

# The parents guide to the IB Diploma

An independent\* guide by

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*Implementing the IB Diploma Programme –  
A practical manual for principals, IB coordinators, heads of department and teachers*

<http://dp-help.com>

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\* The IBO is not affiliated with this independent publication, nor do we seek its endorsement. Nevertheless, the information pertaining to the IBO is correct at the time of writing, and we endeavor to keep this booklet up to date through regular reviews. The IBO is the ultimate authority on IB matters, and enquiries on IB issues should be directed to the organization. This booklet provides a readily available and easily accessible information source on a range of key areas of the IB Diploma Programme, designed to assist readers in understanding the programme and to pose useful questions. We shall accept no responsibility or liability for actions taken on the basis of this guide. This booklet was last updated on 20 Sep 2004.

## Dear parents: a quick introduction to this book

Over the last few decades, the IB Diploma Programme (**the DP**) has emerged as the single truly international pre-university high school programme. It is generally recognized as an excellent educational system, and, contrary to popular perception, it is not just meant for elite and/or expatriate students: any well motivated student capable of coping with a national pre-university programme should also be able to cope with the IB diploma, provided the school has fully understood the programme and knows how to use it to maximize each student's potential.

This provision, however, cannot be taken for granted. Our Cambridge Press Guide *Implementing the IB Diploma Programme (a practical manual for principals, IB coordinators, heads of department, and teachers*, available via our website <http://dp-help.com> or via Amazon) was written precisely to provide schools with an indepth knowledge of the programme, as well as inform them of both the advantages *and* the challenges that come with offering the IB Diploma Programme. As detailed in that guide, the challenges are surmountable but considerable, and parents would do well to make sure that any newly authorized school has 'done its homework'. In fact, we believe that parents can play an important role in ensuring the school is delivering a quality service by asking the right questions.

Even with well-established IB schools, parents are often not certain what the programme entails. How is it different from the national education system(s)? What is the value of the so-called core curriculum (TOK, CAS, and Extended Essay)? What package of subjects is appropriate for my child? How can I help to make my child's Diploma Programme performance more successful?

This concise guide will enable parents to tackle these issues with confidence. Chapter 1 gives a quick overview of the main challenges and advantages of the DP for all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, management, nation), chapter 2 explains what the DP is, chapter 3 lists the important questions to ask schools, and chapter 4 answers the typical parental concerns about the academic content of the DP. Using this information, chapter 4 also details how parents could assist their child in getting the most out of the programme.

Mindful of parents' busy schedules, this booklet is designed to be succinct and accessible (less than 50 pages); for much more comprehensive and detailed information we refer the reader to our Cambridge University Press publication (550 pages!). We hope this booklet is as informative as we think it is, but please email us about any issues you feel are not – or not sufficiently – discussed, as well as other suggestions for improvement. In the near future, we plan to sell this booklet online for a nominal fee, but while we incorporate the first round of feedback, it is free.

To download the latest copy of this booklet, please go to <http://dp-help.com>

NB. Please note that **the IBO** (the International Baccalaureate Organization) offers, apart from the DP, also programmes for primary and middle school (the PYP and MYP). This booklet, however, discusses only the DP and to emphasize that, we will talk about the **IBDP** or the **DP** throughout (rather than perpetuating the popular terminology in which the DP is often referred to as 'the IB').

Happy reading!

Dr Marc van Loo,  
Singapore, 25 Sep 2004

## **Chapter 1.**

### **The IB diploma: what does it mean for everyone concerned?**

The philosophy of the IB emphasizes high academic standards in the 5 mandatory areas of study: first and second languages, mathematics, humanities and science. This academic excellence goes hand in hand with an emphasis on personal development in areas such as philosophy, social awareness and the arts. The IBO is not tied to any individual national programme, which enables it to maintain rigorous independent assessment standards. This explains why a growing number of universities in more than a hundred countries hold IB graduates in high regard, why a rapidly growing number of high schools are considering adopting the IBDP, and why so many parents want to know more about the IBDP.

Many IB schools, rather than offer only the DP, run **parallel** pre-university high school programmes: they retain their original programmes (for instance, A-levels) and offer the IBDP as a separate programme to suitably motivated students. Naturally, schools running parallel programmes need to have a very clear understanding of the difference and commonalities of the programmes, as well as a clearly formulated admission policy for each.

A school wishing to offer the IBDP must receive authorization from the IBO first, in a process that involves effort, money and time (typically 1-2 years). Before embarking on the IB authorization process, however, a school must reflect on the impact such a decision will have on all stakeholders: the students and their parents; the teachers; the school as a whole; and the community at large (region, nation). Frequently encountered anxieties involving implementation of the programme include fear of change in general, fear of being a guinea pig, fear of loss of national identity, fears associated with the IB's perceived elitist nature, fears relating to university recognition, and fear of examination in a language that is not your own (currently, in terms of documentation and examination, English, French and Spanish are the only official IBDP languages). Furthermore, until recently the IBO did not wish to endorse subject textbooks of any kind. This, and the fact that the academic content of the IBDP changes on a regular basis in response to feedback from schools, examiners and universities around the world, has held publishers back from embarking on IB book projects. The IBO has begun to relax its opposition to textbooks, but it is fair to say that the current offering of course-specific textbooks is still poor compared with the offerings in other major high school programmes. Given this list of concerns and the list of further concerns addressed below, it is clear that all stakeholders need to be convinced that the advantages of adopting the IBDP outweigh the risks. Amongst all prerequisites for successful introduction of the IB, transparency surely ranks as the first priority.

It is instructive to see how the DP affects all stakeholders, so we list below the key messages to be communicated to each stakeholder group. The issues and challenges of particular interest to parents will be further developed and highlighted in chapter 3 and 4.

#### **Key messages to students and parents**

The DP provides enhanced learning opportunities for students. Along with these enhanced learning opportunities come often (but not always, see chapter 3) expanded opportunities at tertiary institutions – including receiving significant transfer credits for students achieving sufficiently high results. A universally recognized diploma and ranking system, focusing on international perspectives (including expertise in at least two languages and emphasizing areas of global concern) ensures an increased adaptability and mobility on the part of the IBDP diploma holder – a major advantage in a rapidly globalizing world. At the same time, the IBO's insistence that students study their mother tongue as a first (A1) language ensures firm roots in the home culture. In line with university and job market demands, the mandatory IB core components emphasize personal growth through activities, through service, and through their insistence on reflection, on both an academic and a personal level.

Success in the IB is not only determined by a final external examination; a substantial part of the assessment is internally administered by the school (although typically with external quality controls), and this affords students the opportunity to take a significant degree of ownership of their education and to be rewarded for their efforts in school.

The perception that the IBDP is elitist in nature is to a large extent unjustified. While the demands of the programme are definitely greater than those of a typical US high school diploma, they are on a par with those of a typical North American AP programme. In relation to British-style education, while it is harder to achieve high scores in the IBDP than it is in A-levels, the programmes are comparable on the pass level – in fact many students who pass the IBDP with 24 points would have struggled to gain Ds and Cs at A-level (see Chapter 4 in our Cambridge Press book). Furthermore, US inner city IBDP schools have reported an overall lift in student performance and morale after the introduction of the IBDP, and this experience is shared by international schools who cater to students from a wide spectrum of academic ability. (See the case study chapters in Part Two of our Cambridge Press book.)

Having noted that the IB programme is academically more accessible than is often presumed, both students and their parents nevertheless need to realize that its rigorous standards and the substantial workload require a great deal of commitment, organization and initiative. For students not able to finish the full diploma (consisting of the core and 6 academic subjects, see chapter 2), the IB offers the opportunity to obtain individual subject certificates. However, individual IB subject certificates enjoy much less recognition at universities than the full diploma, so students lacking sufficient drive may well be better off in traditional national programmes, since partially completed programmes of national systems usually afford better recognition than those of the IB. In view of this, parents will need to query the school's admission policies very carefully, and how this impacts on a student's admission opportunities at the target universities. As always, there are no air-tight rules: some schools have reported that certain Australian universities have been very welcoming towards IB certificate students.

More generally, parents need to ask the school specific questions about university acceptance. While it is true that many top universities are well aware of the IB diploma and regard it highly, some admissions officers may be new to it, and for some universities, an IB diploma holder may actually be at a relative disadvantage compared with a national degree holder. These problems can usually be overcome through hard work on the part of the school's tertiary advisers, who should canvass the target universities well before the IB programme is offered to students. (Naturally the IBO is continually working hard as well – and with significant success – to address such recognition issues; refer to its website).

On a final note of caution, students who are likely to move schools during the course of their IBDP, should seek careful advice on their IBDP package choice lest they get stranded later at their new school. More details on all these issues can be found in chapter 3.

### **Key messages to teachers**

Teachers joining an IBDP school will become members of a worldwide professional body, which offers regular opportunities for professional development. The IBDP affords them an international perspective on teaching and learning. The programme is clearly formulated, but it allows and encourages teachers to experiment with ideas and practices, even to teach completely new concepts such as those featuring in the core programme. The introduction of the IBDP could potentially mean smaller class sizes, since the IBO strongly recommends a limit of 25 students per class. Being part of an IB school is clearly an asset for those who work there. The implementation of the IBDP does not mean that teachers have to start all over again. But a new programme coupled with the relative lack of good textbooks (see above) may well mean that teachers have to consider a wider range of resources and pick the best of each. While teaching the IBDP is initially more work, it clearly enhances the

teaching experience and builds teacher confidence in the longer term.

In summary, implementation of the IB diploma will require commitment and a lot of work – but that hard work will be rewarded with better outcomes for students, international mobility, and potentially better remuneration packages. The increased marketability of teachers, especially in the private school sector, further provides an IB school with an incentive to create an attractive working environment, which benefits students as well.

### **Key messages to the school management**

The quality of learning for students is improved with the IB diploma; the opportunity for quality teacher professional development is enhanced; and the image and competitive position of the school will improve with successful implementation of the IBDP. Furthermore, the school will gain a sense of shared purpose and mission – *Education for life* – which boosts morale. The school will have access to a worldwide pool of teachers who can be contracted for service. Finally, the introduction of the IBDP means a ready-made quality programme that can be integrated with feeder systems and with tertiary institutions.

