



# The path to a successful UK education experience for international pupils

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# UK EDUCATION GUIDE

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**This e-book has been developed from the collation of several published articles written for leading international education journals by our Co-Founder Pat Moores.**

We hope it helps you and your family on your educational journey.

Since the launch of UK Education Guide, we have been helping students and families successfully transition to a UK based education, this e-book has been written to give you the tools to make an informed approach to supporting your child's study in the UK all the way from high school to university.

The articles we have selected span the entire application process and start at the crucial beginning - how can you ensure that your child is placed in the right school - where they will both thrive academically and be happy all the way to successful entry to university.

## About the author

### **Pat Moores, Director and Co-Founder**

Pat has worked in International businesses at Manager and Director level for over 30 years. She has specialised in the Education market for the past 20 years. Her Education work has included working in UK schools alongside supporting various UK & US Universities in a consultancy role as well as in an international student recruitment role. Pat writes regularly for [international education publications](#) and champions the needs of international students and their families in the UK Education system.



## About UK Education Guide

### **Our Mission**

To provide international families with the very best, most relevant, independent and comparable information about UK Education providers to help them make really well informed decisions.

### **Honesty and transparency**

In our dealings with schools, universities and families.

### **Independence**

We do not work for any specific school or university and are not swayed in our preferences for any institution over any other. We try very hard to find the best institution for each young person.

### **Passionate about education**

We want every young person to have a wonderful education wherever they live.

For any further information, support or to start your child's journey to a UK education please contact us directly at [hello@ukeducationguide.com](mailto:hello@ukeducationguide.com)

## Chapter 1 – The school selection & application process

Honesty is the key component for successful boarding school placements.

When considering an overseas boarding school education, there are so many factors for parents to consider, to make a successful boarding school placement. Meanwhile, schools and agents bombard families with information that may or may not be relevant to them.

We asked guardians and schools if they were only allowed to provide just one piece of advice to parents to help them make the best decision for their children, what would it be?

"Too many parents are not honest about their child's health (physical and emotional) and academic ability and therefore have unhelpful expectations about the type of school that is best suited for their child," she says.

"This can lead to children being placed in unsuitable schools from either an academic or pastoral care perspective. We see this happening quite often and, as guardians, we try our very best to provide the added support a child may need that has been placed in an inappropriate school, but, at the end of the day, more work needs to be done prior to placement."

**Julia Evans**  
Director at [Cambridge Guardian Angels](#)

"Choosing a school is more about knowing your son/daughter than it is about knowing a school. There is rarely a bad school but there is often a bad choice of school. Ensuring that the style of education, the process of teaching and learning and the outcomes of the process are suited to your child is essential to avoid disappointment."

**Gareth Collier**  
Principal of [Cardiff 6th Form College](#)

"Often parents will have an idealised view of a 'traditional' boarding school but it is important to understand if this environment will actually suit their child?"

**Anna Matthews-Stroud**  
Recruitment Director of [Kings Colleges](#)

Interestingly, the answers received almost all followed a similar theme. All three contributors are essentially focusing on the same issue- parents need to be honest and think long and hard about the type of school environment that will really suit their child – so, a 'child first, school second' approach.'

Trying to shoehorn a child into an unsuitable environment can be disastrous for both the child, family and the school itself.

For many families who work long hours, it is sometimes hard to keep track of their growing children's needs and where they might need additional support. Therefore, it is important that parents and agents look closely at existing school reports before approaching schools that may well not be suitable for the child concerned.



Agents have a crucial role to play here and can add huge value. If they have gained the trust of the parents they can ask difficult questions about why a child appears to be struggling with a particular subject or behavioural issue, as highlighted in a school report.

By not investigating these issues, there is a huge risk a child will be placed in an inappropriate school which will ultimately mean they will, at best, underperform academically, but more importantly potentially develop troubling behavioural issues. Guardians are then left to help try to pick up the pieces

### Case Study

Julia Evans provided a recent example to highlight what happens when a 'child first, school second' approach is not taken. The child in question was placed in a highly academic 6th form college-relevant information about the child's existing worrying behaviour in particular circumstances was not flagged to the new school by the agent or existing school.

The parents too shared the same sense of denial and therefore the screening and interview process was based on fragmented and incomplete information.

Over the next twelve months the parents' unwillingness to communicate and their rejection of any suggestions of underlying medical conditions, especially psychological issues, resulted in the student's erratic behaviour becoming uncontrollable and emotionally volatile.

The school tried to cope without parental support but simply did not have the pastoral care provision necessary to deal with the young person's needs and so the pupil had to be removed from the school before completing her A-Levels.

This damaging failure in communication is all too familiar to many schools and guardians and reinforces the point that only if agents, families and schools work together honestly, can placements be made that will truly meet the needs of each young person; allowing them to reach their potential with the appropriate academic and pastoral support in place.

"So, honesty in presenting all aspects of your child is crucial to making sure they are placed in a suitable school, but how to find a suitable school?"

Of course Agents can help and UK Education Guide provides independent information about many schools and colleges that parents can access free of charge, but many parents are very focused on selecting schools with a high ranking.

### Do rankings really matter?

Many think not and in this article for The PIE we explore why so many experts believe they don't really guide parents in a helpful way.

