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What is an IB education?



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The International Baccalaureate Organization (known as the IB) offers four high-quality and challenging educational programmes for a worldwide community of schools, aiming to create a better, more peaceful world. This publication is one of a range of materials produced to support these programmes.

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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.

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What is an IB education?

Imagine a worldwide community of schools, educators and students with a shared vision and mission to empower young people with the skills, values and knowledge to create a better and more peaceful world. This is the International Baccalaureate (IB).

In 1968 the first programme offered by the IB, the Diploma Programme, was established. It sought to provide a challenging yet balanced education that would facilitate geographic and cultural mobility by providing an internationally recognized university entrance qualification that would also serve the deeper purpose of promoting intercultural understanding and respect.

With the introduction of the Middle Years Programme in 1994 and the Primary Years Programme in 1997, the IB identified a continuum of international education for students aged 3 to 19. The introduction of the IB Career-related Programme in 2012 enriched this continuum by providing a choice of international education pathways for 16 to 19 year old students.

Each of the IB programmes reflects a central desire to provide an education that enables students to make sense of the complexities of the world around them, as well as equipping them with the skills and dispositions needed for taking responsible action for the future. They provide an education that crosses disciplinary, cultural, national and geographical boundaries, and that champions critical engagement, stimulating ideas and effective relationships.

These aspirations are summed up in our ambitious mission:

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.

Written primarily for educators, *What is an IB education?* outlines our educational philosophy. It also explains how this philosophy shapes the four IB programmes, which can be implemented independently or in combination: the Primary Years Programme (ages 3–12), Middle Years Programme (ages 11–16), Diploma Programme (ages 16–19) and Career-related Programme (ages 16–19).

About international-mindedness

The aim of all IB programmes is to develop internationally minded people who recognize their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet. Central to this aim is international-mindedness.

International-mindedness is a multi-faceted and complex concept that captures a way of thinking, being and acting that is characterized by an openness to the world and a recognition of our deep interconnectedness to others.

To be open to the world, we need to understand it. IB programmes therefore provide students with opportunities for sustained inquiry into a range of local and global issues and ideas. This willingness to see beyond immediate situations and boundaries is essential as globalization and emerging technologies continue to blur traditional distinctions between the local, national and international.

An IB education fosters international-mindedness by helping students reflect on their own perspective, culture and identities, and then on those of others. By learning to appreciate different beliefs, values and experiences, and to think and collaborate across cultures and disciplines, IB learners gain the understanding necessary to make progress toward a more peaceful and sustainable world.

An IB education further enhances the development of international-mindedness through multilingualism. All IB programmes require the students to study, or study in, more than one language because we believe that communicating in more than one language provides excellent opportunities to develop intercultural understanding and respect. It helps the students to appreciate that his or her own language, culture and worldview is just one of many.

International-mindedness is also encouraged through a focus on global engagement and meaningful service with the community. These elements challenge the student to critically consider power and privilege, and to recognize that he or she holds this planet and its resources in trust for future generations. They also highlight the focus on action in all IB programmes: a focus on moving beyond awareness and understanding to engagement, action and bringing about meaningful change.

The components of an IB education described in this document work together to support the IB's overarching aim of developing international-mindedness.

The IB learner profile

The IB learner profile places the student at the centre of an IB education.

The 10 attributes reflect the holistic nature of an IB education. They highlight the importance of nurturing dispositions such as curiosity and compassion as well as developing knowledge and skills. They also highlight that along with cognitive development, IB programmes are concerned with students' social, emotional and physical well-being, and with ensuring that students learn to respect themselves, others, and the world around them.

IB educators help students to develop these attributes over the course of their IB education, and to demonstrate them in increasingly robust and sophisticated ways as they mature. The development of these attributes is the foundation of developing internationally minded students who can help to build a better world.

Attribute	Descriptor
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.

Attribute	Descriptor
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.

Broad, balanced, conceptual and connected

Each of the four IB programmes provides a detailed and developmentally appropriate curriculum or curriculum framework that is broad, balanced, conceptual and connected.

IB programmes offer students access to a broad and balanced range of academic studies and learning experiences. They promote conceptual learning, focusing on powerful organizing ideas that are relevant across subject areas, and that help to integrate learning and add coherence to the curriculum.

The programmes emphasize the importance of making connections, exploring the relationships between academic disciplines, and learning about the world in ways that reach beyond the scope of individual subjects. They also focus on offering students authentic opportunities to connect their learning to the world around them.

The four programmes are all underpinned by a shared focus on international-mindedness and developing the attributes of the IB learner profile. Yet each programme also has its own identity and developmentally appropriate elements. For example:

- In the Primary Years Programme, learning aims to transcend traditional boundaries between subject areas. Students explore six transdisciplinary themes of global significance: who we are, where we are in place and time, how we express ourselves, how the world works, how we organize ourselves, and sharing the planet.
- In the Middle Years Programme, students explore six global contexts that are developed from and extend the Primary Years Programme transdisciplinary themes: identities and relationships, personal and cultural expression, orientation in space and time, scientific and technical innovation, fairness and development, and globalization and sustainability.
- In the Diploma Programme, the curriculum consists of six subject groups and the three elements of the Diploma Programme core. As one of these core elements, the theory of knowledge course encourages students to become more aware of their own perspective and assumptions through an exploration of the fundamental question of how we know what we know.
- In the Career-related Programme, students combine the study of Diploma Programme courses with career-related studies and the four elements of the Career-related Programme core. As one of these core elements, the personal and professional skills course focuses on preparing students to effectively navigate a range of personal and professional situations that they may encounter in the workplace.