On the side of caution, a school adopting the DP must prepare itself for significant investments in terms of time, effort and money. It is easy to spend too little initially, but in our opinion this is unwise, both from an educational and a business perspective. Mistakes made initially tend to get magnified by concerned parties and may well lead to parents withdrawing students from the IBDP or from the school altogether (see the case studies in our Cambridge publication). In the time leading up to IBDP authorization, a school will have to invest in the professional development of its staff. Following this, teachers' salaries may well have to be revised upwards in order not to lose staff immediately to higher paying institutions after providing them with IB training; maximum class size may have to shrink; and the IBO has strict requirements in terms of IT and library provision. As mentioned earlier, a school may also have to invest significant efforts in getting the IB diploma accepted by target universities, well before proposing the IBDP to parents.

While the authorization procedure typically takes less than 2 years, a school must allow up to 5 years for the IB diploma to fully establish itself in the school community: there will be no such thing as an overnight success here. It is very important that all stakeholders accept this fact and are committed to ensuring that the IBDP is allowed to grow successfully well before the whole process begins. Likewise, all parties concerned must have a realistic picture of the cost and accept it as a worthwhile investment.

As a final word of caution, if a school is running programmes parallel to the IB, care needs to be taken that the IB does not erroneously end up being perceived as a separate elite programme – as a school within a school. The IBDP programme needs to be fully integrated with the rest of the school curriculum to avoid conflicts and/or fragmentation.

### **Key messages to the wider region and possibly the nation**

Since a number of schools will have the government represented as a stakeholder in one form or another, it may be important that a school can communicate on the regional/national level as well. Not only will the best and brightest students stay in their home country but foreigners may be attracted by the opportunity to study in an internationally recognized programme. With the IBDP network spanning over 100 countries, a nation whose schools adopt the IBDP places itself squarely in a global educational community. Opportunities for exchange are vastly expanded. Students will be taught the skills necessary to bring about desired change within their own society, while staying true to local values and customs. On the downside, the presence of DP schools could introduce the risk of the national school system being viewed as a second-tier system.

As a final point on the upside, all stakeholders will benefit from the new systems of learning associated with the IBO, as well as from access to its strong and developing research base

which relies on input from dedicated schools and national education systems the world over.

No organization is flawless, but the IBO does take criticism seriously and responds to it in the spirit of its own philosophy. Since concerns may be raised anywhere around the world and at any time by force of the IBO's own constitution, the academic content is by necessity one of dynamic and measured change. While this can be frustrating from the perspective of a single school trying to establish good routines, history has shown that any errors are quickly rectified and that long-term changes are invariably for the better.

One could argue that being small (around 50,000 students and 1000 schools worldwide were involved in the May 2002 and 2003 examinations) makes it easy to retain both quality and flexibility, and that these virtues may diminish if the current annual growth of around 10% is maintained. But the IBDP has been around for over 30 years, and 30 years of continual fine-tuning and a constitution assuring transparency, stakeholder sensitivity and quality delivery surely seems a powerful guarantor of continued reliability in the future.

## Chapter 2. Overview of the Diploma Programme

This chapter features a brief overview of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme (DP) and the way it is assessed. It establishes the terminology used freely in the rest of this booklet.

### 1. Content of the IB Diploma Programme: the hexagon

1.1 Constraints of the IB DP

1.2 A few details on the IB core programme

1.3 School-based subjects and trans-disciplinary subjects

### 2. The central philosophy and aims of the IB Diploma Programme

### 3. The assessment

3.1 Statistical analysis of subject grade distributions

### 1. Content of the IB diploma curriculum: the hexagon

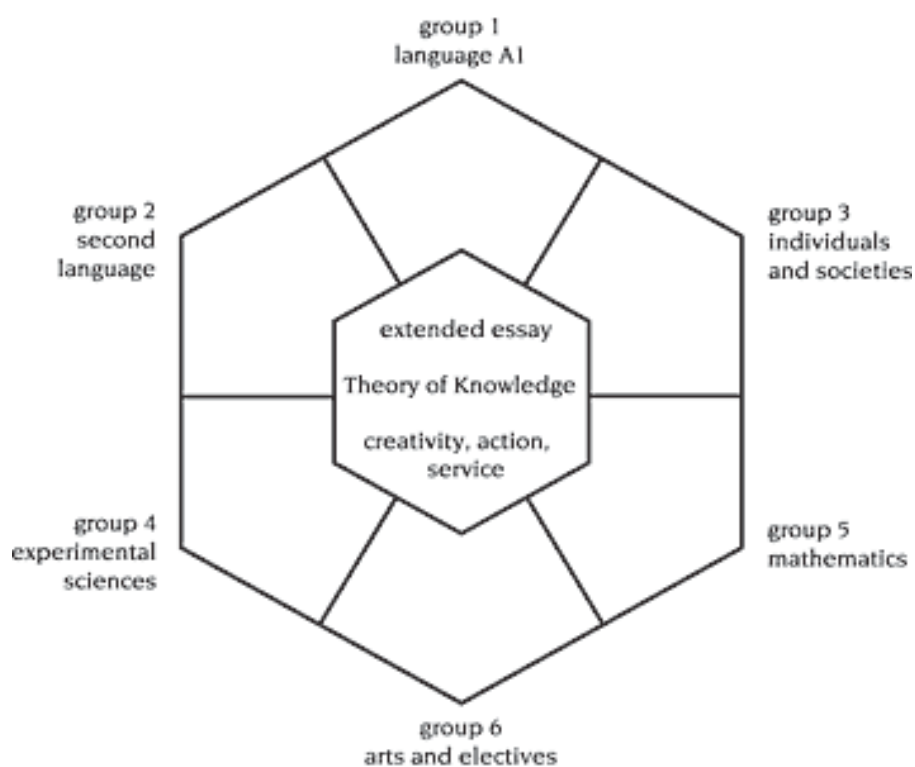


Figure 1. The IB diploma hexagon

The content of the IB Diploma Programme (offered in English, French and Spanish) is displayed graphically in the IBO's trademark diagram, the hexagon (see figure 2.1). The details are explained below.

## 1.1 Constraints of the IB DP

All diploma students must complete the **core** programme (in the centre of the hexagon), and they must study 6 academic subjects – one subject from each corner of the hexagon (i.e. from each **group**). Of the six academic subjects, the IBO stipulates that at least 3 and no more than 4 subjects must be taken at **Higher Level (HL)**, comprising 240 teacher–student contact hours; and the rest at **Standard Level (SL)**, 150 contact hours. It is up to the student and the school advisers to determine which particular subjects are taken at HL, but typically these will be subjects that students may want to pursue at tertiary level.

The 6 subjects must be chosen subject to the following constraints.

### *First and second languages (groups 1 and 2)*

The group 1 language is a literature course in the student's mother tongue or best language and is labeled A1. In Singapore, for example, this could be English A1 or Malay A1 or Chinese A1. A1 courses can be class-taught or, in the case of minority languages, self-taught. 45 A1 languages are offered, but other languages can be made available on request, given sufficient notice. Group 2 is a second or foreign language programme that can be taken at beginner's platform (ab initio), intermediate platform (B), or fluent platform (A2, offered to bilingual students). Unlike A1, only the most common group 2 languages can be taken at all three levels, e.g. Spanish ab initio, Spanish B or Spanish A2. Other languages, for instance Hindi, can only be taken as language B but are not available at ab initio or A2 level. Schools wishing to teach group 2 courses other than those automatically available must make a special request to the IBO.

Both group 1 and 2 languages can be taken at either HL or SL, except ab initio and self-taught A1 languages, which are only available at SL. Note further that the IBO does not impose English as a mandatory language (unless it happens to be the student's first language), but that many schools insist (for budgetary or other reasons) that all students study English as their A1 language, whether it is their best language or not. If this brief summary strikes the reader as somewhat bewildering, that is because it is so. Chapter 4 provides a little more detail; for full details, see our Cambridge Press publication.

### *Individuals and societies (group 3)*

History, economics and psychology enjoy great popularity; geography, business and management, and information technology in a global society are also widely taken; also available are philosophy, anthropology and Islamic history.

### *Experimental sciences (group 4)*

These are usually biology, chemistry or physics, but also available are design technology and environmental systems (the latter at SL only).

### *Mathematics and computer science (group 5)*

Choice is between one HL course and two SL courses, one of which is quite accessible, while the other is an introduction-to-calculus type course. The HL course is hard, covering more than a typical US college first-year mathematics programme.

### *The arts and free electives (group 6)*

The arts subjects are visual arts, music and theatre arts. As a free elective, students can choose a third language or one of the group 5 subjects *computer science* and *further mathematics* (further mathematics is an SL course equivalent in content to a typical first semester university pure mathematics course, and has no equivalent in any national system). Usually, however, students use the free elective option to choose another social study from group 3 or a science subject from group 4 so as to allow them a degree of specialization necessary for university.

Students are allowed to take a seventh subject, from any group, at the discretion of the school.



Please keep in mind that the subjects listed above are those made available for study by the IBO. No school will offer all subjects, and many smaller schools will only be able to offer relatively few – although each school will have to offer subjects from each group. Typically, in group 1 and 2, most schools will offer English at both A1 (fluent) and B (intermediate) level, and one or two of the most popular languages as a second language; only experienced IB schools tend to run self-taught languages. In group 3, history is most commonly offered, followed by economics (although some schools only run business and management and no economics); regional preferences determine the other group 3 offerings. In group 4, schools typically offer the classical sciences physics, chemistry and biology, with the other science subjects trailing far behind in worldwide popularity. In group 5, most schools offer mathematics at HL, and at least one of the SL math courses. Finally, amongst the arts subject in group 6, music is most commonly offered, but visual arts and theatre arts may also be on offer.

## **1.2 A few details on the IB core programme**

The heart of the IB DP is embodied in its three mandatory core components, summarized below and described in greater detail in chapter 4. Since these components do not feature in national education systems, they are typically least understood, both in terms of their content and their value. For experienced teachers, however, the core is really what makes the DP so special and worthwhile, since it allows students to mature on a personal level. Although there are only few marks allocated to the core (see section 3 below), failure to complete a core component means failing the entire diploma. Increasingly, universities attach great importance to the qualities inherent in the core programme since it is in this area that students can truly demonstrate their personal qualities and drive.

### *Creativity, Action, Service (CAS)*

Students must show sustained and active participation in CAS, in each of the three CAS components. Typically this amounts to half a day per week over the two-year course, or 150 hours altogether (keeping in mind that CAS should not be approached as an hour-counting exercise). The goal of CAS is that students learn about themselves, about others, and about the wider community by *doing*, and that they learn to reflect on the knowledge they acquire this way. Uniquely, CAS insists that students truly extend themselves into domains where they have never ventured before: a soccer player attempting a dance course; an ice-skater combating her fear of height by joining a climbing club; a student helping to establish a sister school in the developing world; or initiating or contributing to a reading program for blind children.

