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FAQs for the May 2021 Diploma Programme and Career-related Programme examination sessions



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IB mission statement

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

To this end the organization works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment.

These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

FAQS for the May 2021 Diploma Programme and Career-related Programme examination sessions

Administering examinations

What will happen if a school cannot administer examinations?

The IB asked all schools in January 2021 to identify their current ability to administer examinations, taking into consideration local or national government mandates. Schools should inform the IB immediately if circumstances change that effect their ability to administer examinations.

Moving from exam route to non-exam route:

If **at any time before or during** the examinations a school is no longer able to administer examinations due to local or national restrictions, they will be offered the options to; withdraw, defer or change to the non-examination route for students. Once schools inform the IB that they cannot administer examinations, the decision is considered final and instructions for the non-examination route will be issued.

Grade Awarding

Non-examination route

How will results be calculated in the non-exam route?

Without the written examinations, the IB will use the following data points for grade awarding:

- Coursework mark
- Predicted grade

The PG will be used in place of an exam score so the students total mark will be the combination of the coursework mark and predicted grade, using the usual weightings placed on course work and examinations for each subject and component.

Grade boundaries will be set so that there is comparability in grades between the exam route and non-exam route. This will be done by comparing coursework performance and the results of “similar” schools on the two different routes.

To ensure that students retain the benefit of being placed at the top of the mark range for their predicted grade we will ensure that grade boundaries are no higher than May 2019 on the non-exam route.

Examination route for awarding results

The IB will carefully consider the grade boundaries during grade-awarding to account for global disruptions in learning and teaching and other unusual circumstances that might have affected exam performance. The IB will ensure that the results are fair despite the disruption that students have faced.

Additionally, student coursework which is normally internally assessed will be externally marked by trained IB examiners for the May 2021 session.

We will ensure that:

- There will be equality and equivalence between the results of those students taking exams and those who are not.
- Are fair outcomes for these students in the global context.
- Students may also decide to:

What if our students want to take exams rather than be on the non-exam route

Students will be able to defer, at no extra cost, to a future examination session, dependent on subject availability, or

Withdraw from the May 2021 session with a full refund from the IB.

Should a cohort or student choose to defer or withdraw, please contact support@ibo.org immediately.

Will there be different grade boundaries set for the exam v. non exam routes?

Yes, the exam route and non-examination route will have different grade boundaries. This is because the examination route will take into account the relative difficulty of the examination paper this year compared with previous years as well as any impact due to disrupted teaching on examination performance. The non-examination route will need to be adjusted to ensure equity between examination and non-examination route.

How will the IB ensure equity in grades between exam route and non-exam route?

The IB will use examiner judgement and analysis on assessment outcomes to ensure that results from May 2021 examination route are fair compared to previous years and will also carefully consider the impact the pandemic has had on students. The IB will use grade boundary setting as a mitigation for the impact of lost teaching time.

Once this benchmark with previous years is completed, the challenging task will be to ensure equity between the examination and non-examination route. In order to achieve this we will carefully analyze several sources of information; (i) ensuring that the relative outcomes between 2019 and 2021 are the same for schools in the exam and non-exam route (i.e. if the exam route shows a 2% increase then we would expect the non-exam route to see a 2% increase). (ii) looking at the relative performance in coursework between the two routes.

Will the passing criteria that was used in the May 2020 session be used to award grades for the May 2021 session?

Yes, the same passing criteria will be used as in previous years, however we are only expecting "best endeavors" with CAS given the challenges of COVID-19.

Guidance for a variety of possible scenarios May 2021

The below list is not exhaustive but aims to provide guidance for a variety of possible scenarios schools and students may face during the May 2021 examination session. If you require any assistance, please contact support@ibo.org or your IBWS manager.

What happens if not all schools in the same country respond similarly about being able to administer exams?

We acknowledge that schools within the same country could be under different lockdown conditions and we will work with them accordingly.

I was able to administer some examinations for some subjects, but now our school has been forced to close and students cannot sit any further exams. What are the options?

If students have completed all written examinations for a subject, they will be awarded grades for that subject using the standard awarding process.

For any subjects where no examinations were taken, they will receive grades using the non-examination route, which uses the IA and predicted grades to award results.

Where students have been able to complete some examinations in a subject before the school was closed, the IB will award a grade based on either our usual missing mark process (which we use every session when a student is ill during an exam) or, we will treat them as having taken the non-examination route.

Our school is now allowed to administer exams after a period of quarantine/closure, can students take exams for remaining subjects?

If your school begins the examination session the non-examination route, they cannot move back to the examination route. If school moves to the non-exam route during the examinations, they will not be able to administer any remaining examinations and any remaining subjects will be awarded results through the non-examination route.

If we cannot administer the exams in May 2021, is there a possibility of reimbursement of the enrolment fees?

