18, a student of the IB curriculum in Canada who completed his O Levels from Sunbeams School, Dhaka.

Adjusting to the differences between the two

curriculums (of O/A Levels and IB) calls for some adaptation. Wasif Ahmed Khan, 17, an O Level graduate from Sir John Wilson School Dhaka decided to go for the DP at International School Dhaka (ISD) hoping that this challenging curriculum would be better suited for making him an all-rounder.

“Adjusting is definitely hard since we come from a background where we aren't very good at time management and multitasking - both of which are very crucial to do well in the IB. Secondly, the style of education is slightly different since it includes a lot of critical thinking and presentation skills rather than textbook memorising. It takes some time to get used to relying heavily on technology for education purposes as well as striking a balance between academics and ECAs," says Wasif.

American International School Dhaka (AISD) and ISD are authorised by the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) to offer the DP. A student at either school will have to pay an estimated total of USD 60,000+ (BDT 47 lakhs+) as tuition fee, charges for field trips and other costs, for the duration of the two-year long DP, which can be reduced to around USD 30,000+ (BDT 23 lakhs+) with scholarships (66% of the tuition fees for external students), in the case of ISD.

Most DP admission processes comprise of a written test and/or an interview after assessing O Level grades and the most popular among options abroad include the 15 United World Colleges around the world. (*visit <http://uwc.org/> for more information*)

The DP is recognised by universities worldwide and a high score of around 35+ is accepted by various top universities and since DP students have no lack of ECAs there's always that plus point in their applications.

Concentrating on numerous courses, mastering a new language, doing countless ECAs and completing the DP seems to create well rounded, socially aware and probably sleep deprived individuals.

### Sources

<http://www.ibo.org/>  
<http://www.isdbd.org/page.cfm?p=519>

Salma Mohammad Ali fears she is becoming a crazy cat lady and uses writing as a means to grasp on to sanity. Send her your views/hate/love at <https://www.facebook.com/salma.ali209>