As teachers witness time and time again, students who *experience* that things previously thought impossible or uninteresting can be accomplished or stimulating, are infused with a confidence that translates directly back into the classroom: “if I can overcome my fear of heights, surely I can tackle this physics chapter!”

### *Theory of Knowledge (TOK)*

This is a philosophical course that considers the ways in which people acquire knowledge as well as the typical strengths and weaknesses of each of these ways. Throughout, an awareness of the impact of culture on knowledge plays a key role. To give some examples, rather than asking the question ‘should we abandon or introduce the death penalty?’, TOK could ask: ‘how does your culture / community influence your view on the death penalty?’, ‘Why are Americans more inclined to support the death penalty than Europeans – and are they, really? How do you know?’ Rather than learning Popper’s view on the scientific merits of Freud’s theory, TOK could ask ‘Give a psychologist and a biologist perspective on AIDS – how does each profession obtain knowledge, and what are the inherent strengths and weaknesses of their respective approaches? What do the people in your neighborhood think of AIDS? How do you think they reached this view, and how valid is it?’

Not only does this course allow students to explore, express, and contrast their own cultural

and personal backgrounds with those of others, but it also allows them to reflect on the different academic disciplines, their commonalities and differences, and so become truly rounded individuals with a proven ability to be objective, balanced critical thinkers appreciating different perspectives of knowledge, be it from the arts, religion, (social) sciences, or language.

Unlike CAS, versions and variations of which are becoming increasingly common in national education systems, there is no equivalent of TOK in any national education system. The IBO prefers to see as many teachers as possible involved in the teaching of this inter-disciplinary course.

#### *Extended essay (EE)*

Students are required to write an extended essay of 4,000 words, for which there is again no equivalent in most traditional high school programmes. The extended essay is a research project in a subject of the student's choice (e.g. in mathematics, economics or a language) which involves work outside the taught subject material. University admissions officers often look closely at this aspect of a student's work because the extended essay has an affinity with research work required at tertiary level, and can be a telling indicator of a student's drive, passion, and true academic ability.

### **1.3 School-based subjects and trans-disciplinary subjects**

Within the hexagon, we finally briefly mention the role of the school-based subjects and the trans-disciplinary subjects, exciting courses that mark the future of the DP.

#### *School-based subjects (SBS)*

These are subjects developed by experienced IB schools in consultation with the IBO that typically meet a local (national) need or requirement. About 20 such SBSs currently exist; they are only offered at SL. The few schools experienced enough to offer an SBS should also be experienced enough to explain the merits of the course to the parents. Therefore we won't go into more detail in this booklet – please refer to our Cambridge publication.

#### *Trans-disciplinary subjects (TDS)*

These are subjects that satisfy the requirements of two groups at the same time, with a view to fostering cross-subject understanding and to provide greater flexibility in package choice. These subjects are: *text and performance* (groups 1 and 6), *ecosystems and societies* (groups 3 and 4) and *world cultures* (groups 3 and 6). They can only be taken at SL and only at selected pilot schools, though once the courses have been tested and recognized they will be on offer to all schools. For more details, please refer again to our Cambridge publication.

## **2. The central philosophy and aims of the IB Diploma Programme**

The *overall* DP aims truly drive the programme development: to understand the starting point and direction of the DP, one must understand its overall aims and philosophy. Certain subjects only partially fulfill some of the overall IB aims, but by identifying the areas where a subject fails to fully meet the central aims one can confidently predict its future direction.

Below we summarize and discuss the main DP aims.

#### *To provide an internationally acceptable qualification for entry into higher education.*

Whereas many national education systems understandably focus on national university entry requirements, the IBDP aims to provide an education that is acceptable to universities the world over. As we mentioned earlier, the IBO has made great strides in fulfilling this aim (in particular with top universities in the English-speaking world) and it is continually working to resolve any outstanding recognition issues. The IBO website features favorable quotes of famous universities, although some of these quotes are out of date and thus a little too rosy.

The message to parents therefore is: please check with the school that the programme your child is following is acceptable to the universities you have in mind and supports his/her career choices. As we mentioned earlier, special care needs to be taken if it is likely your child will not complete the full diploma and takes subject certificates instead, in which case the national education system may well be the better option – for more details, see chapter 3.

*To promote international education and intercultural understanding.*

This means that students, in addition to learning about themselves and their own culture, also learn to appreciate the viewpoints and backgrounds of others, something increasingly important – even vital – in a rapidly globalizing world. The DP core, the social sciences (group 3) and the languages (group 1 and 2) are natural vehicles to prepare the students for global citizenship, but science, mathematics, and the arts are expected to contribute equally to this goal. Whereas a traditional science project might focus on, for example, the technical aspects of cooling, a typical IBDP science project could (and should) look at air-conditioners from a multitude of scientific angles, including global environmental issues. Another example: IBDP students of aesthetics subjects are required to demonstrate explicit understanding of work from cultures different to their own – it is not possible to concentrate on technical expertise in Western music alone, for instance. In general, for any subject, the highest marks are reserved for work that demonstrates an overall global understanding of the topic under scrutiny.

This overall DP aim furthermore manifests itself on the subject level: the subject syllabuses reflect what is considered important around the globe, rather than reflecting national trends. For international schools, this aim will appear familiar and natural. However, around half of the current IB schools are national schools used to a sometimes strongly nationally biased traditional education system. For such schools, pursuit of this aim can have a very profound impact and may necessitate substantial change.

*To develop a holistic view of knowledge that emphasizes the connections between the various fields of learning.*

To have a holistic knowledge of an issue means to have an overall, multi-faceted knowledge of the issue. To return to the example of air-conditioning mentioned above, students could be expected to be able to confidently address issues of science (e.g. how do air-cons work in principle / what chemicals, if any, are involved and what is their role), issues of social sciences and business (e.g. how did air-con change the economy and life in the tropics / comment on the exploding business of car air-con, both in terms of economy and environment), issues of language (e.g. how is air-con being advertised around the world), issues of design (e.g. how important is the air-con's design for its sales). Typically, it would be less important for a student to have any specialized technical knowledge of an air-con than to be able to address a range of issues surrounding air-cons with confidence, and comment intelligently on the connections between those issues. This is not to say that the IBDP shies away from 'hard' knowledge – its HL mathematics and science programmes for instance rank amongst the world's toughest – but that it aims to teach each section of knowledge within the context of the wider world. Naturally, such focus on overall skills (rather than content) prepares students well for their future in a rapidly changing world.

This particular DP aim is perhaps the least developed across the subjects. This is because teachers may feel less confident in addressing issues outside their area of expertise, and because in certain subjects (such as mathematics), the IBO could do much more to illuminate teachers on understanding and implementing this aim in the classroom. One can therefore predict with confidence more active and practical development of this aim across all subjects in the years ahead. The mathematics and science chapters in our Cambridge book contain many examples that illustrate this aim concretely.

*To educate the whole person, emphasizing intellectual, personal, emotional and social growth in a student-centred philosophy.*

This aim is most naturally tied to the DP core, but all subjects are expected to contribute (although the IBO could definitely do more to guide teachers on how to personalize their teaching in certain subjects). To give an example from a subject such as mathematics (which may seem fairly non-personal by nature): one could investigate the problem of how *fast* each individual student can throw a baseball, and then further personalize the project by applying the insights gained to a sport of personal interest such as hockey, karate, or golf. Such projects can be partly of a collaborative nature, and thus develop the whole person as stated in the aim. (See our Cambridge book for more details).

The term *student-centred education* is very important in current educational thinking and merits some additional detailed explanation. In the past (and currently also in parts of Asia or in France for instance), educational systems were what one could call *teacher-centred*. In simplistic terms, this means that the teacher imparts knowledge to the student, who is expected to listen and reproduce this knowledge during exams. Many education systems (not just the IB), however, are shifting the balance to a more student-centred education, which means, again in simplistic terms, that the education is tied, as much as possible, to the interests of the individual student. Using the baseball example again, rather than just teaching about the mathematical orbit of freely flying objects (such as baseballs) and then do some paper exercises on the subject, the teacher could take the students out to the field to record *how far* each student can throw a baseball, and then ask each student to figure out what this implies for the speed of the ball as it leaves his or her hand. Once results are obtained, can students explain why they can throw much faster than they can run? This exercise completed, the teacher could invite students to apply the insights they've gained to their own favorite sport. If that favorite sport happens to be karate, the ultimate question is: can you estimate the speed of your hand at the moment of impact? And is it possible to verify your calculations experimentally? Obviously, such an approach leaves plenty of opportunity for the students to draw different disciplines together, work together, do (internet) research to compare personal results with those publicly available, and so forth. Such an approach satisfies not only this aim, but the previous and following aim as well.

In most subjects (other than mathematics or science) it is more obvious how to place the student in the center of the learning process: study your favorite writer, critically analyze your favorite TV show, or investigate an international business firm you have an interest in.

In terms of assessment, student-centred education also means that not all components of the course go through a final exam (**external assessment**), but that serious efforts are made to assess students through internal work (**internal assessment**), which allows the students to be rewarded for efforts at school by teachers who know them well.

While educational experts generally agree that student-centred education, properly implemented, is a magnificent tool to motivate students since it provides instruction that students can relate directly to their own lives (whereas teacher-centred education leaves a lot of students disengaged), there is a word of caution here. Care must be taken that objective (criterion referenced) assessment standards are maintained when education is personalized. The IBDP does this, first, by limiting the percentage allocated to internal assessment (see subject percentages below, which are between 20-50%). Secondly, it does this by imposing external, centrally administered, quality controls on internal assessment. This is called **external moderation**, and it typically means (for most subjects) that one or more independent outside experts will verify the quality of a school's internal assessment by requesting a sample of assessed work, after which the whole school's internal grades (for that subject) might be 'marked up or down'. Most IBDP educators agree that the process of external moderation works very well, and thus allows for a student-centred, yet at the same time rigorously tested educational system. As a matter of fact, the percentage of internally assessed work could well increase without sacrificing educational quality (in fact, the IBO favours this) but reluctance of European universities in particular to recognize internally

assessed work, will probably put a brake on such developments for the near future.

