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The approach to IB awarding in *May 2021*



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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.



IB learner profile

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.

As IB learners we strive to be:

INQUIRERS

We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.

KNOWLEDGEABLE

We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.

THINKERS

We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.

COMMUNICATORS

We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.

PRINCIPLED

We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

OPEN-MINDED

We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.

CARING

We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.

RISK-TAKERS

We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

BALANCED

We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.

REFLECTIVE

We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.

The IB learner profile represents 10 attributes valued by IB World Schools. We believe these attributes, and others like them, can help individuals and groups become responsible members of local, national and global communities.

The approach to IB awarding in May 2021

Summary

At the IB, we understand the global impact of Covid-19 on our May 2021 students and on the whole school community, and we appreciate that students may have been impacted in different ways depending on their local and personal situations. We have designed our May 2021 session to provide students with the most appropriate assessment opportunities (an “exam route” or a “non-exam route”) and have worked hard to ensure that we provide fair and valuable certification to all students, irrespective of whether their school is able to run examinations or not. At the IB, we all care deeply about our students and aim to ensure that we provide the best possible experience and outcome for them during this session so that they can successfully progress to the next stage of their education. These times are confusing and frightening for students and parents across the world and so we look forward to working with our schools to create the confidence that this May’s results are the fairest possible outcomes in exceptional circumstances. This document aims to provide you with details of the way in which we will manage this complex examination session.

Awarding grades in the current context is a significant challenge, but we believe that schools and universities will accept that the IB has taken the best possible action for students under exceptional circumstances. Alternatives have been discounted because they would disadvantage more schools and more students.

The IB will use a range of approaches to ensure consistent standards across the normal (but reduced) “exam route” and the exceptional “non-exam route” including:

- Comparing school performance in each route with their performance in previous years;
- Comparing how students with similar coursework marks fared in both routes;
- Ensuring that expected (predicted) performance reflects actual historical performance on each route;
- Ensuring that actual performance on each route this year matches the patterns of actual performance we have seen in previous years;
- Checking that standards of awarded grades are comparable across routes;
- Checking that awarded grades in individual schools are plausible.

The non-exam route represents a best endeavour for awarding of grades in exceptional circumstances. It is impossible to perfectly reflect what students would have achieved in examinations without those examinations being taken. In the absence of actual exam scores, we will model what a student would have achieved on an “normal” exam day using their teacher’s predicted grade and combine this with the student’s coursework mark to arrive at an overall grade. Much of the quality assurance of student grades will rely on focussed scrutiny and human judgement rather than automated processes and we have set aside additional time to do this.

Context

In common with other providers of international and national qualifications and qualification regulators, and in the best interests of learners, the IB endeavours to maintain academic standards from year to year and across subjects. Maintaining standards means that IB Diplomas, MYP certificates and IBCP certificates retain their value to learners and institutions that use them as learners progress to the next stage of their education or employment.

Your responses to our survey suggest that approximately three quarters of students in the May 2021 session will be experiencing the reduced assessment model route of coursework and examinations (the “exam route”), and the remaining quarter will experience a non-exam route. In order to ensure justice to both groups of students, it is vital that awarding of grades does not privilege one group over the other.

The following principles have guided the IB approach to awarding in May 2021:

- It is fair for students to receive a grade even if exams cannot be taken because of COVID-19;
- It is fair to give students the same certificate as if they had taken examinations because an alternative certificate may be treated less favourably by universities;
- It is unfair if students on one route (exam/non-exam) are systematically advantaged over students on the other route because all are receiving the same certificate;

Determining fair grades on exam and non-exam routes

Students receiving grades on the exam route will complete a range of assessment components for each subject in the normal way. However, a range of adaptations has been made to assessment components, such as the reduction of the number of components in some subjects. Most internal assessment tasks will be marked externally by examiners rather than subjected to moderation in order to facilitate changes to route that may become necessary at a late stage and to assist in assuring comparability of standards between the routes. The non-exam route uses marks from internal assessments marked in the same way and by the same teams of examiners.

For exam route students the following evidence will be used in determining grades:

- Marks from Group 1-5 subject examinations (reduced examinations in some subjects)
- Marks from all Group 1-5 internal assessments
- Marks for Group 6 assessments
- Marks for ToK and EE assessments

For non-exam route students, the following evidence will be used in determining grades:

- Marks from all Group 1-5 internal assessments
- Marks for Group 6 assessments
- Marks for ToK and EE assessments
- Predicted grades for Group 1-5 subjects guided by May 2017, 2018 and 2019 assessment outcomes for each school using the non-exam route.

