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A review of curriculum in the UK: internationalising in a changing context

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Abstract

This article focuses on the growing emphasis on international dimensions of the curriculum in the UK. Educators and policy-makers increasingly grapple with the thorny issue of how best to prepare future generations for life in a world changing so rapidly that no-one is able to predict precisely what knowledge and skills will be relevant for the adult of tomorrow.

Overlapping with debate relating to the national context is that pertaining to the global environment, which manifests itself in current educational discourse relating to a growing number of concepts such as global citizenship education, international education, development education, world studies, and education for international understanding.

Beginning with consideration of the curriculum context, this article highlights the growing number of international curriculum programmes being developed and offered worldwide, and in the UK in particular, before considering some of the reasons behind this growth and the implications of increased interest in programmes with an international focus.

Keywords: International Baccalaureate, International Primary Curriculum, IGCSE, international curriculum, international education

The curriculum context

Curriculum has traditionally been organised on a local or national basis, as a selection from the culture of society (Lawton 1989), with curriculum planning essentially arising from cultural analysis. Values applied to the culture of a particular society at a specific point in time lead to a list of cultural priorities for the curriculum, which is then organised in stages or sequences according to what is also known about learning and teaching theories. Lawton's argument, consistent with Bernstein's earlier stated view that 'how a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge that it considers to be public reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control' (1971, 47), makes clear that central to the notion of curriculum is the selection, classification and evaluation of particular forms of knowledge (Ross 2000).

Determination of 'cultural priorities' in a local or national context might at one stage have been relatively straightforward, when the likely lifestyle of the next generation could be predicted by extrapolating from the experiences of their parents. In some societies this may still be the case. In the developed world it clearly is not, as the skills and knowledge required by the next generation become increasingly difficult to predict with any confidence for, arguably, three main reasons. On the one hand, developments in technology have shown how little our past knowledge has enabled us to predict what might need to be known in the future. At the same time, life within essentially national contexts has become increasingly influenced by the effects of globalisation. Even for those with no intention of travelling beyond their national borders, the international context cannot be ignored as the internet and international media highlight the impact on our national lifestyles of events beyond our national boundaries. Equally relevant has been the effects of the increasingly multicultural nature of society on the links between notions of nationality and culture, which have become more and more stretched. '[S]ociety is no longer – if it ever was – possessed of an unmistakeable and

clear culture’, says Ross; ‘we are now increasingly aware of a range of multiple culture identities from which individuals make their own selection’ (2000, 10). The plurality of our society, Ross goes on to say, means that students’ diverse cultural backgrounds include differences in ethnic origins, faiths, attitudes and beliefs, so that ‘To make a selection for transmission through the school curriculum will necessarily be contentious’ (2000, 10).

It is only relatively recently that the curriculum in constituent countries of the UK has begun to respond to the increasingly multicultural and globalised nature of the UK context. Such curriculum changes as have been introduced in response to the changing nature of that context, and its wider environment, have arguably been at the level of ‘tinkering’ rather than of a fundamental review of how best the curriculum, and the wider aspects of schooling, can prepare the next generations for life in a very different world. Given, as Ross points out, the contentious nature of the exercise, that is perhaps not surprising. How the curriculum should respond to changes in society arising from increasing internationalisation, both within the national context and outside it, is one of the most pressing challenges to curriculum developers of the early 21st century.

Internationalisation in a national education system

In the absence of fundamental reform, the educational response of the UK and its constituent countries to growing internationalisation has taken a number of forms: some endorsed and advocated by central government, and others initiated by individual schools, groups of schools or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Oxfam. Reflecting on the potential for confusion in terminology used in the context of different initiatives, Marshall (2007, 38-39) uses the term ‘global education’ as an umbrella to encompass concepts

including, *inter alia*, international education and global citizenship education, and highlights the rejuvenating impact on some of them of the endorsement of government and associated governmental and media attention. Initiatives such as the International School Award (ISA 2012) are achieving an ever-higher profile as both state-funded and independent schools aspire to such an accolade as recognition of their efforts to include an international dimension in the student experience. Meanwhile the Department for Education and its predecessors (DfES, DCSF) provide resources that encourage the incorporation of an international dimension into the curriculum – be that within the constraints of the national curriculum, for state-funded schools, or in a more flexible context for the independent sector. As Marshall points out: ‘this is an exciting time for [UK] teachers, activists and educationalists advocating the inclusion of an identifiable global dimension in all aspects of school life’ (2007, 38).