### What value do boarding school rankings provide international families?

League tables aren't everything and can often be misleading, make sure you have your own criteria as to how you will evaluate and rank the schools in the context of your desired academic outcome for your child.

### Key Takeaways

- Be honest about your child's academic and emotional needs.
- Have a 'child first' and 'school second' approach.

As anyone who works in international student and pupil recruitment knows, Boarding school rankings are revered by many families who believe that they alone provide the ultimate 'judge' of whether a school is desirable or not.

However, should this perception be challenged more than it is?

Major rankings are devised predominantly from public exam results and, of course, high grades are important. However, these grades are often achieved due to the highly selective admissions policies of many highly ranked schools. Many international schools that have far less selective recruitment criteria for students, reflecting the fact that many of their pupils need to develop their English language skills before they can excel academically, are particularly disadvantaged by the current ranking system and many choose not to be included. As Mark Jeynes, Director of [Bishopstrow School](#) and [Padworth College](#) says, "it's often not clear when looking at the tables, which schools are selective and which are non-selective on entry and league tables would look very different if they published the percentage of a year group actually submitted for specific exams".

"Schools with small cohorts can have just one student fail and it can impact the % pass rate by 5% or so, and rankings also fail to mention whether or not the school has all of its pupils studying in English as a second language".

**Mike Oliver (Retired)**  
**Principle of [Brooke House College](#)**

Even some highly ranked schools are now questioning whether the benefits of appearing in rankings outweigh the negatives. England's highest-ranked small independent school for A level results, [Truro High School](#) for girls has recently announced it is withdrawing from exam league tables citing concerns over students' mental wellbeing. Head mistress Sarah Matthews says: "The culture of comparison so prevalent in today's society is damaging. We want our students to have their own goals and to become the best they can be, not to judge themselves against someone else". Ms

Matthews adds further context, saying that a journey for a student moving from a D to a B grade is every bit as impressive as a straight A student.

Indeed, it is easy to argue that measuring the academic 'progress' of the children during their time at the school is a far more valuable indicator for parents. "There are league tables showing Value Added rankings which show how well a school helps its students to progress," says Caroline Nixon, General Secretary BAISIS, "but even these don't show the value added to a child's skills outside the narrowly academic - valuable skills such as teamwork, leadership and of course linguistic and cultural acquisition," she adds.

Of course, the counter argument is that rankings are tangible measurements that are relatively easy for parents to access. However, schools can help make decision making more balanced by providing more information about how else their school is different from the school down the road? We are often told by parents that they find it very hard to distinguish one school from another and this is particularly the case for international parents who are trying to make decisions remotely and may never get to visit the UK before a school decision has to be made.

There is also a responsibility on Agents to point out the limitations of the ranking system to parents. Too often Agents shy away from confronting this issue and this perpetuates the problem. The market is also changing and now is a good time to challenge the status quo. More parents, notably in China, who have experienced high pressure learning environments themselves, want a different, more rounded educational experience for their own children.

A final word from Adam Williams, Headmaster of [Lord Wandsworth College](#), “speak to any coach in any discipline and they will talk of focussing on making those incremental improvements in one’s own performance, not worrying about what the opposition are doing. It’s about your journey. The world that lies ahead is one where being curious, creative, tech savvy, collaborative and emotionally intelligent are key factors. One would also add in critical/analytical thinking. I wonder, where are the league tables for those skills? Exam results don’t get a look in.”

### **The best age for a young person to enter the UK education system**

The choice of when your child should come to the UK to study is one of the hardest questions for any family to answer. UK Education Guide provides an overview of the UK education system to help families understand the most sensible access points.

Many families want to send their children as young as possible to attend a prep school here in the UK and some children arrive in the UK to study as young as 8, but for many families a later entry point is more suitable and more cost effective.

### **Other key entry points are;**

Year 8-prior to selection of GCSE subjects, Year 12-for A Levels or IB study, but there is also another option for families to consider.

The offer of a Foundation programme for pupils aged 16+ is something that more providers are now offering. Typically, the Foundation programme replaces A Levels or IB and is usually a 1 year course, leading directly to University application.



## Chapter 2 – Safety

Safety is an issue that has become more important for parents when considering where to send their child overseas to study. Covid-19 has raised this issue to new levels and in this article we explore how families are increasingly considering safety when selecting a school.

The pressure is on UK schools to make their schools as attractive as possible when it comes to projecting a safe image.

Maryland lawmakers have approved a bill that will allow Johns Hopkins University to form its own, private police force to enforce the law on campus. Meanwhile, in the UK, over the past three years, universities have paid more than £2 million to 17 police forces in exchange for support.

Spending is rapidly increasing and the University of Northampton now has six full-time police officers seconded to the University for 3 years, at a cost of £775,000.

Safety is increasingly front of mind when students are deciding about overseas study locations. In [IDP's annual survey](#) of almost 3,000 students in the five main overseas study destinations (US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) Canada leads the way in terms of 'safety' versus its international rivals, with the UK ranking 4th out of five.

Also, students from China are now reported to be as concerned by the safety of the destination country in which they intend to study as they are the relative academic position of their institution, according to the [latest report](#) from the Beijing Overseas Study Service Association.

However, University students still find the allure of the UK's big cities hard to resist and for the second year running, London has been voted the top global study city by [QS](#).