External marking of internal assessments in both routes and a common approach to predicting grades, will enable students to be swapped to the non-exam route at the last moment, if necessary.

Setting Grade Boundaries

We appreciate that because of the teaching time lost this session, the quality of the answers may be generally weaker than those seen in previous years, but this can be mitigated by adjusting grade boundaries, so that students are not disadvantaged by COVID-19-related school closures and disruption. However, we will consider evidence of the strengths of this cohort in comparisons comparable to previous cohorts

Grades achieved on the non-exam route should be comparable to those on the exam route

To be fair to all students, grades achieved on the non-exam route should be comparable to those on the exam route. This does not mean, for example, that the distribution of grades awarded will be the same across both routes. We will carefully ensure that patterns of student performance on the exam route and non-exam route are consistent with historical patterns of student performance in each group of schools, so that students are not disadvantaged by the route they are on.

Calculating fair grades without examination scores

The coursework components, internal and external assessments, that feature in many IB courses, provide evidence of attainment for awarding purposes even in the absence of examinations. The IB is also making use of school-submitted predicted grades, which will be informed by each school's actual subject results in 2017, 2018 and 2019 (where applicable).

New Studies in Language and Literature (group 1) and Mathematics (group 5) courses are first assessed in May 2021. Group 1 courses are sufficiently similar to legacy courses that historical results remain reliable predictors of results in the new courses. This is because students with similar attributes are likely to have selected similar new courses. For group 5, the new courses differ substantially from the legacy courses. Therefore, to determine recommended predicted grades for the new SL Mathematics courses, we will use a combination of prior Mathematics SL and Mathematical Studies SL results adjusted to account for known differences in difficulty between these two courses. For the new HL Mathematics courses, recommended predicted grades will be based on prior Mathematics HL results.

As well as drawing upon our own extensive experience in assessment design and analysis, the IB consulted external academic and educational assessment specialists to help optimise the basis for awarding using evidence from assessed coursework and predicted grades. We tested, using data from previous sessions, to see whether using either predicted grade or coursework mark alone was better than using both together, but the evidence indicated that a combination provided the most accurate approximations to marks students have been awarded historically.

Without examination marks, the best approach we have available is to estimate subject grades using a combination of predicted grades and coursework marks

IB analyses applied to school results for earlier years (when examinations were sat) suggested that in 95% of cases, using coursework and predicted grade data, student results could be modelled to within one grade of their final grade awarded. However, an assumption of the testing was that historical patterns of prediction would be maintained by schools. Experience of the 2020 sessions has shown that historical patterns of prediction have not been maintained, perhaps because Covid-19-related disruption has reduced the quantity and quality of evidence teachers use to make grade predictions, or that under the challenging circumstances for students, teachers are more likely to give benefit of the doubt. Whatever the causes, grade predictions increased in both 2020 sessions and therefore, in 2021, the IB will provide additional support to schools for making grade predictions. This support is detailed below (in *The role of school-submitted predicted grades in fair assessment*).

We learned in 2020 that we needed to provide additional support to enable schools to make their predictions as accurate as possible.

In May 2021, for the non-exam route a student's grade for a subject will be based on:

- Coursework mark (Cw)
- Predicted grade (PG)

The PG will be used in place of an exam score, therefore:

Total mark = Cw + PG (top mark for the PG in exams)

Both coursework and exams have published weightings applied: Cw (between 20-40%) + PG (the remaining 60-80%)

For this revised approach, a common approach to predicting fair and realistic grades in schools is vitally important. The IB has used three years of school data (where available) to generate the range of grades that this year's students would be likely to achieve in each school, in each subject. Schools will be provided with these recommended predicted grades (through IBIS) to guide assignment of predicted grades to their students (see details provided in *The role of school-submitted predicted grades in fair assessment* below).

The role of school-submitted predicted grades in fair assessment

Our experience shows us that not every school or teacher predicts grades in the same way. When schools look at their historical data, they can see how their predicted grades compared to final grades received. Schools and teachers vary in the accuracy with which they predict the final grades awarded to their students: some predict accurately, some under-predict student performance, but most over-predict.

