

David Wilkinson is presently the founding head of the Mahindra United World College of India. His involvement with IBO goes back to 1976 when he joined the faculty of the United World College of South East Asia. He carried out the British Schools Council study of the IB in 1979, has been a Government Representative at Council meetings, and member of the Heads Committee, a member of the TOK working party and an assistant examiner in physics for many years. In 1982 he was Deputy Head at the founding of the UWC of the Adriatic and in 1991 he was founding director of the Li Po Chun United World College in Hong Kong.

Recollections of Dr David Wilkinson

Only twenty years ago, the IB was a very small organization as far as the UK was concerned. There was no centralized examinations office. The ground floor of a Georgian terraced house on Taviton Street close to the Senate building of the University of London housed the major part of its UK operation. The total full time staff was just three; Robert Blackburn ran the office with the support of Roz Sievers and Dianne Burton. The languages office with Tom Carter in charge on a part time basis and Dianne Williamson as the only full time employee was at the University of Southampton bringing the total UK full time staff to just four.

The examination papers were produced in Taviton Street, at Southampton University and at the Headquarters in Geneva with each office having different subject and language responsibilities. In Taviton Street just one photocopier provided the papers with the staff working flat out through weekends to prepare and dispatch the papers on time. The contrast with the present large scale high-tech production could not be greater.

The lack of size however was matched by a passionate belief in the IB Diploma programme. Alec Peterson was a regular visitor at the office in Taviton Street. His handwritten letters seeking support for the IBO seem far away from today's electronic communication systems. The knowledge that growth was vital for survival was clear. Informal discussions with Robert and Alec were already considering the possibility of an IB for younger students. Alec believed that the IB Diploma must be open to students whatever their previous educational background. He was very open to the idea that the key elements of the breadth and of "learning how to learn" should be part of an education for younger children; he did not believe that any such course should provide a necessary or privileged entry to the Diploma.

In 1979 I had the privilege of spending a year working for Alec Peterson. He had managed to persuade the British Schools Council to carry out a feasibility study. The aim was to introduce the IB in about 50 schools and colleges spread throughout the United Kingdom. In the following few years the impact of the IB in these schools was to be monitored, to provide evidence of the effect of broadening the British sixth form curriculum. My task was twofold; the first to visit interested schools and colleges in order to acquaint teachers and administrators with my own experience of working at a school that had introduced the IB alongside the British "A" level system. The second

was to work with University admissions people in order to further the acceptability of the IB Diploma as an entry qualification.

At every meeting of the working party which represented the Department of Education and Science, the Cambridge Board and the Examination Council in addition to the Schools Council, Alec's radical views were evident. Not only did he argue against the early specialization of British education, he was equally vigorous in his objection to what he called "over teaching". The two he said fed off one another and left students with little time to reflect on the value or the meaning of what they were being taught. Without reflection he argued, students could not discover how to learn, how to think and how to imagine.

My visits to schools, colleges and universities in the autumn and winter of 1979 showed how much ahead of his time Alec really was. The argument against the IB that was put forward again and again was that any broadening of the curriculum would result in a reduction of the quantity of knowledge that was essential to continue the study of the discipline. Not surprisingly the most ardent supporters of the need for students to have the widest possible knowledge basis were in the sciences, engineering and medical departments of the universities. The facts however revealed a different situation. By 1979 over 1000 students had entered British Universities with the IB Diploma as their matriculation qualification. We surveyed their degree results and found that, across all university subjects, they had performed above the average level of non-IB entrants.

The year was eventful for the IB. Over twenty new schools joined the programme. The decision was taken to appoint a Director of Examinations. Plans were made to consolidate the IB's UK operation at the University of Southampton. For me, the year ended with disappointment. The examinations council of the Schools Council decided not to support the four-year project.