University of BRISTOL

How the Diploma can prepare students for University

Angela Milln
Director of Student Recruitment, Access & Admissions

How the Diploma can prepare students for University

- What do universities say they want?
- What do universities really want?
- How does the Diploma measure up?
- Implications for admissions policies

What do universities say they want?

- General academic ability/potential
  - Often expressed as a combination of GCSE and ‘A’ Level grades
  - Some rule out ‘soft’ options (e.g. critical thinking) in favour of more academic subjects (e.g. English, Maths)

- Subject knowledge specific to chosen degree
  - Often expressed as a requirement for a specific ‘A’ Level subject

- A good personal statement and reference, providing:
  - Evidence of motivation/commitment
  - Evidence of broader skills relevant to the chosen degree programme (E.g. teamwork, verbal communication)

What do universities say they want?

- Emphasis is on the evidence required NOT on the skills/knowledge to be demonstrated
- Academic performance generally carries more weight than generic skills
- The importance of both general and specific academic requirements varies from programme to programme and from university to university
- The nature of subject specific requirements varies from programme to programme

How does the Diploma measure up?

- General Academic ability/potential
  - The Advanced Diploma attracts 490 UCAS tariff points (equivalent to 3.5 'A' Levels)
  - All UK universities have agreed to accept the Advanced Diploma for admission
- Subject-specific knowledge
  - In some cases, more direct relationship in terms of subject content
  - In others, universities will look to the Additional Specialist Learning component to provide specific subject knowledge (often asking for a named A Level as the ASL)
  - In a minority of cases, subject pre-requisites cannot easily be accommodated within the Diploma
- Generic Skills
  - Continuing emphasis on the personal statement and reference as the main source of evidence of more general skills

What do universities really want?

- Students who:
  - Have a strong grasp of any specific subject pre-requisites
  - Are interested in and committed to their subject
  - Are self-motivated and intellectually curious
  - Are able to learn independently
  - Are able to make linkages between different aspects of their studies
  - Can demonstrate specific skills relevant to their chosen degree programme e.g. teamwork, communication
  - Have the potential to succeed on their chosen degree

Now...How does the Diploma measure up?

- Relevant subject knowledge from Principal learning and/ or Additional Specialist Learning
- Interest in subject encouraged by placing academic knowledge in a practical context
- Extended project encourages independent learning and provides experience of working across subject boundaries.
- Themed approach also supports interdisciplinarity
- Generic learning provides a grounding in personal, learning and thinking skills – including team working, creative thinking, independent enquiry, self-management, effective participation and reflective learning

Implications for admissions policies

- On a basic level, acceptance secured
- BUT – a shift in approach needed to enable universities to make more creative use of what the Advanced Diploma has to offer
- (Positive) experience critical to achieving this shift

Implications for admissions policies

- University programmes were not specifically designed to build on Advanced Diplomas
  - Can mean an uneasy fit in terms of subject pre-requisites
- Solutions are achievable
  - e.g. the Engineering module
- BUT –
  - Can be slow to develop due to programme approval lead times
  - Need to be proportionate to the problem - is it reasonable to expect major changes to a History degree programme to ensure that it can accommodate applicants from a Manufacturing and Product Design Diploma?

Implications for admissions policies

- Bad experiences with previous initiatives have taught admissions tutors to be cautious - the traditional approach is ‘comfortable’
- Current response based on assessment of Diploma specifications –no practical experience yet
- Experience could facilitate more creative engagement…
- …or could have a negative impact
- Experience will be acquired at varying speeds, depending on geographical spread of Diploma delivery and on relevance of degree portfolio to Diploma applicants
- Positive engagement with DDPs may help to accelerate this process

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