If a school is not able to administer the exams, and students do not wish to receive a grade using the non-examination route, they are able to defer to the May 2021 session with no additional cost, or withdraw from the IB May 2021 session with a full refund from the IB up until 1 May 2021.

Examination challenges for individual students

Quarantine

A student cannot take their examinations in school due to quarantine requirements following exposure to COVID-19 or because their household is self-isolating/shielding due to being in a high risk category.

Schools must make alternative arrangements to invigilate students taking examinations. Schools should contact the IB to discuss their invigilation procedures for this student to confirm they adhere to requirements. We look favorably on robust creative solutions (socially distanced invigilation/via window etc). Schools should contact the IB to discuss their invigilation procedures for this student to confirm they adhere to requirements.

Travel restrictions

My student is in another country and unable to return to school to sit the examinations.

Programme Coordinators must try to identify an alternative venue for candidates who are unable to return from another country. An alternative venue involves a candidate taking one or more IB examinations at the time indicated on the schedule, but in a different location. If no longer required, alternative venue arrangements can be cancelled at any time. The only recognized examination centres for IB examinations are IB World Schools. The examination(s) must be conducted in full compliance with the procedures and regulations for the conduct of IB examinations at the time and on the date scheduled by the IB. To submit a request for an alternative venue, use the [Alternative venue authorization request form](#) and send this to support@ibo.org.

If an alternative school cannot be secured, the student can move to the non-examination route or defer to a future session.

Student illness

My student is unable to take examinations in school due to illness (non-contagious) or injury but feels able to sit them elsewhere.

Schools can arrange alternative invigilation in another venue such as at the student's home or in hospital to enable the student to sit the examinations if they are able to and it is safe to do so. This emergency measure is used every examination session, for example when a candidate is in hospital recovering from appendicitis surgery. Schools should contact the IB to discuss their invigilation procedures for this student to confirm they adhere to requirements. We look favorably on robust creative solutions (socially distanced invigilation/via window etc. Where this is not viable solution then a change to the non-examination route can be requested using the Request for an individual candidate to move to the non-exam route form, or a deferral to a future session can be requested using the D2 Candidate(s) affected by adverse circumstances form.

Quarantine

A student cannot take their examinations in school due to quarantine requirements following exposure to COVID-19 or because their household is self-isolating/shielding due to being in a high-risk category.

Schools must make alternative arrangements to invigilate students taking examinations. Schools should contact the IB to discuss their invigilation procedures for this student to confirm they adhere to requirements. We look favorably on robust creative solutions (socially distanced invigilation/via window etc.).

Where this is not viable solution then a change to the non-examination route can be requested using the Request for an individual candidate to move to the non-exam route form, or a deferral to a future session can be requested using the D2 Candidate(s) affected by adverse circumstances form.

Requesting for an individual student to move to the non-examination route

Emergency rescheduling, alternative invigilation and/or an alternative venue are the first tier of support that must be thoroughly considered by the school to support a student to sit their examinations. Where these are not viable solutions to the challenges of quarantine, student illness or travel restrictions then a change to the non-examination route can be requested using the *Request for an individual candidate to move to the non-exam route* form, or a deferral to a future session can be requested using the *D2 Candidate(s) affected by adverse circumstances form*. Where such a request is made on the basis of student illness, medical evidence must be provided to support this. If a school fails to take all reasonable steps, as determined by the IB, to make use of emergency rescheduling, alternative invigilation and/or an alternative venue to support their student to sit examinations, the student would be unable to move to the non-examination route.

My student/their parent does not wish for them to attend school due to concerns of contracting COVID-19

Schools should make alternative arrangements to invigilate students taking examinations, for example at home. Schools should contact the IB to discuss their invigilation procedures for this student to confirm they adhere to requirements. If the school is not willing/able to do this, the student must defer to a future session; a move to the non-examination route is not possible.

Will there be changes to the adverse circumstances policy for May 2021 to account for possible COVID-19 disruption mid-session? For example, if some of the exams are completed and a student in the cohort tests positive, forcing the whole cohort to quarantine? What options will students have?

The IB has considered several scenarios that may impact students during this examination session.

Please refer to the published guidance for schools to support students who may need provision through Adverse Circumstances whether sitting examinations or not.

- [Adverse Circumstances Policy \(Only applicable to the examination route for the May 2021 session\)](#)
- [Adverse Circumstances Policy \(Only applicable to the non-examination route for the May 2021 session\)](#)

Please note: If a student has already chosen to defer but would like to move to the non-examination route this is an option. Please contact the Adverse team to discuss.

Will there be any changes to the May 2021 exam format?

For schools who can administer examinations the format will follow the adapted examination schedule which was published in August 2020.

Please refer to the comprehensive list of adaptations and resources for May and November 2021 <https://resources.ibo.org/dp/topic/M21-and-N21-adaptations-and-guidance/resource/11162-416220?lang=en>

Does the IB have COVID-19 safety guidelines for administering the May 2021 IB Exam, which all IB World Schools have to follow?