The most likely development of this particular aim in the near future, therefore, is the construction of more detailed and better quality subject syllabuses with more support material, plus more effective assessment tools to concretely measure success in this aim.

To place the IBO's efforts towards fulfilling this aim in an international context, one could say that North American education generally puts even more emphasis on educating "the whole person, emphasizing intellectual, personal, emotional and social growth in a student-centred philosophy" (and often awards much greater percentages of overall assessment towards personal attitude and effort). Critics, however, point out that the lack of external quality control in the US is a problem (quality is often defined through an individual school's reputation, which may be neither earned nor just). On the other hand, the IBO could learn a lot of from American efforts to spell out objectives clearly and in detail, and to critically define and develop the means and tools to deliver and assess these.

European countries, on the whole, have largely recognized the value of this aim but typically lag behind the IBDP in ensuring its implementation (France perhaps most notably amongst the big European countries with its emphasis on academic student-independent standards).

In most Asian countries, the debate has only just begun with many people recognizing the need to move away from teacher-led and 'rote-learning' based education.

*To develop inquiry and thinking skills, and the capacity to reflect upon and to evaluate actions critically.*

This aim is once again shared by many other educational systems around the world, with stages of development in national education systems around the world roughly paralleling the aim above. The idea is closely linked to the previous aim: students should not be passive recipients of knowledge, but rather develop an ability to link the knowledge they receive actively to the world around them. A geography student on holiday should not only be able to recognize the lessons learned in class, but should ideally also be aware when the lessons in class do not seem to apply, and attempt to reconcile the apparent differences between theory and practice. If this is not possible, he should wonder why this might be so. A student in physics should not stop with an equation of the orbit of a parachutist in free fall, but should stop and think about what that equation is telling her: that the parachutist will gradually attain constant speed, and understand why this is indeed what one expects. Conversely, if the equation tells her that the parachutist continues to accelerate, she should realize that this is impossible and find out why and where things went wrong. A student engaging in a CAS service activity should attempt to realize why it is that he felt uncomfortable during a visit to an orphanage, and why he sat on the sidelines when others were telling stories or swapping favorite songs. The answer may well be different for each student, but the idea is that each student reflects on what has happened; do they want to get involved, and if so, in what way? Are these proposed actions really helpful for the orphans? Did you ask them what they wanted? A business student should instinctively verify how his own buying habits tally with the marketing theories discussed in class, and recognize a marketing ploy when he sees one. Does this recognition translate into actions, such as buying a cheaper brand they know must be equally good? And if that doesn't happen, why not?

All examples illustrating the aims above represent an ideal situation. No student is expected to do all these things perfectly. Rather, the objective of the IBDP is to instill in students a basic awareness of all of the above aims, and endow them with an ability to apply all of the aims, albeit not all in one situation, on a regular basis.

Inevitably, particularly due to the different regional perspectives alluded to above, not all parents will be comfortable with the aims set out above, and neither are all schools equally committed to them. When parents contemplate sending their children to an IBDP school, however, it is very important that they be convinced of – or come to fully accept – the

intrinsic value of the objectives referred to above (as teachers who have truly experienced different systems invariably are). After all, it makes no sense to enroll your child in a system you don't believe in, and it is unhelpful for your children's education to resist certain parts of their education (such as the DP core), especially when you will be powerless to change things during the two years of your child's education within a global examination system such as the IBDP.

Likewise, it is in the best interest of your children to insist that the school takes the aims outlined above seriously as well. A good indicator of the school's true commitment to the IBDP is how seriously it takes the IBDP core – the core should take a proud central role, and not a secondary one, way behind all the academic subjects. There are three practical reasons for this: if a school doesn't take the core seriously, it has likely not committed fully to the aims above, and *there is no doubt that this will have a negative impact on the subject grades*. The IBDP assessment measures, to an ever-greater extent, the successful mastery of the central aims in each of the subjects. Of course, no school would wish to run the risk of running a programme that lowers the students' subjects grades, so parents need not have any anxieties at all that a school is overdeveloping the core at the expense of the individual subjects. *An emphasis on the core simply means a better programme, period*. Secondly, universities, and certainly the better ones, have an increasing interest in students educated according to the aims above, as they themselves are global institutions by nature and are rooted in creative thinking rather than factual recitation. In addition, the school's report on the student's achievements in the core components allow university admission officers a close look at the student as an individual, something that academic grades on their own could never do. Thirdly and finally, one should question the motives of a school that offers a programme that it doesn't fully believe in.

None of this information should be taken to imply that all IB schools must follow the same script – the case studies in our Cambridge publication attest to this. What is important is that the school commits to – and clearly communicates it is committed to – the central IBDP philosophy.

### **3. The assessment**

The IB diploma subjects are examined by a combination of continuous coursework and examinations at the end of the two-year programme. The exams are in the first three weeks of May, with resits in November. For most southern hemisphere schools the order is reversed, with students sitting examinations in November and taking resits in May.

In each subject the student can gain a score of 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). The maximum for the six subjects is thus  $6 \times 7 = 42$  points. There are up to 3 points – called *bonus points* – for both the TOK and extended essay (EE) together, but a student who fails both TOK and the EE, or who fails to satisfy the requirements of the CAS programme, will not be awarded a diploma (s/he may instead be awarded individual subject certificates for each subject successfully completed, but as we mentioned earlier, such subject certificates carry much less recognition than a full diploma).

The maximum score for a diploma is therefore 45 points (attained by about 0.2% of the worldwide cohort in May 2002 and May 2003). The minimum score needed to gain a diploma is 24 points (provided that all other requirements are satisfied). A good university will expect something like 28–36 points (about 4–6 points for each of the six subjects). Top universities might ask for 37–40 points. Students seeking scholarships need to aim for at least 36 points.

IB examiners and teachers comprising members from many continents and cultures write the syllabuses and examination papers. There is a 7-year review cycle for all subjects which aims for continual improvement and inclusion of new developments in each subject area. Minor changes are introduced on a regular basis, and major changes every 7 years.

The IB diploma examination system is graded against absolute standards (with some grade adjustments if necessary) and is thus in particular not **norm-referenced** (i.e. there is no fixed percentage of students achieving a certain grade). This inevitably leads to a different grade distribution every year and for every subject (see section 3.1 below), but the IBO has made progress in moderating these differences. **Grade inflation** (ever higher grades with each passing year) has not happened in the IB diploma. Since this sets the DP apart from many other examination systems, it is expected that the IBO remains committed to keeping it that way.

All subjects in the hexagon, with the exception of the core, have a written examination, consisting typically of two or three papers. Students still finish their diploma within three weeks of intensive written examinations but these examinations are limited to a maximum of 5 hours per HL subject and 3 hours per SL subject. In addition, every subject has a coursework component, which may be internally assessed (and externally moderated by the IBO), or internally supervised but externally assessed. The assessment percentage contributed by the coursework varies, as illustrated in table 2.

Group	Coursework
Group 1: Language A1	30%
Group 2: Second language language languages	30%
Group 3: Individuals and societies	20–30%
Group 4: Experimental sciences	24–36%
Group 5: Mathematics and computer science	20%
Group 6: The arts	30–100%
TOK	100%
Extended essay	100%

**Table 2. Assessment weight of coursework**

Oral and written communication is stressed, as are group work, an ability to synthesise information, and analytical skills. The IBO encourages students and schools to take the initiative, and thus favours coursework as a means of assessment; it is held back from giving coursework greater weight by the entry requirements of some universities.

The system of assessment is recognizable to anyone familiar with US or UK examination board methods: there are standardization, moderation and grade award meetings. The whole assessment process is completed six weeks after the last examination, and students can access their results by means of a secure PIN code on the IBO website in the first week of July (or January for November candidates).

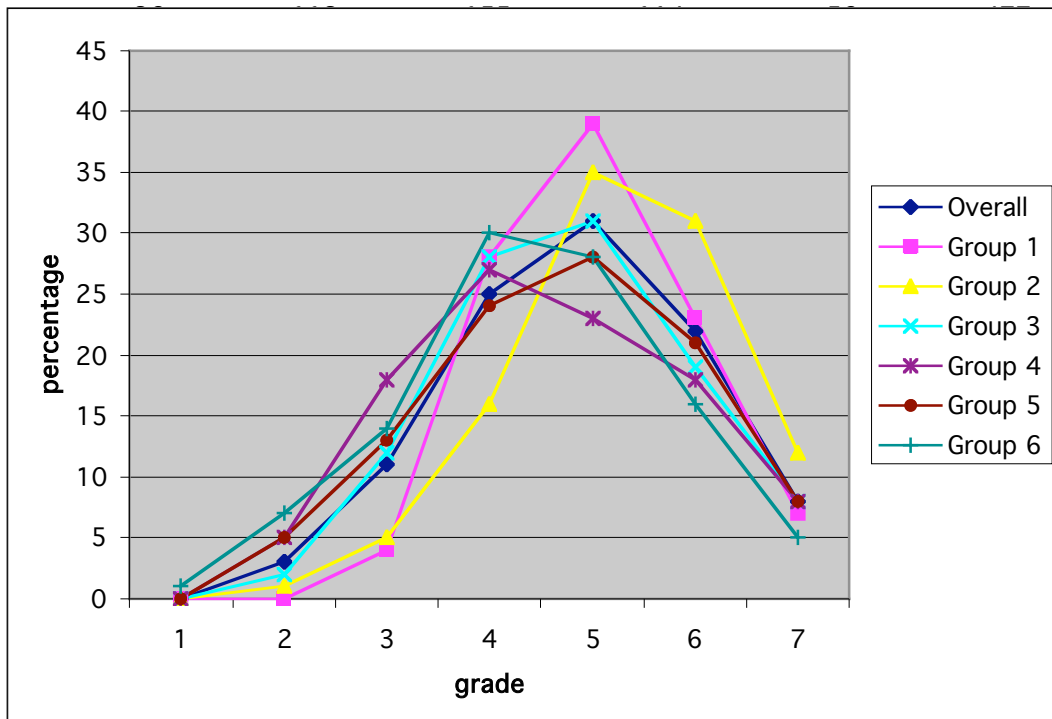
### 3.1 Statistical analysis of subject grade distributions

Table 3 and Figure 4 below show a statistical analysis based on the leaflet of raw data that the IBO calls *the Statistical Bulletin*. The table lists two important statistics. The *average grade* for each group of subjects indicates roughly how difficult that group is for the student. The *standard deviation* is a measure of the spread of the grades (i.e. the ability range of students) and thus roughly indicates how difficult the subject is for teachers to teach, especially for teachers who face the full ability range. The significant differences in these two numbers across the groups clearly demonstrate the absence of norm-referencing; figure 4 illustrates this. (The striking similarity of the figures for May 2002 and May 2003, however, suggests that individual groups aim roughly for a similar grade distribution each year – only in the Arts there was a marked shift in grades from 2002 to 2003).

