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Executive Summary

Phase 1 Findings

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1. Introduction

This Executive Summary synthesises the findings and implications from four reports commissioned by Education in Motion (EiM) for Phase 1 of an EiM research brief. The goal of this phase is to provide a research foundation for EiM's new International Diploma (ID) programme, which aims to offer a career-related enrichment experience combining traditional A-Levels, the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), and a Worldwide Future Skills Profile.

2. Summary of Individual Reports

2.1 Future-Ready: A Desk-based Literature and Policy Analysis of Employability Skills and Implications for Innovation in Secondary Education

This report synthesises findings from ten authoritative sources on future employability skills to inform the development of EiM's innovative secondary education curriculum and assessment system through the Worldwide International Diploma (ID). It highlights a persistent skills gap between traditional education outcomes and rapidly evolving workplace demands, with a recurring focus on AI and digital transformation.

Key findings and recommendations for the ID include:

- Curriculum Design: Recommendations suggest that a successful approach to the ID requires a dynamic, interdisciplinary curriculum with strong industry connections, personalised learning pathways, and future-oriented pedagogies to foster student agency and differentiated opportunities to demonstrate and articulate skill achievement. EiM could consider building into their curriculum design an approach that balances technical, specialist, and methodological skills with human capabilities, including critical thinking, creativity, and communication, to secure a competitive advantage over established qualifications.

- Assessment Innovation: Assessment systems for the ID should be designed to extend beyond traditional examinations to include authentic, project-based evaluations that measure both technical competence and soft skills. Recommended approaches include diverse assessment methods (e.g., project-based assessments, portfolios, and practical demonstrations), authentic assessment tasks framed around real-world problems, competency-based assessment, technology-enhanced assessment, continuous and formative assessment, and methods to assess soft skills.

- Priority Skill Clusters: The ID design effectively addresses the skills gap by emphasising future skills and incorporating priority skill clusters: technical and digital, cognitive,

social and emotional, and self-management.

- Competitive Differentiation: The ID can position its provision as forward-thinking and effectively bridge the potential gap between education outcomes and employer expectations through its future orientation, deep industry connections, personalisation, and technology integration.

Areas for further development could include an even more explicit focus on soft skill development and assessment, teacher preparation, ensuring implementation coherence, and enhanced stakeholder engagement.

2.2 Global universities' admission requirements: A Review and analysis of trends in university admissions

This report reviews global university admissions requirements based on an analysis of top-ranked universities. Key findings include:

- United Kingdom: UK universities focus heavily on academic qualifications, especially A-levels and the IB. Oxford and Cambridge recommend only 3 A-levels, highlighting the importance of subject depth and super-curricular activities. Imperial and King's College consider extracurriculars more openly. Additional written work, interviews and admissions tests are commonly required for selective courses.

- Australia: Australian universities accept a wide range of international qualifications. Entry requirements are clearly stated, but admissions information is often limited. Their approach aligns partially with the US system, incorporating broader assessments in some cases.

- Canada: Entry is primarily based on high school performance, with additional emphasis on personal profiles or statements. University of Toronto and UBC consider the applicant's full academic history and non-academic qualities such as leadership and community involvement.

- United States: US universities adopt a holistic approach, prioritising personal qualities, extracurricular engagement and leadership alongside academics. SAT/ACT use varies. Recent insights suggest that SATs/ACTs are becoming less popular and even Ivy League universities are now considering them only optional. Essays and interviews are central, with universities such as Harvard and MIT providing detailed insight into what makes a strong applicant.

- Europe: European institutions rely mainly on academic credentials, often supported by entrance exams and interviews. Specific subject combinations and high grades are typically required. Language proficiency is essential for non-English programmes. Institutions like ETH Zurich and EPFL have strict entry tests and quota systems.

- Asia: Asian universities are transitioning from strictly academic to more holistic admissions. NUS exemplifies this shift, considering leadership, community work and competitions alongside grades. Institutions like NTU and HKU have defined subject prerequisites and often require interviews, portfolios or other evidence of aptitude.

While global trends show increasing appreciation for holistic assessment, academic performance remains foundational. The US leads in valuing personal qualities and experiences, while Europe and the UK maintain rigorous academic expectations. Asia is evolving in this direction, and Canada and Australia strike a balance between both. A-levels and the IB remain widely accepted, though specific subject and grade requirements vary significantly.

2.3 Phase 1 Focus Group Findings Report

This report summarises findings from focus groups and additional one-to-one interviews conducted with current university students, university graduates, agents, school counsellors, and university representatives.

Key themes and findings include:

- University Preparation and Admission: Participants recognised the relevance of academic results for entry into top global universities but identified a clear difference between more academically-driven systems like in the UK in contrast to US admissions. IB students are perceived as "well rounded" and in general have developed relevant soft and transferable skills. Opinions on completing a fourth A-Level were mixed, with leading universities like Cambridge discouraging it to avoid compromising excellence in the other three.