The rationale for developing a global, or international, dimension arises from a number of perceived needs, which could broadly be described as either ideological or pragmatic (Hayden and Thompson 1995), and are manifested in what may be thought of as several forms of global citizenship (Urry 1998) linked to different forms of global citizenship education (Marshall 2009). Nussbaum’s focus on education incorporating a critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions, the ability to see oneself as bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern, and the ability to consider what it might be like to be in the shoes of a different person (Nussbaum 1997) falls within the ideological categorisation. So too does of the approach taken by Oxfam – whose resources are widely used in UK schools – in encouraging students ‘to develop the knowledge, skills and values needed for securing a just and sustainable world in which all may fulfil their potential’ and to ‘challenge injustice and inequalities’ (Oxfam 2006). More pragmatic in orientation are those with what might be described as a technical instrumentalist agenda (Marshall 2011, 184),

where the curriculum is seen as a means of ‘preparing for the global more competitive knowledge-based economy of the future’ (Young 2008, 20). Indeed Marshall (2011, 184-185) argues that it is the economic agenda that dominates UK global citizenship education policy, as exemplified by the DfES document ‘Putting the World into World Class Education’ in its main goal of equipping young people ‘for life in a global society and work in a global economy’ (DfES 2004a). For whatever motives, and perhaps for a mixture of motives, it is clear that global education, or international education (the term used, for instance, to describe the annual November International Education week: DfE 2012a), has been increasingly promoted in schools through, for instance, the Global Gateway initiative (now Schools Online, 2012), as highlighted through the work of, *inter alia*, Osler and Starkey (2005), Heater (2002) and Davies (2006).

It is thus clear that UK schooling, whether in the state-funded or independent sectors, is seeking to incorporate international elements into the curriculum to a greater degree than ever before. At the same time, another form of international influence on schooling in the UK has gradually emerged in increasing numbers of state-funded and independent schools, at both compulsory and post-compulsory stages of education, in the form of curriculum programmes specifically designed to be international in focus.

The development of international curriculum programmes

The concept of a formal curriculum with a specifically international focus arguably first appeared in the late 1960s with the development of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, aimed at 16-19 year olds. First examined in 1970, the IB Diploma Programme had its roots in the establishment of international schools worldwide to respond

to the needs of globally-mobile families following parental employment, at a time when home country boarding education was declining in popularity. Such schools tended to provide English-medium education for these expatriate children of many different nationalities, and faced challenges in preparing students within the same class for university entrance examinations of their different home countries. The IB Diploma arose from teachers spearheading the development of an internationally-recognised curriculum leading to a qualification designed to be acceptable to universities worldwide (Peterson 1987, United World Colleges 2012). It is perhaps not surprising that the working group set up to discuss the development of an international curriculum and qualification with international university recognition identified History as its first subject focus. The IB has since grown to the point where in July 2012 the IB Diploma is offered by some 2,380 schools and colleges in 141 countries (IB 2012), and the Diploma has been joined by the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP: ages 11-16) and IB Primary Years Programme (PYP: ages 4-11), as documented by, *inter alia*, Fox (1998), Hill (2003 and 2007) and the IB itself (IB 2012).