When it comes to parental decision making regarding boarding school choices though, the pressure is really on UK schools to make their schools as attractive as possible when it comes to projecting a 'safe' image to overseas families.

### School location & school safety practices

At UK Education Guide many parents are now asking us for schools near a small town, rather than near, or in, a big city. However, there is a balance to be had: as can be seen from the QS survey (above) college students still see the attractiveness of studying in London and other large international cities, so preparing young people to make the transition from a rural school to an urban university is one that needs careful consideration.

Also, there is the issue, which we have also experienced, of teenage pupils getting frustrated by the lack of freedom and opportunities to explore major cities if schools are located in remote, rural locations.



## **University students still find the allure of the UK's big cities hard to resist**

Kings Colleges has four city college locations and Anna Matthews-Stroud points out the challenges in getting the balance right between security and the opportunity to explore and enjoy UK city life.

"Security features at all schools include; all students wear an ID card, there is CCTV at boarding houses and swipe cards for entrance to both buildings and bedrooms, but we are also keen to help our students safely explore the cities where our colleges are located, as we see this as an important part of their personal development," she says.

### **E-safety**

School safety measures encompass acceptable use policies and blocking systems on schools' internet servers. But, as Caroline Nixon, General Secretary of [BAISIS](#) (British Association of Independent Schools with International students) points out, "all technology can be got around by the determined teenager so smart schools focus on teaching students how to keep themselves safe online-not disclosing certain information and being aware of how to safeguard themselves and their peers."

This approach also needs to be backed up by Guardians who take care of under 18's when they are not on school premises. These responsibilities go beyond physical safety, as Julia Evans, director of [AEGIS](#) registered Cambridge Guardian Angels points out, "of course, our E-safety training requires all host families to install appropriate parental control software on their routers but arguably more importantly host families also receive training to recognise cyberbullying."

### **Being 'streetwise'**

A final word to Paul Telford whose company, [Student Safety UK](#) helps families and institutions prepare young overseas students coming to the UK; "it's that added factor- being 'street smart', that many international students struggle to understand," he says.

"We advise on the principle that 'integration, not isolation' is key-basically, don't stand out-we also stress that the UK is still a very peaceful country, by any international comparison, but being aware of your surroundings at all times is really important to stay safe."

Parents are more aware about Safeguarding these days and many parents ask questions on how their staff are trained and checks that are made on staff to ensure their child is in a safe and caring environment. Schools now follow very strict recruitment policies and ensure that all staff have ongoing safeguarding training throughout the academic year. Reading Inspection reports which are on the school website also reassure parents.



## Chapter 3 – The role of the guardian

So often the role of the Guardian (for international pupils under 18) is misunderstood and not appreciated, but it can make an enormous difference to how safe and supported your child feels whilst studying in the UK.

How the role can and should be explained to international parents as early as possible. How to make the value of Guardianship more transparent to international parents.

“The role of a good guardian is so much more than knowing the whereabouts of a child when the school is closed”, says Pat.

“Education and guardianship should be considered simultaneously.”

**Yasemin Wigglesworth**  
**Executive Officer of AEGIS**  
**(Association for the Education and**  
**Guardianship of International Students)**

However, no one really argues that Guardianship, when performed well, is of huge value to young international students. The challenge is what a guardianship service should include and at what cost to better ‘make the case’ for international parents to appoint a guardian.

An initial challenge seems to be that the merits of Guardianship are introduced too late in the pupil recruitment process and therefore don’t get

included in the financial planning process families go through before deciding on a UK education.

One reason perhaps that Guardianship is introduced so late into the process is that some agents, without their own Guardianship services to sell, do not want to put off parents by raising the issue of additional costs that Guardianship involve. Also, sometimes parents are unaware until very late in the recruitment process of additional times when schools close, like exeat weekends, and are therefore not immediately aware of the need to have some guardianship services to take of their child during these times, if nothing else.

However, the role of a good guardian is so much more than knowing the whereabouts of a child when the school is closed. As Caroline Nixon, General Secretary, British Association of Independent Schools with International Students points out: “It is so important that there is someone there for the child who is independent of the school.

“Additionally, it is hard to see how a school can comply with visa requirements to be aware of the student’s whereabouts in the UK at all times unless there is a good guardian and it is astonishing that guardians are not presently required to conform to any regulations.”

The lack of regulation of Guardianships and therefore the variation in their quality is a point picked up by Mike Oliver, retired principal of Brooke House College: “One of our problems is that agents who offer international students to UK schools are more often than not running guardianship arms to their agencies as well. These are not that good and hugely expensive in my opinion. As a consequence, many international parents are ‘turned off’ by the prospect of having a guardian.”

So how can accredited, highly respected Guardianship companies present their services in a more compelling way?

AEGIS accreditation is one way to establish 'quality credentials' in the market. AEGIS is a registered charity and offers an accrediting and inspection service for Guardians and therefore there is peace of mind that AEGIS 'approved' Guardianships will offer high-quality care. As Gareth Collier, principal, Cardiff Sixth Form College says, "there is a real place for 'proactive guardianship'. Relationship building with families is the key to excellent service and to combatting the feeling that it is an unnecessary expense."

Julia Evans, director of Cambridge based guardianship agency CGA summarised this as "Proactive guardianship can enhance the pastoral and complement the academic experience of International students coming to schools in the UK, while AEGIS accreditation gives parents and schools confidence that the care will be of the highest quality and value."