While some schools are very accurate with predictions, in general predictions tend to be slightly higher than final grades.

In the normal grade awarding process, predicted grades are used to draw general conclusions about the relative strength of the cohort and in checking the grades that have been awarded, but they do not contribute to students' final grades. For these purposes, the variety of approaches teachers take to predicting grades does not matter as much as the consistency of approach from year to year. However, it would be grossly unfair to students on both routes to merely utilise variously derived predicted grades uncritically on the non-exam route. In 2020 we sought to address this variation and achieve fairness by calculating individual school factors that depended upon each school's historical pattern of predicted and final grades awarded, otherwise students in the most accurately predicting schools would have received lower grades on the non-exam route than similar students in schools that greatly over-predicted. However, the inclusion of school factors made the awarding process somewhat opaque for schools, students and parents.

In order to achieve a transparent process that retains teachers' role in grade awarding through predicted grades, the IB and IB teachers will need to work together to ensure that predicting grades is approached in a consistent and comparable manner in all subjects, in all schools and in both routes. Predicted grades should be based on the whole body of work a student has produced for a subject. The relevant [IB Diploma Programme grade descriptors](#) should be read carefully to determine which grade most closely describes the student's body of work, rather than highlights of it.

IB published [grade descriptors](#) are the foundation of awarding IB grades. For each group of subjects, extended essays and ToK, characteristics of student performance are described for each grade (from 7 to 1, or A to E). Grade descriptors are holistic, describing skills and understanding that should be evident within a student's body of written, oral and practical work for a subject, in order to justify award of a particular grade.

During grade award meetings in December and June, these grade descriptors are used by teams of senior examiners to arrive at recommended grade boundaries. Using their expert judgement, senior examiners scrutinise samples of marked student work and compare characteristics of this work to characteristics detailed in the grade descriptors. In this way, they determine which grade best fits the qualities of the work. Although statistical analyses and summaries of feedback from teachers are also used in determining final grade boundaries, it is the grade descriptors (and consideration of samples of student work against them) that give real-world meaning to the IB published grades.

The grade descriptors are equally valuable for teachers in providing feedback to students on their work and progress; reporting achievement to students and parents; and providing predicted grades to universities and the IB. We strongly recommend that teachers collaborate in the process of grade prediction in order to standardise their approach.

The IB will provide you with the range of grades that this year's students would be likely to achieve in each subject. Schools will be provided with these recommended predicted grades (through IBIS) to guide assignment of predicted grades to their students. Applying the recommended predicted grades should ensure a realistic and representative degree of differentiation of student performance. However, we recognise that schools can have years in which the performance of their students is atypical, and this was one of the lessons we learned from the May 2020 session. Therefore, the recommended predicted grades are based on three years of school data (May 2017, May 2018 and May 2019), not just one year of data, in order to establish a pattern of performance. In addition, four measures will ensure that variations in individual student performance can be reflected in teachers' predicted grades:

1. When calculating the recommended predicted grades, we always round up for the top grade (see table 1).
2. The recommended predicted grades constitute a maximum, not a target. Lower grades can be substituted if a group of students is weaker.
3. If coursework marks indicate that the group of students is significantly stronger than prior groups, the recommended predicted grades can be exceeded accordingly when external IA marking is complete.
4. An exceptions process will be available during the grade prediction period if the recommended predicted grades do not fit the students. Teachers will need to provide supporting evidence to the IB.

Table 1: Example of how recommended predicted grades are calculated and may be applied.

<p>Over last three years a school has had 10 grade 7, 50 grade 5 and 30 grade 4 in History SL. That is, 11.1% grade 7, 55.6% grade 5 and 33.3% grade 4. This year they have 28 students.</p> <p>Applying the percentages, they will receive recommended predicted grades of 3.108 grade 7, 15.568 grade 5 and 9.324 grade 4. However, we round these in favour of the students to 4 grade 7, 16 grade 5 and 8 grade 4</p>	
<p>These submissions from schools would be acceptable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 grade 7, 16 grade 5, 8 grade 4 • 3 grade 7, 1 grade 6, 10 grade 5, 12 grade 4, 2 grade 3 • 1 grade 6, 19 grade 5, 8 grade 1 	<p>These submissions from schools would not be acceptable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28 grade 7 • 6 grade 7, 14 grade 5, 8 grade 4 • 4 grade 7, 2 grade 6, 14 grade 5, 8 grade 3

Adopting a common, consistent and more accurate approach to predicting grades has a number of benefits over adjusting predicted grades according to historic school patterns. These include:

- A student should receive a grade that is no worse than the lowest of their coursework and predicted grade.
- Most school concerns about recommended predicted grades will be addressed during the grade predicting process in February and March.