The IB is not, however, the only organisation to offer programmes with an explicitly international focus. The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), first examined in 1988 by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, was designed for an international market to be consistent with, but more internationally-focused than, the then newly-introduced GCSE. At the 14-16 age range, it is now the most widely offered international curriculum (Cambridge International Examinations 2012a). Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) also offer to schools worldwide other programmes for the 5-16 age range, grouped as Cambridge Primary and Cambridge Secondary, as well as a number of programmes at the post-16 stage described as Cambridge Advanced, which include its Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) and International AS and

A levels. Additionally, the post-16 Cambridge Pre-U Diploma was introduced in 2008. While thus far promoted largely for the UK market and not claiming to be an international programme, the Pre-U may be studied internationally and requires the completion of a Global Perspectives portfolio (CIE 2012b). An International GCSE programme has also been introduced by Edexcel for the international school market, with a version available to UK schools (Edexcel 2012a), while the other large awarding body in England, AQA, has introduced IGCSEs in some subjects for teaching from September 2011, specifically aimed at the UK market (AQA, 2012). Lower down the age range, Edexcel has introduced both an Edexcel International Primary Curriculum and an Edexcel International Lower Secondary Curriculum, in each case offered only to schools outside the UK (Edexcel, 2012b, 2012c).

Independently of the IB or any of the UK Awarding Bodies, in 2000 London-based Fieldwork Education launched the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) to cater for the 4-12 age range internationally (IPC 2012). In 2011 this extended into the middle years with piloting of its International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC 2012). Other international programmes developed at pre-university level include the US College Board's Advanced Placement International Diploma, introduced in 1995 as "a globally recognised certificate for students with an international outlook ... available to students attending secondary schools outside the United States and for US resident students applying to universities outside the country" (DiYanni 2007). The well-established French Baccalauréat now has several versions of an 'Option Internationale' while, in the European context more broadly, in 1959 the European Baccalaureate (Baetens-Beardsmore 1993; Gray 2003; Savvides 2008) was first awarded in the group of European Schools at the end of the final two years of secondary education.

Of note with respect to the existence of such ‘supra-national’ programmes is the speed with which they have developed. Aside from the more well-established IB Diploma and European Baccalaureate, most of these programmes are no more than 20 years old, and the genesis of some is considerably more recent. Of particular note is that they are increasingly offered not only to satisfy the needs of the globally mobile in international schools worldwide, for whom – for language or other reasons – the local curriculum is not perceived to be appropriate, but also to those for whom such programmes were not originally designed. International schools are growing in number (MacDonald 2006) but are also changing in nature, as many such schools now respond to demand not only from itinerant expatriates but also from host country middle classes seeking for their children an English-medium education based on internationally-recognised programmes leading to internationally credible qualifications (Hayden 2011). Outside the international school context, international programmes are also being increasingly offered within national schools and colleges, both state- and privately-funded, in the UK and elsewhere.

Analysis of the different origins, markets and designs of the growing number of international programmes offered at school level led Thompson to propose a 4 model categorisation.

Thompson’s proposed categories are *exportation* (marketed away from the home context, with little if any adjustment, such as A levels offered overseas), *adaptation* (marketed away from the home context but with adjustment, such as IGCSE), *integration* (where best practices from different programmes are brought together to form a new curriculum, such as the European Baccalaureate) and *creation* (where a new programme is developed from first principles, as was the case with the IB Primary Years Programme) (1998, 278-280). The growth of such programmes internationally raises many issues in both curriculum and wider educational terms, not least – as highlighted by Thompson – a suggestion of (albeit

unwitting) educational imperialism, and questions as to why parents and students should choose such programmes in preference to that of a national system. For globally-mobile expatriates, choices are likely influenced by an expectation of continuing schooling in different countries in other international schools that may offer the same programme. Inaccessibility of the local system because of language barriers and concerns about recognition of qualifications in the home country may also be factors for itinerant families (MacKenzie, Hayden and Thompson 2003). For those studying in their own country meanwhile, such choices – in some contexts at least – may well be linked to ‘a response by local elites to a stiffening of the local positional competition on the one hand and a globalisation of that competition on the other’ (Lowe 2000, 24). As more people gain local educational qualifications, says Lowe, ‘those who can afford to do so seek a new competitive edge by taking qualifications that they hope will give them a local advantage’.