Also, quality Guardianships can perhaps help themselves more by offering a transparent inclusive fee structure to parents. Understandably, Guardianships sometimes feel uncomfortable publishing their fees, as it is clearly very hard to calculate exactly what each child will require, depending on the specific health, behavioural, academic and travel challenges they might face during their time in the UK.

"However, it is difficult to imagine that this lack of transparency is helping good Guardianships dispel the myth that their services are too expensive if they are unwilling to provide upfront costs"

Schools also need to step up to support quality Guardianships. Often they do not insist that a child has a formal Guardianship arrangement in place at the time of recruitment. Sometimes schools just require a box to be ticked on an application form to say there is a guardian in place and to provide a name and address of the 'responsible' adult. However, too often this information isn't verified or checked adequately until a problem occurs.

Therefore the challenge is significant but has to start with schools and quality agents promoting accredited Guardianship services at the start of their relationships with every family. Also, best practice must be supported by Guardianship regulations and legislative clarification that a formal guardianship is set up for each international student before they arrive in the UK.



## Chapter 4 – Selecting the right qualifications for your child

“Sometimes it can seem that things in education can be made deliberately complicated and one example can be the public examination system in the UK. UK Education Guide runs free webinars to help explain the examination system to international families , but these next 2 articles we review the future of the IGCSE & GCSE and look at the differences between the IB (International Baccalaureate) and A Levels. The subject of A Levels v IB is one we often come back to-as the global economy changes, it is important to keep revisiting this subject...our latest thoughts here.” Pat

### What could and should replace the IGCSE and GCSE?

Many employers argue that students frequently do not have the soft skills needed to prepare them for the workplace.

As Mike Oliver, retired principal of Brooke House College states, “it simply cannot be sensible to maintain a qualification that clearly does not suit a great many of our young people who leave school without GCSE English or Mathematics and then spend time at a FE college or such like, trying to re-take these failed examinations before being able to access the jobs market in any meaningful way”.

Also, as director of BAISIS (British Association of Independent Schools with International Students) Caroline Nixon points out, there needs to be a continued focus on “developing knowledge of a range of subjects and basic levels of literacy and numeracy”.

However, there is also an argument that for too many pupils, including some international students, an alternative qualification that better measures broader skills, rather than a narrow range of mostly academic subjects would be a better preparation for a post-Covid world.

It is highly debatable how GCSEs develop young people’s ‘soft skills’. These soft skills are likely to form the bedrock of future employability as so many “hard skills” will be automated in the coming decade. The focus on an end of two year study period exam in each subject is probably not the greatest preparation to explore and develop the core soft skills such as:

- Collaboration
- Communication
- Language skills
- Cognitive or emotional empathy
- Time management
- Teamwork and leadership traits

From an international perspective there is much in favour of retaining the GCSE. For pupils coming from a different education system in Year Eight or Nine, GCSE exams are a great way to prep for A Level or IB study.



So what are some possible alternatives?

There are qualification boards such as [ASDAN](#) that offer qualifications that help measure and develop soft skills. Through their Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, for example, young people can gain accreditations for work experience and charitable activities.

Also, some schools are trying to reimagine existing qualifications and introduce new qualifications to meet the skill gaps.

For example, whilst only currently offered in 6th form, [Stoke College's](#) Diploma in Global Competencies offers a unique qualification that builds the crucial soft skills so many employers feel are not a priority within the current examination system:

Nearly two thirds of secondary school teachers (68%) and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (64%) believe that students don't currently have the soft skills needed to prepare them for the workplace.

Independent thinking and research skills in the pursuit of a personal passion, an understanding of global socio-economic issues as well as personal finance, the acquisition of basic language skills to communicate with people from many parts of the world, are some of the diploma's key features.

Sports coaching qualifications, speech, music and drama qualifications allow students to draw upon and apply their individual strengths and passions, to achieve the diploma.

All one can hope is that the DfE consults widely. This is a once in a generation opportunity to create a new qualification that better meets the needs of more young people and the automated world they will be entering where 'human' soft skills will be at a premium.

### **A-Levels V IB in a Covid-19 world**

The comparative benefits of A-levels and the International Baccalaureate (IB). It's an age old debate, but at UK Education Guide we have noticed increased interest in the IB diploma very recently.

First a brief recap on the differences between the two qualifications:

#### **The IB Diploma**

A two-year, six-subjects course with an inner core specifically designed to develop leadership, critical thinking and research skills. During the IB Diploma, three subjects are taught at higher level and three subjects are taught at standard level.

#### **A-Levels**

Focus usually on three core subjects that are all studied to the same high level of proficiency. This allows pupils to specialise taking all three sciences if they wish or focus on a mix of humanities and arts courses.

So what has changed, why might the IB be growing in popularity? Perhaps the uncertainty of a post Covid-19 world is encouraging more young people to keep their options very much open whilst the world settles into a 'new normal'? There is so much economic uncertainty that pupils may feel it is better to select a broader range of subjects for longer?

"Which one is best? Frankly, it depends! If you are a motivated learner with a high level of self-discipline and genuine strengths and interests in a small range of closely-related subjects, then A-levels make a lot of sense. You can concentrate on your best subjects and can develop an impressive depth of knowledge in them. However, if you don't have a tight area of focus, or are good at a range of subjects, or even just don't know what you want to do at age 16, then the IB keeps more doors open for longer."