Over several years the final grades awarded to groups of students within an individual school do not fluctuate greatly, with only minimal movement in mean total diploma score (out of 45). We ask that schools bear this in mind when preparing students for final grades. Once school predictions are aligned with historical patterns, the IB can fairly use a combination of predicted grades and coursework marks to arrive at final marks and grades for each student that best represent the most probable outcomes had the students sat their exams.

- If in previous years your predicted grades have closely matched your students' final grades and you have approached grade prediction in the same way this year, you can expect that your students' grades for May 2021 will closely match your expectations.

- If in previous years your predicted grades have been higher than your students' final grades, you will need to adjust your predictions downwards by the degree indicated by your students results in past sessions.
- If in previous years your predicted grades have been lower than your students' final grades, you will need to adjust your predictions upwards by the degree indicated by your students results in past sessions.

In the cases of new schools and new subjects in schools, where there are no histories of student performance, the IB will check that grade predictions in all subjects are consistent with normal patterns of relative performance in coursework and subject, in order to ensure that awarding is fair to all. We may need to contact schools where predicted grades differ from expected patterns to ask for their support in awarding fair grades to their students. The IB will need to adjust or even set aside predicted grades in the calculation of marks and grades for non-exam route students, where predicted grades are implausible.

The role of coursework marks in fair assessment

The reason that we will not give students on the non-exam route their coursework grade unaltered, is that on average students perform better on their coursework than in exams. Therefore, simply giving coursework grades to non-exam route students is not fair to those who do take the examinations. We could account for this, for example, by giving students one grade lower than their coursework grade, but it is fairer and more accurate to include a school-submitted predicted grade element in the calculation to reflect skills and understanding that are not assessed on coursework. Schools vary in the extent to which their students' coursework performance exceeds (or falls short of) examination performance, and in order to be fair we need an approach that takes this difference into account.

Checking that grades are fair for each student in May 2021

The approach to maintaining grading standards across the whole cohort and between exam and non-exam routes has been described above. However, while the assumption that students this year are broadly similar to last year is reasonable across a subject or even a large school, it breaks down at the scale of small school cohorts and individual students. A key lesson from May 2020 was that it is important to look at individual schools to determine whether assessment decisions and approaches on the non-exam route are producing appropriate outcomes at an individual student level. In May 2020 this was done through a "review service" but in November 2020 all of this review work was completed before issue of results in January 2021. In May 2021, we also intend to do all of this review work before issue of results in July.

Review of individual school results will take place before issue of results in July

This review will take several different forms. Most importantly we will look at the overall impact at the programme level (Diploma Programme points out of 45 and IBCP points totals), not just maintaining standards in individual subjects. We will also investigate where results for a school are radically different to outcomes in previous years. For example, if the number of students achieving a diploma or getting 42+ points is significantly lower than in previous years, we will investigate

whether the available evidence supports such an outcome or is an artefact of the approach being used.

Results for schools on the non-exam route with small cohorts of students and fewer than three years of prior results will be checked with particular care because patterns in school data will be less established and significant. We will carefully consider each school's predicted grades. Historic patterns of prediction in comparable schools will be used to identify occurrences of predictions that cannot be relied upon, as well as those that are helpful in awarding fair grades.

During generation of final marks and grades the IB will carefully exclude bias in favour of or against students on the non-exam route. Any generosity evident in the award of grades on the non-exam route will be carefully replicated on the exam route during determination of grade boundaries to ensure that students are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged by their route to award of grades.

In conclusion

The non-exam route represents a best endeavour for awarding of grades with limited data about individual student performance and yet enables students to progress further with their education. The IB will continue to work with our schools in these exceptional times to create a shared confidence in this May's results. Thorough review of final student grades for both exam and non-exam routes will take place prior to release of results in July 2021, so that IB publishes the fairest possible outcomes for students in May 2021.