Such factors may be inferred as being, at least in part, behind the growth of international schools worldwide, which are almost exclusively private and fee-paying. In some countries, however, the uptake of international programmes in the state-funded sector has also been remarkable. Of the 2,380 schools offering the IB Diploma worldwide in July 2012, for instance, 783 are in the United States, where the vast majority are state high schools. Reasons suggested for this growth in the US have included the external, rigorous, academic nature of the IB Diploma (leading to its use in some cases as a ‘magnet’ programme, or programme for the gifted and talented), its attractiveness for marketing purposes and its appropriateness for attracting international students (Spahn 2001; Mathews and Hill 2005). Clearly international programmes have found a market for which they were not initially designed. One such market is the UK context, where they are increasingly being found in both the independent and state sectors of education.

Growth of international programmes in the UK

As has been shown, the concept of an ‘international’ dimension to curriculum worldwide has been growing. This growth has not, however, been systematic or coordinated, and it is not possible to define the notion of an ‘international dimension’ to the curriculum nor of ‘internationalisation’ of the curriculum in terms that would apply to all programmes or to all contexts. Indeed, the very meaning of the term ‘international’ within the context of international schools, international curriculum and international education is a focus of ongoing debate with respect to the question of what it means for a form of education to be ‘international’ in other than, some would argue, one quite specific – western liberal – sense of the term (see, for instance, Walker 2010, Van Oord 2007 and Drake 2004). In the analysis that follows of the UK context, the so-called international programmes offered will be discussed, and compared with the framework proposed by Thompson (1998) as noted above. As little research has been undertaken to date into this newly-emerging area, it will not be possible to comment on the impact of any of these programmes on schools in which they are offered or, indeed, on the wider educational context; both clearly areas that would benefit from further research.

At first glance it might be inferred that the recent growth of international programmes within UK national education systems reflects an increasing desire by schools to offer a more internationally-focused education experience for their students. And indeed that may be the case for one or all of these programmes, and for some or many schools. It is relatively early days as yet, and there is little research-based evidence available to support conclusions about the reasons behind their growth. What *is* known, in the form largely of anecdotal evidence

and accounts found in the national and educational press, suggests that the situation is perhaps not so clear cut as might be expected, and is likely to differ across the programmes and across the age ranges. Some of the international programmes developed in the UK are offered only outside the UK (including some of those developed by Edexcel and CIE, as noted above) and will not be considered in this discussion of the national context. Others, designed principally for an overseas, international school market have gained a national foothold not anticipated when they were designed. Possible reasons for the growth of this unanticipated market will be considered here by age range: 5-11, 11-16 and 16-18.

5 – 11 age range

At the primary age range, two international programmes are found in the UK. The IB Primary Years Programme (PYP), offered by the IB since 1997 and in July 2012 authorised for teaching in 947 schools in 97 countries worldwide, is found in 13 UK schools, 4 of which are state-funded (IB 2012). The International Primary Curriculum (IPC), meanwhile, has enjoyed a much more marked growth since its launch in 2000. Out of a total of some 1500 IPC-offering schools worldwide at July 2012, over 1000 are in the UK (IPC 2012; Hayden and Thompson 2012). The majority of UK IPC-offering schools are within the state sector, where the IPC is used to complement the statutory national curriculum; for the most part, the UK independent sector has yet to show much interest. Consideration of both the PYP and the IPC shows them to be, in Thompson's terms, 'created' in that they were each developed from first principles. Both encourage engagement in internationally-focused study: the PYP by expecting students to 'develop attitudes that will lead to international mindedness' (IB, 2012) and the IPC by including learning goals for the development of international understanding. The PYP is available in three working languages (English, French, Spanish), though in the

UK context only English is employed by schools. The IPC is offered in English and also (arising from its origins in the schools owned by Shell Oil) in Dutch.