Using these statistical interpretations, it appears that sciences are somewhat tough on both student and teacher; arts were the toughest of all in 2002 (but they left this position to the sciences in 2003); the individuals and societies group is the ‘model citizen’ of the DP; while languages are somewhat gentler on both student and teacher.

Average grades and standard deviations per group 2002/2003	Average grade	S.D. (spread)	Average grade	S.D
	May 2002	May 2002	May 2003	May 2003
<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>1.5</b>
Group 1: Language A1	5.0	0.9	5.0	0.9
Group 2: Second language	5.3	1.2	5.2	1.3
Group 3: Individuals and societies	4.8	1.4	4.8	1.4
Group 4: Experimental sciences	4.6	1.8	4.5	1.8
Group 5: Mathematics and computer science	4.7	1.7	4.7	1.9
Group 6: The arts and free electives	4.4	1.7	4.6	1.3

**Table 3. Average grades and their standard deviations (2002 and 2003)**



**Figure 4. Grade distribution per group, illustrating absence of uniform norm-referencing (This figure is for 2002, as 2003 is almost identical)**



## **Chapter 3.**

### **Some important questions to ask your school**

This chapter features an overview of some important questions to ask the school to which you are considering sending your child.

- 1. Questions to ask prospective or recently (IB-) authorized IBDP schools**
- 2. Pre-IBDP, post-IBDP, parallel curricula, certificates, and admission issues.**
- 3. General academic matters**
- 4. Things you do not have to worry about**

#### **1. Questions to ask prospective or recently IB-authorized schools**

The questions discussed in this section are relevant to all schools, but they apply in particular to schools in the consideration stage of offering the IBDP in the near future, or those that are completely new to it. This is not to imply that schools new to the DP are somehow suspect. Having relatively little experience does not mean a school cannot do a good job. In fact, the initial enthusiasm and energy going into establishing a new programme often means your child will get much more individual attention than s/he would have received in a more established system. This is especially true since the initial student numbers and class sizes are likely to be quite low. Inevitably, mistakes will be made, and nobody should expect everything to run smoothly right from the start. On average it takes around 5 years for the programme to establish itself fully in a school, but if all stakeholders accept this fact, there is every reason to expect that the initial enthusiasm and attention can balance the lack of experience.

Nevertheless, new IB schools have been known to make serious avoidable errors – and which attentive involved parents could have helped prevent – and these are the issues this section concentrates on.

*Are all stakeholders (management, teachers, administration, parents, and students) fully informed about all the advantages and challenges that come with the DP?*

This is a question you will not have to ask the school: the answer should be immediately clear to you as a parent. Information evenings and information booklets should have been prepared. These leaflets should be honest about the advantages as well as the sacrifices and challenges; the school itself ideally discusses the pros and cons raised in this booklet, without any prompting from anyone. There are two reasons why transparency to all stakeholders is very important: first, the IBO insists on candour and complete disclosure as part of its authorization procedures, so a school could risk failing to receive authorization (although this is not very common) if it does not communicate all aspects of implementing the IBDP to its stakeholders. Secondly, and more importantly, experience shows that schools who have put the time and effort into engaging and convincing the skeptics with sound arguments are simply more successful with the introduction of their DP. Schools that do not recognize or create awareness of the serious challenges that implementing the IBDP pose for a school and are surprised by those challenges later on, invariably pay dearly for their mistakes. It is only natural for parents (along with everyone else) to lose confidence in a programme, and consequently the school offering it, when confronted with unexpected major challenges. Such loss of confidence often leads to withdrawal of students and the reputation of the school brought into question. Even small mistakes tend to get magnified by worried parents. Many of these worries may well be exaggerated, and parents need to remember what we said above: it is only natural that mistakes occur, but minor mistakes will be corrected at no harm to the students. So parents need to distinguish between minor and major concerns, but schools can help parents do this by outlining the major issues clearly and honestly right from the beginning.

*Does the school have a realistic estimation of the cost involved of introducing the IBDP in terms of effort, time and money?*

We begin by repeating that in terms of time, a school needs typically around 5 years to become fully familiar with the IBDP. As we mentioned before, this need not be a problem at all, as long as everyone is aware of the time requirements and no one has unrealistic expectations.

In terms of costs and effort, the IBO requires, at a minimum, that each of the teachers teaching an IBDP subject has attends one of the many workshops offered at destinations around the world (which typically last 3 days and come with a bill of around US\$ 2500 per teacher [**note**: from here onwards, \$ will always denote US \$]). In terms of overall costs, if one includes travel, accommodation and incidental expenses for training teachers plus library enhancement costs, expanded IT provision, additional administrative staff and equipment, and increased departmental resourcing costs, a relatively well-equipped small school is looking at a minimum initial cost of US \$ 50,000 (and at least about US \$ 25,000 in additional running costs per year).

It is our firm conviction, however, that this cost estimation is far too optimistic, and that schools do themselves a great disservice by spending an amount too close to the required minimum.

An IBDP workshop tends to be a good experience for the more experienced IBDP teachers, but a less fruitful one for teachers new to the IB: new teachers are not going to learn the intricacies of the IB approach to their subject in just a few days. The IBO has responded to this concern by offering separate workshops for beginners, but this initiative has met with mixed reviews: some schools are happy but some lament the lack of contact with more experienced colleagues. Indeed, a frequently heard comment from IB teachers, both new and experienced, is that (apart from the international networking advantages the workshops afford) they often benefit in particular from the informal mingling sessions that take place outside the more formal workshop sessions. So teachers should come fully prepared to make the most of this 'informal time'. This observation also emphasizes that it is important that schools engage the mentoring assistance of experienced IB educators who understand the school's background and characteristics. In personal consultation sessions, teachers and administrators can then ask those questions that are most relevant to them. The IBO, on its part, actively encourages this kind of sharing of expertise. Such personalized consultation, however, will obviously add to the staff-training bill.

We also believe a significant addition to the initial cost may come from the efforts and costs associated with obtaining good university admission advice (see questions below). Then there are the costs attached to the fact that the entire school (not just the high school) will have to undergo changes (for details, see the questions below). Language support programs may prove necessary and thus add further to the costs. In terms of wages, private international schools in particular must seriously consider the scenario that they may have to increase teacher salaries (details below), thus adding to the yearly operating costs. Diploma package constraints may well mean that certain classes must be run with only a handful of students in them. Also, a number of subjects may expertise not available in the existing teaching body for which new teaches must be contracted. There are a number of other issues that may add to the bill such as potentially smaller class sizes, administrative (wage) bills, departmental resources, and marketing bills. A comprehensive list of cost details can be found in our Cambridge Press publication.

Not spending sufficient money initially often means paying the penalty later in terms of far higher costs in later years. Especially if parents start withdrawing students from the programme or from the school altogether, the overall cost due to loss of clients could well be 10 times higher or more, in particular for private schools (see the case studies featuring in our Cambridge Press book). It simply does not make sense for a school to be stingy, either

from an educational or from a business point of view. A more realistic cost estimate would be to spend at least double the minimum cost stipulated by the IBO requirements. In other words, US \$ 100,000 is a more realistic initial cost estimation for a small school, and much more for a bigger school.

Parents need not worry about the details of the costs to the school – but the school should. What parents may wish to verify is that the school has established a *DP feasibility study committee* that looks into the cost analysis, amongst other things (see question below). This may seem like a trivial remark, but it is not unusual for schools to start the IBDP without an adequate cost analysis, so it may not hurt to bring up some of the cost issues listed above to check that the school has done its financial homework.

In conclusion, parents should ask schools to provide a generous budget to ensure a successful and ultimately cost-effective start, and then decide (along with all the other stakeholders), whether these costs are worth it, and if so, how to fund these. As the regional study of Canada in our Cambridge publication recounts, parents of children who are enrolled in other programmes of the school may not be happy to share the extra cost associated with the IBDP, so schools may have to increase the fee for IBDP students (the annual basic fee and examination fees alone account for well over US \$ 500 per student). It may well be the case that parents are prepared to pay a premium to have their children study the IBDP (particularly if its merits have been well-explained), but clearly, such issues are better resolved before the programme starts. Arguments over funding in a programme that is already in operation is the last thing anyone needs.

*Has the school established an IBDP feasibility study committee?*

We referred to this committee in the question above. This committee should conduct a *position audit*, a *gap analysis* and a *cost analysis*, and formulate an *action plan* with a timeframe for DP implementation. The position audit deals with issues such as ‘where is the school now and where does it want to go?’ and, ‘is there a market for offering the IBDP – do we have a market niche?’ At first sight, such questions may seem only important to the school itself and not to the parents, but a badly conducted position audit may lead to a collapse of the programme, which affects everyone including the parents. The gap analysis must establish how the IBDP is different from the existing programs in school, or more generally, what development must take place across the school to enable it to offer the IBDP effectively. The cost analysis was discussed in the previous question, and the meaning of an action plan speaks for itself.

What must be clear from this is that this feasibility committee cannot just be one person. In order to do an accurate gap and cost analysis, the committee will obviously need to comprise the detailed help of the management, and of the department heads, who will need to study the IB programme very seriously and carefully to find out where changes or new resources are needed.

*Are teachers paid well enough?*

Now here’s a question that is going to win you friends amongst the teaching staff! But for private and international schools in particular, it is a very important issue for everyone. As detailed in the case studies in our Cambridge publication, paying lower salaries in comparison to the international market leaves the school open to a serious risk: after a typical 2 year contract, teachers can boast not only their (IBO mandated) IBDP training, but also their years of IB teaching experience. With the number of IB schools growing roughly at 10% a year worldwide, it is easy to find a better-paid job elsewhere, and many teachers do so. This can leave the school with a very high turnover rate and a continually under-experienced staff and continual training costs. In response, some schools try to protect their training investment by making contractual amendments, but of course they are once again constrained here by international standards. In a fluid labor market such as the international teaching world, we feel that the only sustainable policy is to provide an attractive working

environment and adequate remuneration, in line with other reputable international schools. If the school is short on funds, it can draw on modern management insights that demonstrate that job satisfaction can often be achieved very effectively through non-financial means. Creating an environment where all teachers feel valued and cared for, and where they have meaningful responsibilities matching their interest is one example. Establishing a transparent and supportive appraisal system is another. Having salary differentials within the common room may create its own kind of tensions, but such tensions may be avoided by attracting an exceptional and inspirational manager (and setting aside funds for that!). Alternatively, hiring a first-rate management consultant who can suggest a range of relatively cheap but effective measures tailored to the school to improve staff welfare and job satisfaction can be very cost-effective. These comments apply of course to any organization, but when a school embarks on a new programme, it might as well use this opportunity to the full. Parents can do their bit by requesting and supporting such policies.