- Work-Life Experiences: There were mixed opinions regarding the inclusion of work-related activities within the curriculum, with some recognising value (e.g., exposure to real-life work environments, development of basic skills) , but others worrying about the additional pressure on students to choose a career path too early. There was a general consensus about the relevance of embedding soft and employability skills such as teamwork, communication, and problem-solving within the curriculum; as well as helping students to develop awareness about different career

paths.

- Digital Skills and AI: There was consensus about the relevance of embedding digital skills and AI among the school curriculum, mainly to prepare students to use tools and to raise their awareness about the impact of AI into everyday life. Students and graduates felt they often had a better digital and AI understanding than their teachers and lecturers.

- Opinions on the New Curriculum: Most participants were positive about the new curriculum. However, school counsellors expressed concerns about the practicalities of global rollout, the cost, the training available, and whether it would be acceptable to universities. University admissions recognised they are often "slow" to accept new curricula and would wait until other universities recognise it, highlighting the importance of having good, globally recognised university partners.

2.4 A Desk-Based Review of Global Admissions Qualifications and The EiM International Diploma Value Proposition

This report provides a desk-based review of global admissions qualifications and the EiM International Diploma's value proposition. It details the key features, typical university requirements, and sources for major international qualifications, including A Levels, International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, BTEC (UK), Advanced Placement (AP) - USA, Abitur (Germany), French Baccalauréat, Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), Indian Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC), and China's National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao).

The report then analyses EiM's International Diploma against these qualifications, identifying strong alignment in several areas:

- Assessment Method Mix: Strong Alignment: The ID combines traditional academic qualifications (A-Levels) with project-based learning (EPQ), partnership-based experiences, and competency assessments.

- Breadth vs. Depth: Strong Alignment: The credential architecture shows a balance between deep subject knowledge (A-Levels) and broader interdisciplinary skills (Worldwise Future Skills Profile with multiple pathways).

- Core Components: Moderate Alignment (Scope for Strong Alignment): While the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) serves as a core component similar to IB's Extended Essay, there doesn't appear to be direct equivalents to Theory of Knowledge or CAS experiences explicitly defined. EiM is exploring a core focus on Systems Literacy

and Digital Metaphysics, which could constitute a unique and distinctive alternative to the theory of knowledge component in IB.

- Digital Literacy Integration: Strong Alignment: The qualification emphasises digital credentials, technology-focused pathways, and future-focused digital skills across multiple areas, appearing to go beyond what other qualifications typically offer.

- Global Competency Framework: Strong Alignment: The Future Skills alignment gives scope to incorporate this component, but a more explicit reference is advisable given the international nature of EiM and its qualifications. This also aligns with the findings in the Future Skills Desk-based review report.

- University Preparation Elements: Strong Alignment: The findings show that the ID model provides an innovative pathway to higher education to compete with alternatives like Yale STEM, Stanford AI, and other university partnerships that provide pre-university experiences.

- Industry Connections: Very Strong Alignment: Multiple industry partnerships are featured (AmplifyME, DEC, etc.) with industry-validated credentials built into the qualification.

- Microcredentials: Very Strong Alignment: The digital wallet concept and credential architecture fully embrace the microcredential approach, allowing for personalised learning paths and learning credentials which are completed with the qualification but also have the facility to be unbundled.

- Project-Based Assessment: Strong Alignment: The EPQ component (hours) and various pathway experiences incorporate project-based learning.

Potential gaps identified for EiM to consider addressing include assessment transparency, further exploring the philosophical/ethical component, strengthening service learning and community engagement, considering standardisation across schools and articulating quality assurance, emphasising language requirements, and clearly emphasising numeracy development across all pathways.

3. Triangulation of Findings and Overarching Considerations for EiM

By integrating the insights from the four reports which have been created in this phase of the research commissioned by EiM, several overarching themes and considerations emerge which have been summarised below:

3.1 The Imperative of Future-Ready and Holistic Skill Development

- Finding: There is a consistent and urgent demand across all reports for "future-ready" skills, encompassing technical and digital proficiency (especially AI), cognitive skills (critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity), social and emotional skills (communication, collaboration, teamwork), and self-management skills (adaptability, lifelong learning). Traditional education is often seen as failing to keep pace, and traditional assessments are deemed inadequate for measuring these competencies.

- Implications for EiM: The ID's strong alignment with digital literacy integration, industry connections, microcredentials, and project-based assessment is a significant competitive advantage. EiM should proactively highlight how these features go "beyond what other qualifications typically offer", preparing students comprehensively for evolving workplace demands. Explicitly articulating how soft skills are developed and assessed within the ID framework will address a noted gap, enhancing the ID's appeal to universities looking for "well-rounded" individuals.