As with other international programmes, there is to date a dearth of hard evidence available upon which to base firm conclusions about reasons behind the remarkable UK state sector interest in the IPC. Bunnell (2010), in one of the few pieces of IPC-related analysis published to date, highlights the increasingly international-focused environment for schools in this national context. But the fact that the large UK growth in the IPC has not been accompanied by a similar growth in the IB PYP suggests that it is not simply the international aspect of the programme that explains its appeal. A recently-completed study in one state primary school in England proposed that interesting and enjoyable features of the IPC curriculum, in the views of participating children, were a number of dimensions not necessarily related to its international nature (Van der Heijden 2009). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the attractively produced and detailed teaching materials might be part of the IPC's appeal, and its marketing within the national context has certainly contributed to its relatively high profile. Very positive endorsements included in IPC documentation (IPC 2012) focus on a range of perceived attractions of the IPC's thematic approach to the curriculum, of which the international dimension is only one. At the same time a small scale study of state schools in England and Wales offering the IPC suggests a similarly positive overall response, with attractive features including the enthusing of children through new topics and through being 'inspired [to] see themselves as an integral part of their world' (Marshall 2012).

11-16 age range

The only international programme so far developed to cover the entire 11-16 age range is the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP). In Thompson's terms this is again a 'created' curriculum. Its international dimension is characterised by intercultural awareness as a fundamental concept which is expected to be facilitated by schools, inter alia, 'embedding in the curriculum examples drawn from a variety of cultural, social, religious and national perspectives, as well as implementing activities and practices that celebrate a range of cultural identities' (Phillips 2011: 36). The MYP is available in English, French, Spanish and Chinese – though in the UK taken up only in English. In existence as an IB programme since 1994 and as at July 2012 offered by 974 schools in 89 countries worldwide, it is found in only 11 UK schools, 3 of which are in the state sector (IB 2012). To date, therefore, the IBMYP – though clearly viewed positively by those UK schools that offer it (see, for instance, Albrighton 2011) – is not a major player in the UK context. Reasons for this lack of uptake no doubt include the fact that the MYP has not been approved as an alternative to the national curriculum, and thus can only be offered by state sector schools prepared to offer it in conjunction with the statutory curriculum. More recently launched (in 2011), Fieldwork Education's ages 11-14 International Middle Years Curriculum (IMYC) is similarly not recognised as an alternative to the national curriculum, but in July 2012 is already being trialled by 4 UK state schools (and 25 schools worldwide) (IMYC 2012) and seems likely to attract further interest as it develops. Though reasons for interest from the national context are again not yet clear it seems likely that, as with the IPC, the IMYC's detailed materials and high profile marketing campaign will have played a part.

As noted earlier, the AQA IGCSE was introduced only in September 2011. Though it is therefore too early to judge its likely uptake within the national context, it is interesting to note that no explanation of the 'I' prefix appears in AQA documentation, nor is any mention

made of an international dimension to these programmes. By far the best-established international programme at UK secondary level is the Cambridge International Examinations (CIE) IGCSE. Here the ‘international’ dimension of the English medium IGCSE is described largely in terms of international recognition (CIE 2012a), though an optional Global Perspectives course may be studied. Created with an international market in mind, this programme has nevertheless proved of interest to the UK independent sector as an alternative to GCSE in some, if not all, subject areas. The authorisation in June 2010 of many of its courses for teaching in state schools in England and Northern Ireland has led to a situation where, in July 2012, the CIE IGCSE is offered by over 400 schools in the UK independent sector and over 350 schools in the state sector of England and Northern Ireland, with recent uptake leading to an expectation that UK state sector numbers will soon be higher than those of independent schools (CIE 2012a). The IGCSE, of whichever Awarding Body, is English-medium only and meets the criteria for the ‘adaptation’ category of Thompson’s model in being a variation on the GCSE; it is interesting that this adaptation for the international market has led to its finding favour in some sectors of the home market.