*Is the teaching staff prepared for the rigours of the DP?*

The IBDP subject materials at HL (Higher Level) and the extended essay place considerable intellectual demands on teachers. Also, in certain subjects, the differences between the IBDP programme and the traditional national programme may be very pronounced. In view of this, it may be necessary to hire new staff. The school should be able to explain eloquently the differences between the existing educational programme and the IBDP, and hence confidently assess the school's need for new staff. For more details on (potential) staffing needs, see section 4.2 of our Cambridge book.

*What will the class size be?*

For any educational system, it is true that students benefit most from a class size between 15 – 25 students, but the IBDP has a very intensive internal assessment component that demands a lot of individual attention for each student. In view of this, class sizes should really be limited to 15 – 20 students, if possible. Naturally, most new schools will start out small, so this should be achievable for the first few years, but for long-term planning, this is an important point to keep in mind.

*Why does the school want to offer the IBDP and is the IBDP suitable for this school?*

This question is of particular importance if the school is non-selective by nature, since the IBDP will necessitate some level of student selection (see questions regarding admission policy below). Another 'identity barrier' may be that the school is highly national in nature (vs international in nature) and will hence have to accept a great change in its existing identity and in the way the subjects are taught.

For some schools the main reason for wanting to adopt the IB is of a business nature: they wish to gain instant credibility by becoming an 'IB World school'. Another business reason is more defensive in nature: the school is losing students to IB schools and therefore feels forced to adopt the IB itself. While we do not feel there is something inherently wrong with business reasons as the primary drivers behind the IB, the experience from the authors of our Cambridge Press book suggests caution: teachers are generally not impressed by such reasons; such reasons tend to go hand in hand with a desire to do things 'on the cheap'; and they may thus fail to translate into the necessary ideological or broad-based support required to deliver the programme effectively. One cannot ignore a business reality, but if the school decides to go ahead with the IBDP, it better adopt the IBDP ideology wholeheartedly, or else risk a business failure in later years.

Whatever may be the case, the feasibility study committee should have a clear and confident answer for the question above to the parents.

*Are there proper safeguards in place to prevent the IBDP from becoming isolated from the rest of the school?*

As discussed in greater detail below, schools that are considering offering the IBDP in

tandem with an existing high school diploma, usually intend to reserve the IBDP for more intellectual, motivated students. This carries the risk that the IBDP will be perceived as – and thus may become – an isolated programme in the school, a ‘school within a school’ reserved for the elite. Should this happen, those not involved in the DP may come to resent it. Careful thought is needed to prevent this, and the school should explain how it aims to prevent this undesirable outcome – see below for more details.

*Has the school established close contact on all levels with similar schools?*

As alluded to in the cost issues, the school should really seek personalized help. There are always schools with a similar background that have introduced the IBDP themselves (preferably not so long ago, so they still remember the challenges). One of the great things about the educational community is the willingness of its members, especially teachers and department heads, to share their experiences to assist the professional development of colleagues, even if they are from another school. Ideally, the school could invite experienced teachers and administrators from other schools over, but if that is difficult, often an email to a distant colleague requesting help will produce an excellent response. The list of all IBDP schools is posted publicly on the IBO website, so there is really no excuse for not contacting other schools, both on the management and teaching level. Much of this advice may come for free, but even if a school has to pay for it, it is money very well spent.

*Has the school studied our IBDP Manual published by Cambridge University Press carefully?*

A self-serving question in part, for sure ☺

Nevertheless, it is a serious one. Cambridge University Press took up our book for a good reason: there was no independent comprehensive information source on the IB at the date of our publication (July 2004), and the absence of such an independent source of information has cost some schools dearly, as is documented in the case studies of our book. In the opinion of the authors, our book is one of the best and most cost/time effective places to start for schools contemplating offering the IBDP. Once the school decides the IBDP could be a worthwhile investment, the next step should be to contact the regional IBO office and acquire the important IBO resources, such as the subject guides.

## **2. Pre-IBDP, post-IBDP, parallel curricula, certificates, and admission issues.**

A great number of schools will also offer middle school programmes (which we will term **pre-IBDP programmes** hereafter), and may well be running other high school programmes in conjunction with the IBDP such as A-levels or an American high school diploma or AP’s (which we will term **parallel programmes** hereafter). Pre-IBDP students from the same school cannot be expected to simply enter the IBDP upon completion of their middle school programme. The special ethos of the IBDP as embodied in its general aims (see chapter 2 section 2) calls for preparation in the earlier years. The IBO therefore correctly insists in its authorization phase that concrete efforts be made to spread the IB ethos around the entire school. Likewise, any parallel programmes must be clearly aligned with the IBDP. While schools will, over time, develop a properly functioning IBDP **admission policy** (i.e. they will be able to gauge fairly which students are able to take on the IBDP and which not), new IBDP schools will need some time to get this right (unless they hire an experienced admission officer, see below). Even experienced schools will still get it wrong every once in a while, meaning that students who were thought capable of doing the IBDP diploma in fact cannot cope. In schools running a parallel, more traditional program, parents will then want to see that their child can ‘drop out’ safely into the traditional program and not be left stranded with nothing. The other drop-out option is the so-called IB certificates, whereby students obtain certificates for the individual subjects they have completed successfully. Parents have to ask hard questions about these drop-out options, as we will detail below.

Having mentioned the link with the pre-DP and parallel programmes (discussed in more detail below), we must talk about the link with the **post IB-DP** education, i.e. the admission into colleges and universities. We shall begin this section with the latter.

*Has the school cleared the IBDP with the target universities?*

While it is true that many top-universities, in particular in the Anglo-Saxon world, are well disposed towards IBDP graduates, easy university acceptance cannot be taken for granted. Certain countries such as Chile have stringent national requirements for entry; certain IBDP mathematics courses are not recognized in countries such as Germany; there may be language requirements; and so on (a fuller list of potential problems is listed in our Cambridge Manual) Even for universities whose favorable quotes feature on the IBO's website, it happens that some university admission officers are still not fully aware of the IBDP, and some of the entry requirements featuring in these quotes are outdated (with universities now generally asking for a slightly higher overall number of points than quoted). The IBO is working hard and with success to win universities over, but the tertiary advisors in the school must work equally hard. They must establish personal contact with the school's target universities to verify that the university advice they give to students and parents is correct. To give an example, one of the schools featuring in the case studies of our Cambridge Manual found, much to its surprise and to the parents' dismay, that some Canadian universities set the entry benchmarks for DP graduates higher than those for national graduates, i.e., a student doing the provincial Ontario curriculum could obtain the same university place with much less work than a IBDP graduate. This phenomenon – that IBDP graduates are welcome at universities but must work harder to earn the same place – occurs elsewhere too. On the other hand, there are also universities that give a premium to IBDP diploma holders and even offer scholarships to them. In short, there is no way around the school doing its own university research, and parents should ask for clear evidence of this.

One successful school strategy to deal with parents' concerns about IBDP admissions is to invite university representatives over on parents' information evenings. Naturally, this strategy is only feasible for a few universities, so international schools in particular must make sure they have established ways to quickly verify admission policies of universities around the world and can swiftly explain the IBDP to those universities that are not fully familiar with it.

The university admission concerns are especially pressing for students who fail to obtain the full diploma and obtain subject certificates instead. While the individual IBDP subjects are excellent courses in the opinion of those familiar with them, the brutal fact is that universities typically give much less recognition to IB subject certificates than to (partially completed) national diplomas. If a school runs parallel programmes, it may be able to offer the parallel diploma should the student fail the IBDP, but if the school is 'IBDP-only' it will not have this option. This point is worth highlighting:

*Particularly if the school is DP-only, what tertiary assistance does it offer to students who fail to obtain the IB diploma?*

The authors do not wish to imply that the only way forward after high school is to go to university. However, all IBO efforts to gain recognition from tertiary institutes is focused on universities only, so from a tertiary education point of view it makes little sense to study the IBDP if the student has no plans to go to university afterwards. So it is a matter of serious concern that many university avenues are closed should a student fail to obtain the full IB diploma – although some Australian and American style colleges may still accept students with certificates only.

This last point marks a difference in the world with regards to university access that is worth highlighting. Unlike other continents, the US universities and colleges manifest an enormous range of quality, from the world's poorest to the world's best, and for US high school education, the picture is the same. There is no doubt in the educational community that the typical American high school diploma based on the 'three R's' (Reading, wRiting, aRithmetic) is a poor education system, and students in this system are most certainly better

off with a few extra IB certificates (see the North America chapter in our Cambridge Press Manual). Our advice to parents of students in these schools is thus very simple: help your school with all your might to offer the IBDP. If your child does not study the 'three R' system, or if US colleges with relaxed admission standards are not an option, then you must seriously ask the school (especially if it is IBDP-only) what tertiary avenues are open should he or she fail to obtain the diploma.

*Has the school got a successful admission policy?*

Although we noted before that the IBDP is not as academically difficult as is often assumed, it definitely requires much more discipline and motivation than most other high school programmes. Should there be good reason to doubt that a student may lack these qualities, he or she may well be better off in a more traditional programme, as argued earlier. In view of all of the above, a school really needs to put a lot of efforts into developing a reliable admission policy that successfully recognizes which students stand a good chance of finishing the full IB diploma. Even if the school has a well-functioning 'drop-out' routine into a parallel programme, morale is likely to suffer if many students have to fall back.

For schools new to the IBDP, ask for its detailed plans on how to quickly develop a successful admission policy, and for experienced schools, simply ask for their diploma success rate.