All four IB programmes also require the completion of a culminating project (the Primary Years Programme exhibition, Middle Years Programme personal project or community project, Diploma Programme extended essay and Career-related Programme reflective project). These projects provide an opportunity for students to showcase their knowledge, understanding and skills.

Meaningful assessment supports curricular goals. In IB programmes assessment is therefore ongoing, varied and integral to the curriculum. IB schools use a range of strategies and tools to assess student learning. Emphasis is placed on the importance of analysing assessment data to inform teaching and learning, and on recognizing that students benefit by learning how to assess their own work and the work of others.

The Middle Years Programme, Diploma Programme and Career-related Programme also offer a range of IB-validated assessments. These assessments balance validity and reliability, offering assessment tasks that, for example, require students to demonstrate higher order thinking rather than simple factual recall. These rigorous assessments help to maintain the IB's hard earned reputation for high standards and challenging programmes.

Approaches to teaching and learning

Grounded in contemporary educational research, the IB's six approaches to teaching and five approaches to learning guide and focus educators and students in IB World Schools. They play a crucial role in ensuring that the aspirations of an IB education become a reality in the classroom.

The approaches are centred on a cycle of inquiry, action and reflection—an interplay of asking, doing and thinking—that informs the daily activities of teachers and learners. They also place a great deal of emphasis on relationships. This reflects the IB's belief that educational outcomes are profoundly shaped by the relationships between teachers and students, and celebrates the many ways that people work together to construct meaning and make sense of the world.

Approaches to teaching

The same six approaches underpin teaching in all IB programmes. The approaches are deliberately broad, designed to give teachers the flexibility to choose specific strategies to employ that best reflect their own particular contexts and the needs of their students.

In all IB programmes, teaching is:

- **Based on inquiry.** A strong emphasis is placed on students finding their own information and constructing their own understandings.
- **Focused on conceptual understanding.** Concepts are explored in order to both deepen disciplinary understanding and to help students make connections and transfer learning to new contexts.
- **Developed in local and global contexts.** Teaching uses real-life contexts and examples, and students are encouraged to process new information by connecting it to their own experiences and to the world around them.
- **Focused on effective teamwork and collaboration.** This includes promoting teamwork and collaboration between students, but also refers to the collaborative relationship between teachers and students.
- **Designed to remove barriers to learning.** Teaching is inclusive and values diversity. It affirms students' identities, and aims to create learning opportunities that enable every student to develop and pursue appropriate personal goals.
- **Informed by assessment.** Assessment plays a crucial role in supporting, as well as measuring, learning. This approach also recognizes the crucial role of providing students with effective feedback.

Approaches to learning

Our focus on approaches to learning is grounded in the belief that learning how to learn is fundamental to a student's education.

The five categories of interrelated skills aim to empower IB students of all ages to become self-regulated learners who know how to ask good questions, set effective goals, pursue their aspirations and have the determination to achieve them. These skills also help to support students' sense of agency, encouraging them to see their learning as an active and dynamic process.

The same five categories of skills span all IB programmes, with the skills then emphasized in developmentally appropriate ways within each programme. The five categories are:

- thinking skills, including areas such as critical thinking, creative thinking and ethical thinking
- research skills, including skills such as comparing, contrasting, validating and prioritizing information
- communication skills, including skills such as written and oral communication, effective listening, and formulating arguments
- social skills, including areas such as forming and maintaining positive relationships, listening skills, and conflict resolution
- self-management skills, including both organisational skills, such as managing time and tasks, and affective skills, such as managing state of mind and motivation.

The development of these skills plays a crucial role in supporting the IB's mission to develop active, compassionate and lifelong learners. Although these skills areas are presented as distinct categories, there are close links and areas of overlap between them, and these categories should be seen as interrelated.

Conclusion

An IB education is designed to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who will help to create a better and more peaceful world. Today, as new global challenges emerge under an unprecedented pace of change, an IB education is more relevant and necessary than ever.

The IB and its programmes are unique in many ways. We are a not-for-profit organization, meaning that there are no shareholders and any surplus income is invested in our work. We are independent of political and commercial interests, and IB programmes are offered in a hugely diverse range of schools around the world; both state and private, national and international, large and small.

One of the most special features of the IB is that it gathers together a worldwide community of educators who share a common belief that education can help to build a better world. Each of our IB programmes and curricula undergoes regular review to ensure that we are delivering the best possible education for IB students. This curriculum review process involves educators from many different cultures and backgrounds and ensures that practising teachers play a critical role in the development of each programme. It also means that our vision is constantly sharpened by research, both our own and that of other respected academic bodies.

The IB has always championed a stance of critical engagement with challenging ideas, and of combining our commitment to enduring fundamental principles with our drive for innovation and improvement. For this reason, *What is an IB education?* is intended not only to inform but also to stimulate further conversations and discussion.

Additional reading

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