Within the independent sector, arguments recorded by proponents in explaining the switch from GCSE to IGCSE have seemed less to relate to the international dimension of the latter than to structural issues including perceived benefits of the linear approach of IGCSE, with single examinations after 2 years, compared with the modular frequently-assessed approach of GCSE (Hurst 2010). More recently, some IGCSEs have been viewed as attractive in returning to coursework models previously found in GCSE before concerns about plagiarism and cheating led to the 2011 introduction of controlled assessment in English GCSE. Allowing students to prepare in advance for a piece of work written in the classroom under controlled conditions has subsequently been criticised for reducing teaching time (Stewart

2011). Though it may be inferred that similar reasons lie behind the adoption of IGCSE in the state sector as in the independent sector, as yet no research has been conducted that could confirm if this is indeed the case. Furthermore, in a context where both state and independent schools may already exercise choice of GCSE Awarding Body by subject, availability of IGCSE options may be viewed as simply one more choice when determining the most appropriate programme for a particular school context.

16 – 18 age range

At this level, CIE's Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) and International AS and A levels are only available outside the UK. Within the UK the CIE Pre-U (introduced in 2008) has attracted interest from a number of schools whose respect for A level has been diminished by perceived over-assessment, loss of teaching time and lack of rigour arising from its modular structure and condoning of re-sits (Stewart 2010); as at July 2012 64 UK state schools and 74 independent schools have entered students for this new programme (CIE 2012c). Still the best-established international programme to date in the UK, however, is the IB Diploma. In July 2012 this programme is offered in 197 UK colleges and schools, 126 of which are state-funded (IB, 2012), that are part of a network in the UK and Ireland known as the IB Schools and Colleges Association (IBSCA 2012). In Thompson's model, the IB Diploma could be considered as fitting the 'integration' category, in that its genesis was in the best practice of a number of previously existing national programmes (Peterson 1987). Its international dimension is represented in its three working languages (English, French, Spanish) and through the promotion across the curriculum of the development of international mindedness (IB 2012).

This age range cannot be meaningfully considered without recognising that UK-wide generalisations are not possible because of the different education systems of the constituent countries. At the centre of much debate in England in the past half century (and indeed in Wales both prior to and following devolution in 1999) have been the recurring themes of the purpose of education beyond the statutory school leaving age, the relationship between – and perceived relative status of – the so-called ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ dimensions of post-compulsory education, and the benefits of breadth vs depth as a precursor to university-level study. While ongoing attempts to resolve such issues in England have been beset with difficulties, in Scotland post-16 provision has traditionally been broader than A level. In Wales, meanwhile, development since devolution of the broadly structured Welsh Baccalaureate has suggested that curriculum change at this level can be successful (Hayden and Thompson 2007; Welsh Baccalaureate 2012).

In England, even though internationalisation has not been a key issue in the ongoing debate about post-16 education reform, the question of why an international programme might prove popular to national schools cannot be divorced from issues of structure and the breadth vs depth debate. Detailed discussion of developments from the replacement in 1949 of the Higher School Certificate by the more specialised A level can be found elsewhere (Phillips and Pound 2003, Pound 2006). Particularly noteworthy, however, are the recommendations for increased breadth at A level made by the Institute for Public Policy Research in proposing a ‘British Baccalauréat’ (Finegold et al, 1990) and by the Higginson Committee (DES 1988) – neither of which met with a positive response from government – as well as the ‘Curriculum 2000’ reforms that emerged from the consultation document ‘Qualifying for Success’ (DfEE 1997). The Tomlinson Working Group on 14-19 reform was similarly unsuccessful in its recommendation of a more flexible and inclusive diploma framework

incorporating both vocational and academic awards (DfES 2004b) that was rejected by the Blair government within days of publication. Indeed educational developments post-16 in England must be viewed within the socio-political context which has seen governments of both hue reluctant to tamper with the well-established 'A' level, as reflected in media speculation – at the time of government rejection of the Tomlinson proposals – that Tony Blair wished 'to avoid, at all costs, the stigma of being the Prime Minister responsible for the abolition of A levels' (Pound, 2006). More recent proposals for reform by, for instance, the Royal Society (2011) have met with no more success. Meanwhile the introduction of the 'English Baccalaureate' in 2010, as a packaging of a particular group of GCSE subjects, has arguably muddied the waters by using the term 'baccalaureate' in a fashion inconsistent with its more usual application to describe, for instance, a preparatory programme for university (Thompson, Hayden and Cambridge 2003).