**Alasdair Summers**  
Vice Principal at St Clare's, Oxford

Also, the IB allows pupils to start a new language from scratch. As potentially more families delay entry into the UK education system due to economic and financial uncertainty alongside safety concerns, it is possible more pupils will come into the UK education system without having had the prior opportunity to study a second language and the IB gives this option. As Chris Townsend, Headmaster of [Felsted School](#) points out: "Taking a second language (in addition to English or a native language) can be at 'ab initio' (beginner) level – the IB's global philosophy puts a value on the learning of language, which can only be a good thing."

Some IB schools also argue that the variety in the curriculum, the extended essay and CAS (Creativity, Activity, Service) aspect help to build really strong independent study skills and a global outlook. In a tightening economy due to the pandemic this could

also become more important. [Westbourne School](#) highlights a survey of university admissions officers conducted by THE in 2017 that reported 97 per cent rated the IB as developing a 'global outlook' either "well or very well", whilst only seven per cent said the same about A-levels.

The IB was also top for "encouraging independent inquiry" with 94 per cent of the admissions officers saying that it did this "well or very well", while only 49 per cent of officers gave the A-levels a similar rating.

However, in the same survey, A-levels were considered to offer better "in-depth subject expertise" with 94 per cent stating that they developed this "well or very well", compared to 56 per cent for the IB. Additionally, as Chris Townsend points out, "completing the Extended Project Qualification alongside A-Levels allows pupils to develop self-motivation & autonomy".

Gareth Collier, Principal of Cardiff Sixth Form College also argues that, "There is a place for both A-Levels and the IB in preparing students for university and the world of work. Different approaches will suit different students. The success of each system in the aftermath of Covid-19, and any continuing restrictions in place, will be determined by the ability of skilled teachers to adapt their delivery to take advantage of new technology and the exciting developments in this field, relevant to education."

Even before Covid-19, Burning Glass data highlighted that one third of skills listed in job postings are soft skills and even in highly technical roles such as IT a quarter of all skills required are soft skills, such as resourcefulness, resilience & critical reasoning (Source: Burning Glass technologies-the Human Factor). As Caroline Nixon, Director of BAISIS and International Director of Boarding Schools' Association says; "Changes to the world post-Covid are likely to highlight what has almost become a cliché in education – namely that most jobs in tomorrow's world have not yet been invented. Therefore, the role of education has become even more focused on developing thinking skills as well as to accrue knowledge."

So, the question which qualification is best, may never be answered? However, the move online has certainly meant that both A-Level and IB studies have required greater autonomy and self-guided learning, developing the vital soft skills that may well prove essential to all students who wish to succeed in the post Covid 19 jobs market.

## Chapter 5 – Special Educational Needs (SEN)

UK Education Guide is strongly committed to trying to meet the needs of all international students looking to study at a UK Boarding school.

To this end we highlight schools that offer SEN provision on the site and all schools with a strong SEN offering can be identified because they have a 'star' icon on their profiles and their SEN provision is highlighted on their profile page.

There are several schools we feature that are particularly focused on offering support for young people with dyslexia and dyspraxia -they typically have [CReSTeD](#) accreditation. We also additionally feature schools that offer support for pupils with an ASD diagnosis.

We are always delighted when we find the right school for a SEN pupil!

### **How can we help to find a good school match for a child with SEN?**

Firstly, we will ask to see an EdPsych report and a child's most recent academic report, this will help us begin to understand a child's academic and pastoral support needs.

We can then start to identify what appear to be appropriate schools. Schools will also ask to interview each child to see if they are a good 'fit' for their school and some schools will even ask for a 'trial' visit of up to a week so they can make their own assessments to ensure the school can fully meet a child's need.

However, the key aspect of this process that is often neglected is honest feedback from parents from day one.

A successful placement can only really be made if parents are honest about their child's needs.

Reports and interviews are important parts of the process, but honesty from parents can make the difference between a placement that really allows a child to thrive and develop and a placement that is not suitable and therefore a negative and distressing experience for the child concerned.



## Chapter 6 – The Foundation Offer

The numbers of students entering Foundation programmes in the UK tripled between 2012/13 and 2017/18, from [10,430 to 30,030](#). Foundation Programs offer a great ‘bridge’ between high school and University for many pupils.

However, as the range of the providers has grown and the number of course options increased, clarifying where these courses ‘sit’ within the UK Education system would certainly help prospective students and their families.

Explaining that entry to Foundation programmes can start in Year 12 (Age 16+) in the UK is helpful as many families assume that their children need to complete high school in their home countries before a Foundation programme can begin.

This then leads onto explaining the cost saving benefits of Foundation programmes. Brooke House College now has as many pupils studying their 1 year UFP (University Foundation Programme) as it does its 2 year A Level programme. As Principal Mike Oliver points out, for families considering paying international University fees for 3 or 4 years, post-18, a Foundation programme can make excellent financial sense as it potentially saves 1 year’s school fees.

“As an alternative to the traditional two year A Level or IB course, Foundation courses will suit some students well. Boarding schools are increasingly offering this option and their tradition of excellent pastoral care of young people is likely to be seen as an advantage.”

