

## ***IB and A levels at King's College School from September 2013***

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Now that King's has reintroduced A levels alongside the IB with effect from September 2013, many pupils and parents will be wondering what this means for them. This set of questions and answers is just the first stage of a process, but we hope it proves helpful.*

#### **Why are we re-introducing A levels?**

*The A\* has been introduced to inspire and reward the best candidates, and the government is clearly determined to make the national system fit for purpose. As a result, the reputation of A levels, which came in for much criticism in the years King's moved across to the IB, has noticeably improved. Universities appear to believe that A levels provide them with increasingly clear information. We have a significantly extended Sixth Form (of around 400 pupils) and we are now in a position to offer pupils a choice without compromising on quality.*

#### **Does this mean the IB is not working?**

*No. The IB is a proven system which offers an outstanding preparation for university, and for life beyond study. King's is one of the leading IB schools in the world, with an extraordinarily consistent average score in IB of just over 39 points in the last four years. Each year, the success our candidates have with excellent offers to leading universities is an impressive endorsement of the IB. However, for some pupils, the demands of pursuing six subjects while also excelling in many other equally worthwhile co-curricular ventures can be too great a burden. While for the great majority the broad curriculum of the IB is both stimulating and manageable, for some it prevents the opportunity to specialise (eg, by taking maths, further maths and two sciences) which they feel then hinders their university application (eg, for Cambridge mathematics). Our university advice always takes these factors into account, but pupils will now be able to make their own choice.*

#### **What A levels will pupils be able to do?**

*In early March 2012 we intend to clarify which core subjects we will be offering in September 2013. The range of subjects that will be offered at A level will, however, take account of the choices of pupils where possible. We may not be able to offer every subject at both A level and IB, but where there is a strong enough demand for a subject, we will endeavour to provide it.*

#### **Will IB be the preferred option or will A level?**

*The best option for your son or daughter is the one that best suits his or her enthusiasms, aptitude or future plans. As a school we will, no doubt, sometimes recommend one course over another, according to the pupil we are trying to help, but we will not be trying to suggest that one system is, in itself, better than another. Subject teachers and pastoral staff will offer clear and constructive advice. Pupils will be helped to look at subject combinations and course content as well so that they can make an informed decision.*

#### **Will A level pupils have more free periods?**

*Although the timetable structure is not yet finalised, in the L6th we anticipate that A level pupils will have a similar number of periods to IB pupils. Inevitably this may change in the U6th if a subject is dropped after AS.*

#### **If a pupil chooses A levels, how many should he or she take?**

*The expectation will be that all A level candidates at King's will take no fewer than **four** subjects at AS, and no fewer than **three** at A2. Many A level candidates will take four all the way through, especially on the maths and science side. However, we will not be encouraging sixth formers to add*

*ever more A levels to their load: we want King's boys and girls to stay involved in the wider life of the school, as has always been the case here, and to have the time to read widely in their specialist areas.*

**Are there equivalents of Theory of Knowledge, CAS (creativity, action, service) and the Extended Essay for A level pupils?**

*All pupils will be expected to follow a full co-curricular programme, broadly equivalent to CAS. We are also investigating complementary studies including an opportunity for an extended enquiry. We will be able to report further on this later in the year.*

**Will A level candidates who intend to apply to Oxford or Cambridge have an advantage?**

*All candidates wishing to make an Oxbridge application should start their preparation during the summer of the Upper Fifth. Colleagues will provide fair and balanced advice and will not be afraid to say if they think A level, or IB, will help a pupil more with a competitive application. Our experience over recent years is that the IB has led to pupils gaining many excellent offers from the very best universities, including high numbers of pupils at Oxford and Cambridge. This year, for example, about 25% of the Upper Sixth have gained an Oxford or Cambridge offer. We also see, however, that in some areas the evidence provided by AS modules, for example, is very telling. (Of course, this can work both ways!) Regardless of their chosen exam system, pupils need to demonstrate significant knowledge in depth and show initiative in their wider reading and experience. Although A level pupils study each subject for more periods per week, IB pupils develop different ways of looking at a subject and a breadth across a wide range of areas. Every individual must take responsibility for his or her own preparation for university application, whichever curriculum route they choose.*

**Will the school regard IB or A level candidates as more suitable for positions of responsibility (such as prefects or Captains of House)?**

*Selections are based on house contributions and wider contributions to the life of the school and not on academic selection. Whichever route they follow, pupils with a poor effort or disciplinary record will be not rated highly by house staff making these choices. The exam system they have chosen will play no part whatsoever in these decisions!*

**Is there a preferred route from the school's point of view?**

*No. The school aims to provide the best option for each individual pupil, hence the inclusion of both systems.*

**Will all pupils have equal access to teacher contact time and learning spaces and resources?**

*There will be parity in the use of resources (from books and chemicals to the library and computer rooms). Teacher contact time is broadly equivalent but spread out differently according to exam sessions for both groups.*

**Will the school fully cater for both systems when planning activities and trips?**

*Yes. Often these are planned by departments with specific courses in mind so occasionally some trips may be more suitable for particular candidates rather than others. In terms of timing for trips, both cohorts will be considered as part of the planning.*

**How will the school ensure that all pupils feel part of a cohesive entity when they will have to be catered for differently in terms of study leave, exam sessions, lesson demands, and so on?**

*There will be regular sessions and activities for all members of the year group. Tutor groups and assemblies will include A level and IB pupils alike. So will many talks and special events. Pupils will have occasional course-focused meetings to give them appropriate guidance for their particular exam system, but we are confident that the character of King's boys and girls can cope with two examination systems within the same Sixth Form.*

**Will pupils be in separate forms or tutor groups?**

*There will be no change in the tutor group structure. The composition of form groups has not yet been fully determined. Further details will become available in due course.*

**Will some pupils be preferred for team selections, or for other extra-curricular areas?**

*They will be assessed on merit and availability. However, it is possible boys and girls will want to take the differing nature of the two systems into account if they plan on being leading sportsman or women. The same may be true for those who intend to play an exceptionally full role in music or drama, for example. Again, we will try to give fair and clear advice on this where pupils ask for guidance.*

**Why is 2013 the right time for this change?**

*The recent expansion of the Sixth Form at King's, to nearly 400 students, coupled with recent changes in the national examination system, make the idea of returning to a "dual economy" both sensible and affordable.*

**Should you be offering A levels for the current Upper Fifth?**

*King's takes pride in managing changes smoothly and effectively. With so little time until the beginning of the new academic year it would be impossible to timetable, prepare and to teach new A level syllabuses with the professionalism and organisation that parents would rightly expect. Some colleagues will request training, and departments need to select syllabuses with care, consulting widely with colleagues at other schools to avoid pitfalls. However, we are entirely confident that the Sixth Form experience at King's under our current arrangements will remain an exceptional one. It will be a matter of great importance to all of us at the school that the current Upper Fifth, and indeed each of the all-IB year groups, are given at least as much attention and care as their predecessors, all of whom have experienced great success with the IB. It is perhaps worth emphasising that the school and its teachers hugely enjoy offering and teaching the IB: the new announcement makes no change to this.*

**Who will be preferred for academic prizes (or academic scholarships on entry to the Sixth Form, if my son or daughter is applying from another school)?**

*There will be no difference! Prizes and scholarships are awarded for exceptional work, or outstanding potential, whatever the context.*

**MH**  
**19/01/12**