Clearly the breadth vs depth debate in England is of relevance to the growth in popularity of the IB Diploma, broader as it is than the A level alternative. Indeed a central protagonist for the development of the IB Diploma in the 1960s was Oxford University's Alec Peterson, long an outspoken critic of what he perceived as England's overly narrow A level system and premature specialisation (Peterson 1960). The IB Diploma model requires study of a broad range of disciplines, as well as a compulsory core – composed of a 4000 word Extended Essay, a course in the Theory of Knowledge, and Creativity Action Service (CAS) activities – which plays a central role in the development of skills of independent research and thought, and the analysis and synthesis of ideas and communication (Alchin 2011). First examined in 1970, the IB Diploma model is essentially that conceptualised by Thompson in 1983 as a hexagon that was formally adopted in IB documentation in 1993 (Hill 2007), with a number of relatively minor modifications over succeeding years (IB 2012).

Though still offered in only a relatively small proportion of UK schools and colleges, the IB Diploma has achieved an increasingly high media profile in recent years, largely linked to the ongoing debate about A level reform. Many IB protagonists are vociferous in its support, while annual media accusations of falling standards in A level, for instance, provide opportunities for IB supporters to point out that the IB Diploma does not suffer from so-called grade inflation, as grade distributions remain stable from year to year (IB 2012). More detailed discussion of reasons for the IB Diploma's popularity in England appears elsewhere (Joslin and Hayden 2012, Bunnell 2008), but the programme's breadth is clearly of relevance (Snapper 2006, 175). Arguably, not only have its broad structure and emphasis on attributes including critical thinking appealed to growing numbers of schools and colleges, teachers, students and parents; they have also influenced developments within A level and the national context in both England (Hodgson and Spours 2003) and Wales (David and Jenkins 2003; Adams 2003). Bunnell (2008), charting the rise of the IB Diploma in England and Wales, suggests that other factors in its growth include the 2002 debacle over marking of A level papers which weakened confidence in the A level system, and the 2006 inclusion of the IB Diploma in the UCAS tariff system, which for the first time provided a basis for higher education to compare the IB Diploma with A level and other university entrance qualifications (Bunnell 2008). Indeed evidence emerging of the increasingly positive response to the IB Diploma by UK universities (see, for instance, IB 2003, HESA 2011, Currie 2011) cannot be discounted as a factor influencing national schools and colleges. Other factors suggested by small-scale studies to date as leading some national schools and colleges to value the IB Diploma as an alternative to A level include the linear (non-modular) nature of the programme, the absence of national political input and the increased discrimination possible through the IB's 1-7 grading scale compared with A level's narrower

grade range (Snapper 2006, Andain, Rutherford and Allen 2006). A further factor for some state schools has undoubtedly been the financial support announced, in 2006, for each local authority in England to fund the uptake of the programme by one state school as part of the Blair government's choice agenda (Jackson 2007).

Discussion and conclusion

Arguably, if a national education system meets the needs of its population, no other programme will flourish and survive. That international programmes are being adopted by increasing numbers of UK schools suggests dissatisfaction with at least some aspect of what is available within the national context. For policy makers in the national education systems, therefore, one question in future developments may be if and how they should respond to dissatisfaction with the status quo; through modifications to those systems or, indeed, through development of alternative academic programmes.