In advance of the May 2021 session, the IB's utmost priority is the health and safety of our candidates and all persons tasked with supporting the delivery of IB examinations. All national/local guidelines and instructions must be followed where applicable. For more information please refer to [Addendum – Conduct of Diploma Programme/Career-related Programme examinations during the May 2021 2020 session](#).

Information for retake candidates

Will students be able to bring forward marks from May or November May 2020 IA?

If your school is open and is able to accommodate examinations, students can carry forward their coursework marks from May 2020 or November 2020 to May 2021.

If the school is closed and/or unable to accommodate examinations, students should discuss their options with the coordinator.

The options available are:

A) Defer retake to the November 2021/May 2022 session – please note there will be first assessment for the new courses in Group 1 (Language and Literature) and Group 5 (Mathematics) in May 2021.

B) Submit a new or substantially amended piece of coursework.

If a student is retaking in May 2021 would it be sensible for them to complete a new IA in case the school is unable to administer exams?

Yes, in the event that the school is unable to open for the examinations, the IB cannot base grades on a coursework result from a previous year. Therefore, we advise all re-take students to have new coursework ready, as they will be required to submit this coursework to the IB to be eligible to receive a grade. In principle, new coursework must be entirely different work. However, the IB recognizes that for very substantial coursework tasks (for example: the design project for design technology) this may not be feasible given the time constraints. In such cases, substantial modification of the original work is acceptable. If substantially modified work is submitted, it will be marked as a new piece of coursework.

If a retake student falls ill midway through the examinations, would the normal adverse procedure (including missing mark procedure) still apply?

For partially completed subjects the IB will use the missing mark procedure as usual. If students miss complete subjects, they would need to produce new coursework (or substantially modified) with an extension granted for the completion in order to be awarded grades using the non-examination route. This is because the IB will not issue a new grade from the non-exam route using the same coursework submitted in previous sessions.

Candidates who have deferred a subject from a previous session due to adverse circumstances and have completed IA in that previous session are not required to submit new work; they can carry forward their existing marks in the subject.

If they cannot complete new coursework, they also have the option to defer to a future session, for which the deadline is 1 May **2021**.

What happens if a student registers for retakes, and right before the exams start, falls ill or the school is closed?

If the student wishes to be considered for the non-examination route, they need to produce new (or substantially modified) coursework for assessment. Coordinators will need to contact support@ibo.org for Adverse Circumstances to agree an extension for the submission of the work; the candidate will be switched to the non-exam route. The student can also have the option to defer to future session.

Results and recognition

Will there be any difference between Diplomas obtained following the two routes?

Students will earn a Diploma or Certificate that reflects their capability whether they enter the exam or non-exam route. It is important that we maintain equality and equivalence between those students taking exams and those who are not. Not doing so would result in undue stress for students, who have already been significantly and unfairly impacted by the pandemic. There will be no indication on the certificates and transcripts of the awarding route which was used.

The IB is also confident that the Diploma or Certificate will be recognized by universities for all students. Universities worldwide have honored the 2020 results, where grade awarding was based on the IA and predicted grades and historical data.

We will continue to actively engage with universities regarding our grade awarding approach to ensure continued acceptance.

Will Enquiry Upon Results service be available?

The EUR process will follow the usual pattern, with the exception that for coursework which has been externally marked will be covered by a category 1 EUR (review of marking), not a category 3 (review of moderation).

If our school has concerns or questions regarding assessment for May 2021 who should we contact?

We know that schools are working in incredibly difficult circumstances and having to make difficult decisions to support their students and faculty. Our IB Answers team and your IBWS manager will be available to answer your questions to help you support your student.

Predicted Grades

More information about the individual predicted grade distributions will be provided to schools in mid-February 2021.

[What if the distribution of predicted grades the IB has provided does not fit with what my students deserve?](#)

Remember that the predicted grade distribution is an upper limit, not a target, so if you want to submit lower predictions then that is fine.

The predicted grades distribution is based on your school's actual achievement over the past three years.

We recognize that it is possible that your school context has changed significantly or that you have one or more exceptional students this year. For these situations we have set up a predicted grades Exceptions Process, where you will be able to contact a dedicated predicted grades team and ask them to review your situation.

[Why have I been provided with a distribution to support my predicted grades in some subjects but not others?](#)

In order for a distribution of predicted grades to be valuable in supporting you we need to have enough historical evidence to make a sensible decision on the distribution of grades. If you are a new school or have a very small cohort (fewer than 5) we will allow you to allocate any predicted grade you feel is a reasonable representation of your student's ability.

Remember the predicted grade distribution is an upper limit not a target, and we may contact you to understand how you achieved your predictions if the coursework grades look really out of line with the predictions and whether we may need to ask you to adjust them in line with other schools.