

A1.2 The Diploma Programme

The IB Diploma Programme is a challenging two-year pre-university curriculum, primarily aimed at students aged 16 to 19. It leads to a qualification that is widely recognized by the world's leading universities.

Students learn more than a body of knowledge. The Diploma Programme prepares students for university and encourages them to:

- ask challenging questions
- learn how to learn
- develop a strong sense of their own identity and culture
- develop the ability to communicate with and understand people from other countries and cultures.

The curriculum contains six subject groups together with the DP core: creativity, action, service (CAS); the extended essay (EE); and theory of knowledge (TOK). This is illustrated by the below Diploma Programme model.

Candidates for the diploma study six subjects selected from the subject groups. Normally three subjects are studied at higher level (courses representing 240 teaching hours), and the remaining three subjects are studied at standard level (courses representing 150 teaching hours). All three parts of the core—extended essay, theory of knowledge and creativity, action, service—are compulsory and are central to the philosophy of the Diploma Programme.

- The extended essay has a prescribed limit of 4,000 words. It offers the opportunity to investigate a topic of individual interest, and acquaints students with the independent research and writing skills expected at university.
- The interdisciplinary theory of knowledge course is designed to provide coherence by exploring the nature of knowledge across disciplines, encouraging an appreciation of other perspectives.
- Participation in the CAS programme encourages candidates to be involved in artistic pursuits, sports, and community service work. The programme fosters students' awareness and appreciation of life beyond the academic arena.

All higher level subjects, the core and at least one standard level subject must be taught over the two years of the programme. Up to two standard level subjects may be taught, should circumstances require, during the first year and assessed at the end of that first year as anticipated subjects. It is also permissible, should circumstances require, to teach one standard level subject during the first year and one standard level during the second year with assessment requirements met at the end of each corresponding year. It should be noted that this exception is designed to offer flexibility to schools where a genuine need for this arrangement exists due to unavoidable scheduling constraints. This is not intended to be a routine aspect of Diploma Programme design; all courses are designed as two-year learning experiences. Languages ab initio and pilot subjects must be taught over the two years of the programme.

Since the May 2014 examination session, Diploma Programme course students (previously known as certificate candidates) are permitted to register for one, two or all three of the core elements: theory of knowledge, CAS and/or the extended essay. If a course student is registered for both theory of knowledge and the extended essay, the matrix of additional points used for diploma candidates will not apply, grades alone will be issued on the scale of A down to E. For more information about the matrix refer to section A10.5.3.

At the end of the two-year programme, candidates are assessed both internally and externally in ways that measure individual performance against stated curriculum and assessment objectives for each subject.

In nearly all subjects at least some of the assessment is carried out internally by teachers, who mark individual pieces of work produced as part of a course of study. Examples include oral exercises in language subjects, projects, student portfolios, reports, class presentations, practical laboratory work, mathematical investigations and artistic performances.

Some assessment tasks are conducted and overseen by teachers, but are then marked externally by examiners. Examples include written assignments or tasks for language subjects in groups 1 and 2, the essay for theory of knowledge and the extended essay.

Because of the greater degree of objectivity and reliability provided by the standard examination environment, externally marked examinations form the larger share of the assessment for most subjects.

The grading system is criterion-related (results are determined by performance against set standards, and not in relation to the performance of other students); validity, reliability and fairness are the watchwords of the Diploma Programme's assessment strategy.