**Caroline Nixon**  
**Director of BAISIS**  
**(British Association of Independent schools with International Students)**

But how to help families differentiate between different ‘types’ of Foundation programmes?

Looking at Foundation course selection from the point of view of the student (customer) is vital to answering this question.

There is a relatively clear distinction between programmes that offer a ‘bundle’ of Foundation & degree programme versus those Foundation programmes that are ‘stand-alone’, allowing the student to decide on the University at which they wish to study for their degree either during or after they have completed their Foundation course.

There are clearly advantages and disadvantages to both options-but this is an important differentiator for ‘customers’ trying to understand the market.

For example, some students who are new to the UK might not wish to commit ‘up front’ to potentially 4 or 5 years in the same UK city, whilst others might value this continuity.

Also, changing subject ‘pathway’ can be harder under the ‘bundle’ approach, so this approach may better suit a student who is very clear on the subject of study at degree level.



Some 'stand-alone' Foundation courses offer massive flexibility in terms of study options, which will definitely suit students that are more undecided what degree they want to study and where? For example; "at St Clare's we have restructured the academic offerings so that students do not need to choose a particular combination or 'stream', and so can make up a programme of study – with our advice – which best prepares them for their preferred university outcome," says, Paul Sinclair-Director of Studies, Academic Programmes at St Clare's, Oxford.

This flexibility also allows students to not only 'cast the net wide' in terms of UK University options, but also allows them to look at University options beyond the UK.

In relation to the value of 'location', [Ellesmere College](#) is looking to meet the needs of students who may be reticent to travel in a Covid-19 world by considering offering their foundation course as an ongoing online option from Sept 21, with a short College residential period included in the delivery.

One thing is clear, in such a complex market, the onus is on Agents to make sure they clearly understand what type of programme will suit a student before approaching any Foundation provider. Foundation providers, like Kings Education will provide a bespoke prospectus for each potential student, if the brief they receive from the Agent is clear.

The Agent's initial assessment of the student's needs should consider all important variables; academic and English competency, personal confidence, certainty about location and degree subject level. If the needs of each young person and family is fully assessed at the start of the process, many foundation options can be taken off the table, thus making a real difference to presenting only relevant options from day one.

[Click here to read more.](#)



## Chapter 6 – Higher Education: University

“For many parents the ultimate point of sending their children overseas to school is to end up at a top University. In this chapter we look at how schools support their international students to select not only the right course, but the right University for them. How can parents get involved? We explore this issue alongside how vital it is that everyone plays their role to ensure international pupils are not disadvantaged by their parents being thousands of miles away”. Pat

### Which University is best?

Supporting international Boarding school students to make decisions that are right for each individual is clearly a huge challenge for UK Boarding schools to help every international student in the way that UK students take for granted. UK students have parents on hand to drive them to open days and help them review university opportunities. It is also easier for schools to communicate directly and regularly with UK-based parents and therefore manage parental expectations.

Managing parental expectations remotely can be a big challenge for schools. International parents have invested heavily in their child’s education already and understandably want their child to attend what they perceive as a ‘top’ university. Also, schools, recognising parental focus on ‘rankings’, often want to place as many children as possible at Russell Group universities.

David Hawkins runs an independent university advisory service, Hawkins Global Education. He addresses the same issue: “Schools should challenge and educate parents about the full range of university options that are open to their students. There is enough misinformation about universities in the media for schools not to be making things worse, and schools should have the confidence to challenge this head on.”

Gareth Collier, Principal of Cardiff Sixth Form College, also endorses the view that selecting the ‘right’ university is about more than just rankings: “Whilst subjects, rankings and locational factors are all important, matching student expectations to university provision is vital to avoid disappointment.”

So how are boarding schools and colleges practically making sure their international students consider a wide range of universities, not just the ones known to parents at the top of the rankings?

Schools try hard to make sure parents have access to as much information about university choices as possible. At Felsted School, university presentations at the school are filmed and added to the school’s website for parents to view.

“Whilst a focus on university rankings might be something that occupies our mind for PR reasons, in a non-selective institution such as Box Hill School, our focus is on matching the student with the most appropriate course and institution for the individual. That can be difficult if the student and their family have unrealistic expectations and their sole focus is on entering a high-ranking university. In such a situation, it is our role to manage that expectation, hence the crucial role of the guidance that is given.”

**Julian Baker**  
**Head of IB at [Box Hill School](#)**

"Increasingly, students look nowadays not only to the UK but to the US and other countries for their university education. As European countries increase their provision of Anglophone courses this demand is set to continue. Keeping track of all these developments is time consuming and needs dedicated internal resources.

If schools do not have adequate advisory and career counselling resources in place, they should work alongside independent advisers to make sure students get the best advice possible."

**Caroline Nixon**  
**Director of BAISIS**  
**(British Association of Independent schools with International Students)**

University fairs held at schools are also an excellent way of covering a lot of ground on one day. Kings Education Group and Brooke House College see the value of such events and through these events strong relationships can be built with specific institutions. These relationships can additionally benefit students in other ways, as they study for their A-levels and additional qualifications that will enhance their university applications. "Southampton, for example, has a great outreach programme and the university has really helped with library facilities for pupils studying the EPQ [extended project qualification]," says Mike Oliver, retired Principal at Brooke House.