An internationally-focused curriculum may be assumed to be important for international schools with globally mobile pupils, but is increasingly being recognised as of relevance within national contexts too. Each programme highlighted here claims to be an international programme in some way, though exactly what each would claim to be its distinguishing international features varies – whether including content from a wide international context, or enjoying recognition internationally, or including an ideological mission of promoting international understanding (or all of these). The international aspect of such programmes might be inferred to be the reason for their growth within national schools, as an international dimension becomes increasingly regarded as desirable in national forms of education and the relative absence of it is seen as a shortcoming. If it is indeed their international dimension

that is attracting growing numbers of schools and colleges to programmes such as the IPC, IGCSE and IB Diploma, then very interesting issues are raised for curriculum theorists about the relationship between the curriculum and the society for which it is intended to prepare future adults. Once the relationship between national contexts and education programmes is broken down, and internationally-focused programmes are taken up within national systems, it is no longer clear from which culture – in Lawton’s terms – the curriculum should be selected, and challenges are raised as to what indeed is meant by fundamental concepts such as society. In an international school context, Lauder argues that those following international programmes worldwide are destined to be part of a global ruling class (2007), but whether all who study international programmes within national education systems should be considered part of the same grouping is debatable. Debatable, too, is whether it really is the international focus of such programmes that lies behind their increasing profile. In general, their international dimension has been notable by its relative absence in what little is known about reasons for their growth nationally. To claim that this growth in the UK is indicative of growing commitment to internationalising the curriculum would be rash; while this may be the case for some schools, for others the international dimension may be an irrelevance.

Changes in the educational environment may make such programmes more attractive across the sectors than they would once have been. Increased emphasis on parental choice, for instance, makes the prospect of offering a different curriculum attractive not only to independent schools but also to some state schools that seek to establish a market niche *vis a vis* their competitors. Alternatively (or additionally), the international aspect of these programmes may prove attractive to schools and colleges with multicultural student populations, or those that wish for other reasons to introduce a more international flavour to student learning than is facilitated through the national curriculum.

Important questions thus arise with respect to the growth of these programmes, whether they are offered as alternatives to the national curriculum or as a complement to it. Are they valued because they are international? (Can it be inferred that interest in them reflects increasing interest in preparing young people for a more international future?). Or are they valued, rather, because they are the only existing credible alternatives available for schools that find the national curriculum or post-16 programmes lacking in some way? At present, in the absence of sufficient systematically-gathered evidence, no generalised answers are available. Such insights as can be gleaned suggest a combination of factors at play, and it is undoubtedly the case that further research is required to inform practitioners and policy makers about developments discussed here. To date these developments have been low profile and little recognised beyond the circles of those directly involved in them.

Extrapolation from current trends suggests that their profile will increase – though the situation is complex and simple extrapolations are risky. On the one hand, the initial state sector increase in uptake of the IB Diploma following the Blair government 2006 initiative has been followed by some schools dropping the programme for reasons including the challenge of sustaining on-going funding (Exley 2012). On the other hand, major policy changes since the current government's election in 2010 include the loosening of curriculum control over Free Schools and Academies, which are not required to conform to statutory national curriculum requirements (DfE 2012b). Figures published in March 2012, for instance, showed that over half of all secondary schools had by that point applied to become academies (Richardson 2012), and it is suggested that by 2015 almost all schools will have become academies (Blunkett 2012, Brighouse and Newsam 2012). Further growth in the uptake of international programmes within the now less regulated state sector could see unintended consequences arising from these recent policy changes.

Increased curriculum freedom for this new school sector may be valued by today's policy makers. But interesting issues arise if that freedom leads to increasing influence, in both state and independent sectors, of programmes developed by international organisations without direct accountability within the national context; not least when some aspects of such programmes may be inconsistent with national policy (approaches to the teaching of History, for instance, as one example). There is a certain irony in the juxtaposition of recent considerations by a Commons Select Committee of the possibility of creating a single examinations body as a means of exercising tighter control of 'standards' in the 15-19 sector (UK Parliament 2012) and the growing influence of programmes which in some cases fall outside the national accountability structure. And in broader terms, from the perspective of curriculum theorists and developers, if internationally-offered, non-nationally focused and non-nationally controlled programmes continue to gain popularity in UK countries and other national systems, then debate on the role of the curriculum in social and cultural reproduction – as discussed by, *inter alia*, Bernstein (1971), Lawton (1989) and Ross (2000) – will surely need to be renewed.

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