3.2 Navigating Diverse University Admissions Landscapes

- Finding: Global university admissions exhibit a clear distinction: US universities, and increasingly some Asian institutions (like NUS), prioritise a holistic candidate profile that values extracurricular activities, talents, and a broader skillset alongside academic achievement. Conversely, UK and European universities predominantly focus on academic grades. While A-Levels are standard, some institutions might consider a fourth, or extra-curricular activities, to demonstrate depth or additional interests.

- Implications for EiM: The ID's blend of A-Levels for academic rigour and the Worldwise Future Skills Profile for broader competencies and experiences positions it strategically to appeal to both academically-driven and holistically-oriented university systems. EiM should emphasise how the EPQ, partnership-based experiences, and competency assessments contribute to a comprehensive student profile demonstrating both deep subject knowledge and transferable skills, enhancing its competitiveness across diverse admissions landscapes. Providing clear guidance to students and counsellors on how to best present the ID's unique components for different university systems will be crucial.

3.3 Securing University Recognition through Strategic Partnerships and Transparency

- Finding: University admissions offices are often "slow" to accept new curricula, typically waiting for external benchmarking and recognition from other established universities. Clear admission pathways and strong institutional partnerships are vital for

the successful acceptance of new qualifications. Concerns were raised regarding the practicalities of global rollout, cost, training, and ensuring consistency across different schools offering the ID.

- Implications for EiM: The initial focus group findings underscore the critical importance of securing early buy-in from reputable university partners. EiM's existing partnerships (e.g., Yale STEM, Stanford AI) are strong starting points. The strategic objectives of establishing formal recognition, securing MOUs, and developing deep institutional partnerships are directly supported by this finding. EiM should proactively communicate its quality assurance framework and address concerns about standardisation across different schools offering the ID to build trust and facilitate consistent recognition.

3.4 The Importance of Teacher Development and Programme Coherence

- Finding: The literature advocates for pedagogical approaches that promote student agency, applied learning, personalisation, and technology integration. Successful implementation of innovative curricula necessitates ongoing investment in teacher development, focusing on technical literacy, facilitation of inquiry and project-based learning, and diverse assessment design. There is a recognised gap in how teachers are able to remain highly skilled for future-focused courses.

- Implications for EiM: While the ID's design incorporates many of these pedagogical elements, both the "Future-Ready Report" and focus groups highlight a need for more explicit attention to teacher preparation. EiM should clearly articulate its strategy for comprehensive teacher training and resource provision to ensure effective delivery of the future-focused curriculum and assessment methods. Addressing how student experience will embed certain features to ensure coherence and consistency, whilst allowing for local tailoring, will also be vital.

3.5 Developing a Distinctive Philosophical and Ethical Core

- Finding: While the ID's EPQ is a core academic component, there is a noted gap in explicit equivalents to the IB's Theory of Knowledge or CAS. EiM is exploring "Systems Literacy and Digital Metaphysics" as a potential unique alternative.

- Implications for EiM: Developing a robust and distinctive philosophical/ethical component, such as Systems Literacy and Digital Metaphysics, could be a unique selling point for the ID. This would demonstrate critical thinking and ethical reasoning in a rapidly evolving technological world, further strengthening the ID's claim of preparing students who are "distinctively prepared for university and their ongoing pathway

towards developing future-ready employability skills". This component could also serve as a strong differentiator against established qualifications.

4. Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive synthesis of insights from global qualification comparisons, stakeholder focus groups, future skills policy analysis, and the evolving design of the EiM International Diploma (ID). Collectively, the findings reveal a growing international consensus on the need to modernise secondary education to better prepare students for both university and employment in a rapidly changing world.

Across all sources, there is strong agreement on the value of combining academic depth with the development of broader capabilities. While qualifications such as A Levels and the IB are respected for subject mastery and breadth, stakeholders repeatedly emphasised the importance of integrating digital literacy, AI awareness, soft skills, and life readiness into school programmes. The EiM ID is shown to align well with these priorities, particularly through its modular structure, inclusion of project-based learning (e.g. EPQ), digital microcredentials, and meaningful industry and university partnerships.

The stakeholder engagement revealed that students, agents, educators, and universities are largely supportive of a new qualification model if it meets recognised standards, supports personalisation, and can demonstrate clear value for progression. However, successful adoption will depend on transparent assessment frameworks, appropriate teacher training, and external validation by higher education institutions. Concerns around implementation, consistency across schools, and perceived risk in university admissions highlight the need for strong quality assurance mechanisms and clear articulation of the ID's core components.

The future skills review strongly validates the EiM ID's orientation. Global labour market data and policy analysis confirm the need for a curriculum that emphasises cognitive flexibility, collaboration, communication, digital competence, and self-management. The ID's use of a digital wallet, interdisciplinary pathways, and employer-informed assessments positions it as a credible and forward-thinking alternative to legacy qualifications.

In conclusion, this triangulated research supports the fact that the EiM International Diploma addresses key global trends and stakeholder expectations. With further refinement, particularly around implementation, assessment clarity, and stakeholder engagement, it offers a distinctive, future-ready model of secondary education that supports both university access and long-term employability.