Some schools have the added advantage of already operating in both the UK and the US. Kings Education Group already works with every university on both sides of the Atlantic and recognises the importance of regular contact with universities to keep right up to date with their programmes.

A key factor is making sure the process for university selection is started as early as possible to not miss any opportunities. The timescales for international and UK university applications are not the same and so university options need to be considered right at the start of Year 12, ideally, and not left until later in the year, as some avenues may well be cut off by then.

Agents and guardians can also fulfil a vital role in offering continuity to families during the university selection process. An agent who has already worked with a family to place a child at a boarding school and maintained contact with the family is in a unique position to help ensure that the knowledge gained about the student is directly applied in helping identify the best university options. An active agent or guardian can help support both parents and school in this important decision-making process and those with knowledge of multiple, international higher education markets are in the best position to provide this support.

Communication is at the heart of this issue - all parties need to pool their knowledge to work together to find the best outcomes for each international student. Each player brings a different perspective, but most important of all is that the student is at the centre of all these conversations to get the best possible outcome for each individual.



## Chapter 7 – A guide to writing a personal statement

### What is a personal statement?

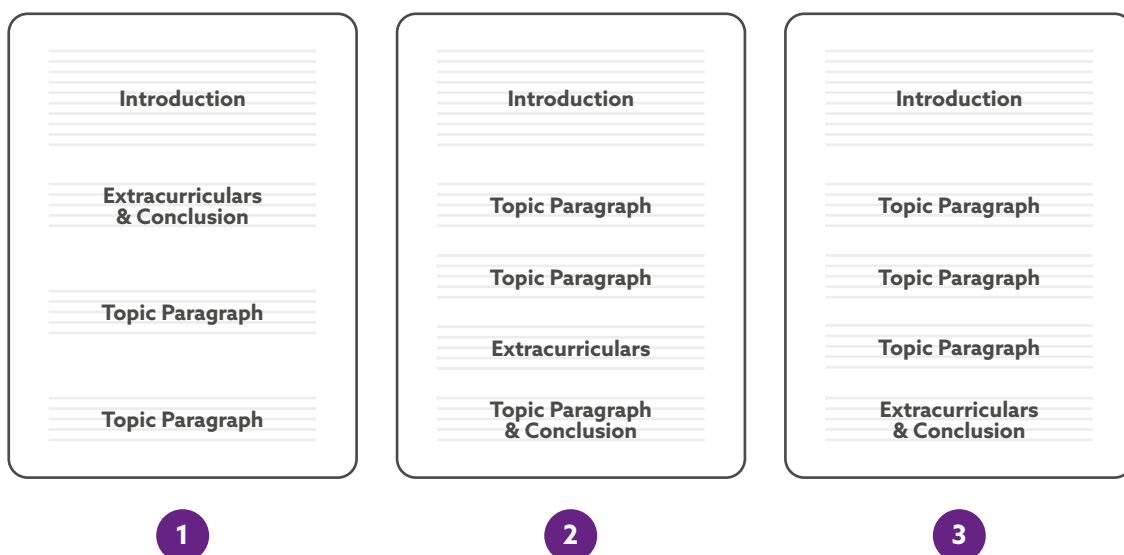
The personal statement is your opportunity to convince university admissions officers why they should accept you to study at their university. You only have 4,000 characters (around 500 - 600 words) or 47 lines to demonstrate your passion for your subject, show that you've done your research, and prove you actually have the skills to succeed at university.

### Why is it important?

Most predicted grades are incorrect, and most universities don't place too much importance on your GCSEs. So your personal statement is your chance to set yourself apart from the other thousands of applicants applying for your course at your university. Apart from the rare instances (Oxbridge, Medicine, etc) where you'll have an interview, it's your one shot to make yourself stand out amongst your peers.

### How should you structure your personal statement?

We spoke with over 20 university admissions officers and they overwhelmingly agreed that one particular structure is most effective. Have a guess which it is of the 3 below:



The best is number 3, followed by number 2 and then number 1. You should start with an introduction that explains why you want to study your chosen subject at university. What's your motivation? Why are you so interested? They're most powerful when you avoid clichés like "I've always wanted to be a doctor" and instead give a personal story that sparked your interest in your subject.



Your next 3 paragraphs are your topic paragraphs, where you go into detail about things you've read, watched, listened to, experienced about your subject and then you critically reflect on those experiences. The final paragraph should be your extracurriculars combined with your conclusion. Believe it or not, Oxford, UCL and many other universities highlight that at least 80% of your personal statement should be on your academic abilities and interests, and less than 20% on extracurriculars.

### What makes a bad paragraph?

Here's an example of a bad topic paragraph from a physics applicant:

*I enjoyed reading The Theory of Everything by Stephen Hawking, and watching lectures from the Royal Academy of Physics. I also listen to Oxford University's Physics podcast and attended a talk by Lawrence Krauss and entered the Physics Olympiad. Passionate about physics, I found myself compelled to read every edition for the last 3 years from The New Scientist, as well as The World According to Physics by Jim Al-Khalili, Seven Brief Lessons on Physics and Reality is not what it Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity by Carlo Rovelli. Reading these books gave me an insight into how complex and multi-faceted physics really is - from quantum physics to general relativity to string theory. All of these resources compounded my passion for physics and challenged me to think differently about the nature of the physical world.*

### What makes it so bad?

The student has listed a series of books and lectures but has failed to critically engage with and reflect on his experience of them. He goes into no detail describing how the books challenged his opinions, or whether he agrees or disagrees with their arguments. This student is likely being dishonest about all of the books he claims to have read.