If your child is not comfortable with the English language, be cautious. The DP is only offered in English, French and Spanish (although the last two make up only a few percent) and schools accepting non-native English speakers must think very carefully about their language policy. Few schools offer the self-taught mother tongue language (although this could well be very successful, see our Cambridge Press Manual) and instead insist that all students study English as their first language. Experience shows, however, that students should at least have a few years of prior exposure to English and should be comfortable with listening, speaking, reading, and writing English if they are to have a decent chance of gaining the diploma. Having an adequate command of the English language is especially important in discussion-based courses such as TOK, which are so central to the DP, as complicated terminology can easily go way over students' heads if they are not fully comfortable with the English language. Many subjects involve a lot of reading (invariably in English) and others demand a lot of written projects. As documented in our Cambridge Press manual, while budgetary or ideological reasons may tempt schools to accept students even when they struggle with English, ultimately such an admission policy is likely to fail, because the school will either have to offer significant additional language support (which takes the focus away from the IBDP itself and adds to the cost) or see a lot of students fail (bad for the students and bad for business). In terms of language it seems, the best – if not the only – sustainable admission policy is to simply insist on a good command of the English language as an admission requirement. If the school does not do this, ask for detailed questions on how it will support those who struggle with English, and how it plans to prevent the presence of such students from slowing down and hence diminishing the value of the whole programme.

*Is the IBDP in the best interests of my child?*

The answer to this question involves honest parental and self assessment of the student. In view of the above, the IBDP is a great programme for mature and academically able students interested in attending tertiary education. Such a student will also have a good command of English, and will be motivated and possess the self-discipline to cope with an individualized programme involving lots of coursework. Typically, the school or year-grade counselor of the previously attended school programme will be able to give the parents a realistic assessment of their child's suitability to do the IBDP. Parents sometimes elect to ignore such advice. All teachers are familiar with the phenomenon of parents convinced that their child has exceptional qualities that have simply gone unrecognized. While it is of course always possible that individual teachers misjudge the potential of students, it very

rarely happens that *all* teachers misjudge a child, and the counselor will thus be in an excellent position to make a reliable judgment. Parents do themselves and their children a great service by listening carefully to the advice of the counselors.

*Does the parallel programme function well as a 'drop-out' option?*

Some of the best IBDP schools in the world offer the IBDP only, but they typically are selective – and with good reason, as we argued above. Most schools, however, offer the IBDP next to an existing more traditional parallel programme. As we have argued above, if a school is not willing to be very selective in its admissions, it has little choice from a tertiary point of view but to offer a drop-out option for those who cannot cope with the full diploma (only offering IB subjects certificates to those who cannot cope with the full diploma may not be in the best tertiary interests of the student as we saw above).

For some parallel systems this drop-out option can work very well. As we said earlier, a school offering a US high school diploma can continue offering it, and any IBDP course completed will simply add value to the high school diploma. As for North-American AP courses, although there can be substantial differences in the AP and IBDP subject material, with elaborate planning on the part of the school a student doing an IB DP course should be able to sit for the corresponding AP as well. However, in addition to the differences in syllabuses (in the academic content) there can be significant logistic differences: AP's, for instance, are often offered as intensive term-long or year-long modules, whereas the IBO strongly recommends that IBDP courses are taught over the full two years. New schools frequently think too lightly of the logistics of the timetabling that is necessary to enable students to fall back, and they may also underestimate the differences in syllabuses. The IBDP generally requires a lot more of individual attention for the student, and its internal assessment and project work is sometimes very different from that of the more traditional programmes, refer to our Cambridge manual for details.

For prospective or new IBDP schools, ask for evidence of a carefully conducted gap analysis by the feasibility study committee. This study should have mapped out exactly the places where the IBDP and the parallel programme overlap and where they differ, and how the gaps will be plugged. Secondly, the school should have constructed a sufficiently synchronized timetable that allows students to change to the parallel system at regular intervals, especially in the first year. More experienced IBDP schools could simply tell you about their 'drop out record', and how the 'drop-outs' have fared.

A seamless integration of the IBDP with parallel programmes is not only necessary from the 'drop-out' point of view, but also to prevent the IBDP from becoming 'an elite school within the school'. If those students who tried and failed can rely on a parallel programme with their self-respect and confidence intact, that goes a long way to achieving that goal. Sharing classrooms and mixing classes when the opportunity is there, and participating in (high) school events together are other key integration facilitators as we noted earlier.

### **3. General academic matters**

In the next chapter, we will deal in greater detail with questions surrounding the individual courses the IBDP offers. This section deals with some of the more general academic matters.

*Is there enough package flexibility?*

Every school faces constraints in the number of subjects it can offer, as is true for any educational programme. Nevertheless, parents and their children need to make sure that the student's main interests are satisfied, in particular that the subjects that hold the student's greatest interest are offered at HL if possible. In addition, some flexibility should be built in so that a student could for instance try mathematics or a science subject at HL, but 'drop back' to mathematics/science at SL should HL prove too difficult, without major upheavals in the students overall package selection.



On the other hand, caution is called for if it is likely that the family and/or the student may move location and/or school during the IB diploma course:

*What package should we choose when it is possible that our family will relocate?*

In this case, it is wise to choose a package from 'traditional' subjects which are likely to be offered in every IB school in the world: In group 1, English is offered everywhere, and Spanish is pretty common in group 2, but while in Asia for instance Chinese or Japanese is widely studied, this may not be available in an IBDP school in Kuwait or Rio de Janeiro. In group 3, history is by far the safest bet, although the regional options will likely differ around the world. Economics is the second most popular subject in group 3 and also widely offered. In group 4, the traditional sciences physics, chemistry and biology are safe bets, while in group 5, mathematics at HL and mathematical methods (at SL) are very likely offered everywhere. *Mathematical studies* at SL is most likely offered everywhere too, but caution is called for when selecting this course (see next question). Finally, for their group 6 subject, students can choose whichever course they like (subject to the constraints just discussed), but if they decide on an arts course, music is the most widely offered course.

If the name of the next IB school is known well ahead of transfer time, then consultation on a viable programme should take place as early as possible.

*What about all these new and unfamiliar courses such as ITGS?*

If your child is likely to remain within the same school for the duration of the IBDP, we strongly recommend the new 'non-traditional' courses such as Business and Management, Ecosystems and societies, and ITGS (Information technology in a global society). They are brilliant courses and very relevant in today's world. Even if a school is offering these courses for the first time, don't be afraid to let your child sign up. Such newly offered courses always attract a lot of initial enthusiasm and attention from the teachers responsible, so your child will be in good hands. Just make sure that teachers have 'done their homework' and read the relevant chapters in our Cambridge manual and have contacted experienced colleagues in similar schools, in person if possible and through internet if necessary – they should not be reinventing the wheel.

*Are there any courses we should avoid?*

Universities will often look at the overall achievement in the IBDP diploma, and the grades for the relevant subjects as well as their level (HL or SL), but they will be less worried about the precise content covered in any particular subject. To study psychology at university for instance, many universities will not even require the student to have studied it at high school level, but they may require that other traditional subjects make up the student's academic profile. For medicine, the sciences, and economics, however, (top) universities will often insist on some particular science and or mathematics background: a top medical college may insist, for instance, on chemistry and biology at HL – the school's package and tertiary advisor should know if there are any such subject specific requirements or preferences. Fortunately, all IBDP subject, certainly at HL, are highly regarded by universities. The most common problem is the SL course mathematics course MSSL (mathematical studies at SL), which a number of countries do not accept as sufficient background in mathematics for entry into university (Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia used to raise objections, although some of these are being resolved). This poses a problem, as MSSL is the most accessible mathematics course, favored by those students whose interests and strengths clearly lie outside mathematics. If their country of origin or their university of choice objects to MSSL, they will have to take MSL (mathematical SL), which is a very serious and demanding mathematics course not necessarily in their best interests. Our personal feeling is that universities are wrong to reject MSSL, and it seems this injustice is slowly being resolved. In the meantime, however, students may wish to play it safe and take MSL instead – see the tertiary advisor if such a course of action is warranted.

*Is there sufficient language and study skills support, as well as support for the IBDP core?*

This question is more pertinent in schools with a more relaxed admission policy or a school that takes in many students from educational backgrounds very different to that of the IBDP, such as Asian students. The DP requires a lot more than most traditional programmes in terms of study skills – listening, reading, (book and internet) research, note taking, summarizing, critical thinking, organizational, and writing skills. Few schools, however, offer any courses in these areas apart from perhaps language support for students whose native language is not English and perhaps a few hours on organizing and prioritizing skills. Yet, as one of the most thought-provoking case studies in our Cambridge Press book documents, *study skills courses may well be one of the school's best strategies to ensure success in the IBDP*. A national school located in Malaysia (featured as a case study in our Cambridge publication), has conclusive statistical evidence to show that their results (the highest in the world!) jumped to their formidable levels immediately after introducing their 5 week long study skills programme.

This positive effect of an explicit study skills course will surprise few teachers. Somehow it is always assumed that students at some stage have learned to summarize (surely the most pressing skill if a student is to effectively process information) but in many educational systems, they never have. One look at what students – even those studying at university level – highlight in their study books is enough to convince anyone that the vast majority of students do not have a clue of what information is important and what not. Identical results are guaranteed if you ask them to summarize a lesson or a movie. This vital lack of skills could be largely fixed if schools would just set a few weeks apart for intensive training in these areas. Not many schools take such steps, presumably because school administrations are worried that they 'are losing time' should they do this, and because they are worried that such an unusual move would not have the support of the students and parents. We strongly urge parents, however, to not only support moves by the school towards study skills courses, but to even insist on it. The case study in our Cambridge book shows that such a course is not only very effective but very enjoyable as well.

The Malaysian school referred to above has some other surprises up its sleeve that other schools should carefully consider and – we believe – implement themselves in one form or another. The school insists that all teachers are intimately familiar with, and get involved in TOK; they set the entire Wednesday aside for CAS alone; and their remaining 4 schooldays last only from 9 am till 1 pm! The gut reaction of some people towards the school's success is one of suspicion, and to 'explain' its high grades through its strict admission policies and restricted subject choice. But this is totally wrong: it misses altogether the point that its results jumped to their current levels only after introducing the study skills courses.

In summary, one of the questions foremost in our minds surely is: what does the school make of the above-mentioned case study in our Cambridge Manual, and what study skills support does it plan to offer itself?

*Class size: has every effort been made to keep classes small?*

We touched on this issue above. Of course some state schools will face severe budget constraints that cannot be ignored, but with a highly personalized and project-based programme such as the IBDP, there is no doubt that 15 – 20 students is the ideal student number per class, and that a class size exceeding 25 will cost the students in instruction quality (although MCB has a very original solution to cope with their classes of 25, see our Cambridge Press book).

*Have all stakeholders understood the role of the individual subjects in the overall DP; in particular, are teachers confident they can finish their subjects successfully within a realistic timetable?*

In the IBDP, the importance of the individual subjects is subservient to that of the overall programme. This is no empty slogan, and it may take some 'traditional' teachers – and

parents! – some time to truly accept this. All teachers will have to accept that they may have to be flexible with deadlines for project work without sacrificing any academic standards, which means that in their homework planning they must keep a close eye on the overall school timetable, inclusive of school trips, arts festivals and so on. The ‘traditional’ attitude – ‘never mind this arts festival, you do my homework first’ – is not an acceptable attitude. In the DP, no subject is more important than any other; the arts are equally important as mathematics. What counts is the overall package – refer to the overall IBDP aims set out in chapter 2. Many parents have a conscious or subconscious hierarchy of subject importance in mind, often with mathematics and the sciences on top and TOK, CAS, and the arts at the bottom. It is of vital importance to the success of the IBDP that all stakeholders realize this is really an outdated mode of thinking (and one of us is speaking as a mathematical physicist here!).

In particular with the coursework, it sometimes happens that teachers forget that a particular piece of coursework only contributes 2% to the overall grade and should not take out a full weekend (or more!) of a student’s time. As a rule of thumb, most schools spend about 4.5 hours a week on a HL subject and around 3 hours per week on a SL subject, which adds up to somewhere between 20 – 25 hours of lessons per week, including TOK but not CAS, which typically adds another 3 hours per school week. Add to this travel time and the extended essay, and it is clear that a typical HL teacher cannot realistically ask for much more than 3 hours additional homework per week, and an SL teacher should not expect more than 2 hours. Simple as this calculation is, it is very easy to forget this, and there is a tendency on the part of teachers to simply add the coursework on top of the regular homework or assume that the project work somehow magically can get fixed during holidays. It is not surprising that many IBDP students suffer from stress, and sometimes put in weekly hours more usually associated with investment banking, especially if they lack basic study skills. While the IBDP is a demanding programme, with very careful planning on the part of departments and time-tablers, it is possible to integrate all coursework within the normal class work and homework time (see our Cambridge Press book for strategies of achieving this). The school’s IBDP coordinator and subject department heads must work together with the time-tabler to achieve a realistic workload. Parents on their part should notify the teacher or the school if their child’s homework efforts all seem to go towards a particular set of subjects, and find out where the problem lies (it may not necessarily be too much homework, and it often is bad prioritizing or planning on the student’s part, in which case counseling can help). Particular efforts should be made to make sure that the extended essay does not take more than one week of time altogether, as many students can easily spend far more than this without careful counseling. Achieving a realistic work calendar where each department is aware of the overall programme calendar really takes very serious thinking on the part of the entire school. Too often everyone seems to assume that the individual departments will somehow sort it out, whereas in practice some do and others don’t. Parents can help identifying such planning problems by monitoring some basic homework habits of their children, such as the number of hours put in for each subject, and report anomalies back to the school.

*Has the school prepared decent resources to support its DP courses?*

In view of one of the IBDP’s central aims – to put the student, wherever he or she may study in the world, in the centre of the education (see chapter 2) – it comes perhaps as no surprise that the IBDP is reluctant to endorse text books. The IBO’s idea is that a textbook might lead to a one-size-fits-all approach and thus take the individuality out of the teaching. Ideally, teachers should consider the likely interests of the students in their classes and construct their own lesson materials, or so the thinking goes.

While such concerns and ideals are understandable and laudable, many teachers (the main author of this booklet included) believe the IBO’s attitude towards textbooks is not helpful. In practice, a lot of core material and examples are useful the world over, and others may be easily adaptable to local circumstances if the textbook provides guidance on how to do this,

as good text books could easily do. Too often it happens that teachers have to use a variety of different textbooks or end up reinventing the wheel by constructing their own resources when much better material is available publicly, sometimes in their own departments. From our point of view, it would be much preferable if the IBO would assist publishers to produce text books which illustrate a variety of ways to successfully discuss a topic, and which invite and assist the teacher to adapt these where possible. Teachers new to the IBDP would probably begin by following such books formats quite closely, but with rapidly growing confidence they will soon be able to tailor the exercises to their individual students' needs.

While we are hopeful the IBO will mend its ways, schools in the meantime have to deal with the situation as it is. The argument that it is useful that a student learns to work using different sources has some validity, but only if this approach is supported by a course in study techniques, which is often lacking as we noted above. If a school does not provide such study technique assistance, a strong case can be made that it should produce its own materials, or pool its resources with those of similar schools, or at the very least limit the number of books it uses so as not to overload the student with organizational demands. The Malaysian school discussed earlier on in this section, continually pools, re-evaluates, and updates its home-produced text-books. Naturally, this involves a great deal of work, especially in view of the fact that the IBDP subject syllabuses change regularly. Schools therefore, must make efforts to free up teachers' time so that they can do this, and the obvious way is to reduce the time they have to spend on administration.

*Has the school made every effort it can to reduce its administrative demands on teachers?*

Ask any teacher these days what takes up most of his or her time, and the answer is shockingly often, 'administration and meetings', rather than 'education'. This shameful state of affairs exists in many educational systems (not just in the IBDP) and the situation continues to deteriorate. In the IBDP the situation is even worse because the internally assessed coursework necessitates a significant amount of administration and record-keeping. The public's perception that teachers have a relatively easy life is a thing of the distant past, if it ever was true. Many schools have followed the corporate world in insisting on a multitude of meetings and PR events such as parents evenings (or, increasingly, meetings with individual parents during the day), and progress reports, be it for parents or for universities or for supervisors. Many of these events are virtually useless and could be canceled or greatly reduced without any loss of educational quality. What is the point of four different people reading and editing the same student report with the result the report arrives with the parents 6 weeks out of date – just to make a professional impression? Gone are the days that a report was a grade and perhaps a one-line comment, but parents are often none the wiser with teachers cutting and pasting to fill in the required 200 report words. Whereas in the past there would be one parents evening for each class, now teachers might have 3 or sometimes even 6 parents evenings per class, leading to ridiculous numbers like 30 or more parents evenings per year (in addition to the meetings during daytime with parents who cannot make it to the parents evenings). Where to find the time to prepare decent and varying lessons on an ongoing basis this way, especially when many educational experts tell us that an hour of good teaching needs an hour of preparation? It is a testament of teachers' resolve to serve the students that the system has not collapsed yet, but things cannot go on like this.

This paragraph is an appeal to the parents. You can help stop this trend (should it exist in your school) by insisting that the education of your child comes first, and accepting that this means that other things must take a backseat. Of course parents are entitled to information about the progress of their children, but a head of grade will in almost all cases be able to give a perfect summary of the state of affairs, and a system of (online and) regularly updated 'tick box style' reports is current, easy on the teacher, and often more informative for parents. Of course, there may be times that parents feel they lose something of value, but something has got to give. At the moment, the sad reality is that this is often the education in the classroom, this being the only time that teachers are masters of their own

time. Help your teachers and thereby help your children by appealing to the school to reduce teachers' non-educational work to the absolute minimum.

#### **4. Things you do not have to worry about**

After discussing so many issues of potential concern, it is a good idea to bring up areas of concerns often voiced by parents where there is in fact no reason to worry.

*Is the IBDP really a good education programme?*

Yes it is. Of course no education programme is perfect, and the IBDP is no exception (we have indicated some areas in this booklet where there is clearly room for improvement). However, if one compares the IBDP to the major systems with which it often 'competes' (those in the US, Canada, Australia and the UK) there is no doubt in any educator's mind that the IBDP is really a far superior system. You need not worry about the intrinsic value of the DP itself, and you can limit your concern to the way it is *implemented* at your school – as discussed above.

*My child is not a top student, and I am worried the IBDP is a system for the elite only.*

As we have noted earlier, if the school has understood the IBDP well and supports the students it admits in the appropriate way, the IBDP is no less accessible than the major existing systems such as AP's and A-levels. What is true is that the IBDP requires more initiative and discipline – students lacking motivation will likely fail. Those students who are willing to give it their best, however, will find that the IBDP leaves a lot of room for personal efforts and also rewards them for it, unlike some national education systems. If you are satisfied that your school has instituted an appropriate admission procedure (see above), you can safely rely on their advice, whichever way it goes.

*Will my child lose his or her own culture and national identity by studying an international education?*

To the contrary, the IBDP will allow your child to constantly express his or her own cultural perspectives, and compare it against other cultural perspectives, thus maintaining and further developing the national identity. The result is that students will be much more aware of their own cultural identity. Of course, what parents must accept is that the IBDP won't develop a blind adherence to the original culture, but rather a critical attitude, with a renewed appreciation for what works well and what may not work so well.

*With so few IBDP schools and students worldwide, I feel my child is like a guinea pig, and subject to too much experimentation.*

While it is true that the IBDP is rather small, with slightly over 1000 schools participating worldwide, it has been subjected to intense scrutiny over the 30 years of its existence, and some of the best schools in the world participate in it. Over these last 30 years, there has been a steady and coherent development that has consistently led to improvements in the programme. By now, it really is a mature system with a longer history than many national systems.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Understanding the DP subjects and how to assist your child**

This chapter features a brief overview of the core subjects as well as the main subjects in each of the groups, so parents can gain some insight into the way these subjects operate differently from what they remember of their younger days. There are also some concrete tips on how to assist your children making the most of their DP. How to support the whole programme (rather than just a part of it) is one of the techniques discussed. Another (top) **vital** technique is supporting your child with study skills – do this well and you can almost forget all the rest, as this chapter argues, assisting with study skills is something **virtually** every parent can do, even (those parents) uncertain of their own academic background or abilities.

At this stage, we would like parents to ask for their feedback on this booklet so far:

- Do you find the information so far useful?
- Are there things missing, incomplete, or not true in your experience?
- Would you like to see the completion of this final chapter 4?

Parents who respond to these questions by emailing [editor@dp-help.com](mailto:editor@dp-help.com) will receive a free copy of the updated booklet as soon as it is available, which is likely to be within a month after having collected sufficient feedback. If you provide us with very detailed feedback, we would prefer it if you edit your comments on this document **in color** (or better even, using 'track changes') to assist us with the editing process – please email us to obtain a MS Word version of this document in that case.