### What makes a good paragraph?

Let's look at a better example, this time in economics:

*Reading Poor Economics by Banerjee and Duflo, I learnt about the causes of the Indian poverty I have seen so often visiting my family back home. I realised that because low-income citizens in India are unable to save, they cannot invest in businesses to escape poverty. This led me to investigate microfinance as a potential solution to India's poverty. Watching Viola Llewellyn's TED talk on microfinance in Africa, I was impressed by her company's use of AI and risk models to find the best companies to invest in. For example, Llewellyn's approach included social and cultural factors not used in the Western world. I believe her strategy could be used in India, too.*

### What makes it better?

The student has chosen a specific topic within economics (poverty), has mentioned a book and most importantly has reflected on what they learnt about reading the book. They then use that as an opportunity to show that it led them to watch a TED talk, which he then reflects on again.

It's clear that this student is far more passionate about and engaged with economics than the physics student is about physics. The more you reflect on your experiences/books/lectures and write about what you learnt and how it challenged your opinions, the more compelling your personal statement will be.

### Personal Statement top tips

- Make sure your introductory paragraphs talks about something specific (like a personal experience or a news article related to your subject), not a generic ramble about your subject interest.
- Pick out three topics for the middle of your statement, one paragraph on each topic
- Avoid discussing things you've learnt at A-Level - show how you've gone beyond the syllabus.
- You have to critically reflect on the books/articles/podcasts you've explored and explain what you've learnt from them and how they've developed your understanding and interest in your subject.
- Keep your extracurriculars relatively short, and link your extracurriculars to a skill you need to flourish at university (e.g organisation, time management etc)
- Be specific throughout your whole personal statement. It's better to discuss one or two books in detail than name-drop ten books.

To take a free personal statement course and have your statement reviewed by subject specialist statement reviewers, check out [unirise.co.uk](https://unirise.co.uk).



## Chapter 8 – International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

### What is IELTS?

IELTS is an English language proficiency test for higher education and global migration. It is recognised by over 10,000 educational institutions, employers, governments and professional bodies around the world.

### Does everybody take the same test?

There are two different IELTS tests. You can choose either the UKVI IELTS Academic Test, which is designed to check if your English is suitable for studying at University level, or IELTS General Training, which measures English proficiency in everyday social and workplace contexts.

If you're planning to study abroad, you will probably need to prepare for the Academic Test.

### I've never taken the UKVI IELTS test. What do I have to do?

The test is divided into 4 parts - Listening, Writing, Reading and Speaking.

You'll sit the test at your nearest official Test Centre, where you may be able to choose between a Paper-Based Test and a Computer-Delivered Test. In most test centres, all parts of the test take place on the same day.

In some ways the test is quite short: you get an hour for the Writing and Reading papers, and the Listening test takes about 40 minutes. The Speaking test is a 15-minute discussion with an examiner.

Each test centre is different but normally you can book the test up to a week in advance and they are often held every 2 weeks.

### How can I prepare for the test?

The IELTS test is simply assessing your general English, and there is a lot that you can do to prepare in terms of both language development and test day strategy.

You'll also need to become very familiar with the test and the type of tasks you will have to complete. This too, will build your confidence so that there are no nasty surprises on the day.

### How long will it take me to pass the test?

Unlike other Language Assessment Tests, IELTS does not have a pass/fail score. It simply measures your proficiency and gives you a band score ranging from 0 to 9 for each section, plus an overall score.

#### Improving your language skills involves:

- Building your vocabulary
- Using more complex grammar
- Getting feedback and correction
- Listening to a wide variety of media
- Reading academic-style articles and
- Practising your speaking and pronunciation

If you're applying to study at University, they might ask you to get a 6.5 Band Score, depending on the subject and level you're going to study.

How long it takes to get to your desired Band Score depends on a number of factors, including your starting point, the amount of time you have available to study, and the quality of your preparation materials and tuition.

### **Is it a difficult test?**

IELTS is well-known for being a rigorous but fair test. The Reading and Listening papers are designed to challenge your understanding and ability to cope with a variety of text-types that you may not be familiar with, and this is why guided practice with real practice tests and an experienced trainer is so essential.

The Academic Writing Test asks you to write in a way that you may not be used to, describing data and writing a discursive essay in a short time limit. Again, with the right training and models, you will be able to adapt your skills to suit the requirements of the test.

The Speaking Test starts with everyday, familiar questions about topics such as your studies and hobbies and then gets increasingly difficult when you will be expected to show your opinion about a topical issue. This is why it is so important to spend as much time as you can reading news articles and listening to appropriate podcasts or even YouTube videos so that you get more awareness of global issues and you increase your comprehension and vocabulary skills at the same time.





## Conclusion

We really hope this guide will help you make the very best decisions for your child, decisions that will allow them to truly thrive and have a wonderful UK Education experience.

If there is just 1 piece of advice that you remember from the Guide, it is to 'always be honest about your child and to put their needs first'...if all decisions bear this firmly in mind, then the chances of success are raised enormously.

We are here to provide personal support and advice if you need us, and we promise to always put your family's needs first and offer objective and independent guidance at all times.



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