

PROS and CONS of the IB Discussion Paper

An increasing number of Australian parents are choosing International Baccalaureate (IB) programs over state curriculum options. This trend is particularly strong in the senior secondary years, where the IB Diploma has almost tripled in popularity since the early 2000s.

- Globally, the IB is now offered in nearly 4000 schools across 148 countries. Its reach has been extended beyond the senior years to offer primary and middle years' programs and a vocational career-related certificate. The number of students taking the IBDP in the UK was 4,850, less than the 5,250 last year (2022).
- A total of 179,917 students took the IBDP and IBCP examinations worldwide, compared with 173,878 IBDP students in 2022.

What is an IB education? [An IB Education explained](#) – Once the preserve of international schools, the IB Diploma is an emerging rival to state-based certificates - such as the Higher School Certificate (HSC) in NSW and the Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) in Victoria. The diploma is offered in a range of public and private schools.

But what is it about the IB Diploma that makes it an attractive option to some parents but not to others? And how is it different from existing state-based curricula and certificates?

Established in Geneva in 1968, the global nature of the IB Diploma has always been a key feature – appealing to parents who are keen to prepare their children for participation in worldwide education and job markets.

In Australia, there are 215 IB World Schools – [IB SCHOOLS Australia](#) – and many independent schools have adopted the IB Diploma program. Schools often sell the program to parents and students as a more robust and superior pathway to university.

Curriculum breadth

The IB Diploma has a unique curriculum, with several features that distinguish it from state-based senior certificates. ([IB Dip](#))

To begin with, its curriculum emphasises *academic breadth* over specialisation. Students are required to study one subject (including a second language) from each of five groups. Students can then elect to do a sixth subject from the Arts or take another subject from the first five groups. Cheryl has outlined the nature of the curriculum in some detail in her briefing paper [\(Cheryl's paper\)](#).

The IB's emphasis on academic breadth and its requirement of a second language could be seen as both a blessing and a curse. On the positive side, a second language is likely to make students more competitive in global job markets, and the emphasis on breadth will keep their post-school options open by ensuring they remain academic "all-rounders". Some would also argue that a "well-rounded" education must surely involve the study of a second language.

On the downside, some might view the language requirement as unnecessarily onerous and the emphasis on breadth as discouraging the *specialisation* many state-based certificates allow for students who want to tailor their senior years towards preferred subject areas. Since the 1990s, Australian state-based certificates have also seen a rapid increase in vocational education and training options. All certificates now allow students to integrate vocational training into their senior years.

The IB Diploma, however, remains academically focused and does not allow for the integration of vocational subjects. For students who wish to pursue vocational pathways, the IB has recently created the **IB Career-Related Certificate Program**. ([IBCP](#)) There is, currently, only one provider in Australia (Hunter Valley Grammar School), but this is the option that John is focussed on for Living School students.

The Core Requirements of the IB (as outlined by Cheryl) might be appealing to parents who want their children to arrive at university with an advantage over others. There is some evidence to suggest this might be the case. The IB organisation for example, has compiled summaries of research¹ (suggesting students who take the diploma achieve higher results at university and have better post-university employment outcomes).

The Career Related Program (CP)

CP students undertake a minimum of two IB Diploma Programme (DP) courses, a core consisting of four components and a career-related study.

For CP students, DP courses provide the theoretical underpinning and academic rigour of the programme; the career-related study further supports the programme's academic strength and provides practical, real-world approaches to learning; and the CP core helps them to develop skills and competencies required for lifelong learning.

Students complete at least two DP courses in any of that programme's subject groups. DP courses provide and enhance the theoretical underpinnings and academic rigour of the CP.

The CP core components give context to the DP courses and the career-related study, drawing all aspects of the framework together. Through the CP core, students develop personal qualities and professional skills, as well as intellectual habits required for lifelong learning.

Each school chooses the career-related study most suited to local conditions and the needs of its students. The career-related study must satisfy IB criteria for accreditation, assessment and quality assurance.

The CP enables students to:

¹ Research across our programmes suggests that IB students are internationally minded, creative, and critical thinkers.

[Students in the PYP show higher levels of well-being](#) compared to similar non-PYP students and [MYP students perform significantly better](#) than students from non-IB schools in the International Schools' Assessment (ISA) areas at several grade levels. [DP](#), [CP](#) and [DP course](#) students demonstrated higher levels of global mindedness as compared to their peers in six countries across the world. DP and CP students also often enrol in some of the most selective universities in the world.

[Read more research findings \(PDF, 359 KB\)](#)

IB research collaborates with leading universities around the world to conduct many research studies aimed at discovering the impact of our teaching and learning methodologies.

- follow their chosen education and career pathways in life
- combine academic subjects with their personal and professional interests and skills
- engage in learning that makes a positive difference to their community
- think critically and creatively
- communicate clearly and effectively in a variety of situations
- work independently and in collaboration with others
- consider new perspectives and other points of view
- develop greater self-confidence and self-awareness
- demonstrate high levels of resilience and flexibility
- be internationally minded and globally aware
- apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios and situations.

In Australia, the future of state-based senior certificates hinges largely on whether or not the national Australian Curriculum is extended into the senior years, as was originally planned. The option of a future national certificate is not out of the question.

In the meantime, the trajectory of change suggests parents will continue to vote with their feet and overlook state options in favour of “global alternatives” like the IB.

Pros and Cons of the IB

Broaden Student Market: The IBDP is a globally recognised.

Improved Pedagogy: All teachers must be certified.

Positive Image: The Community Action and Service component.

Vision alignment: the focus on personal growth, character development and community engagement aligns with our VAST model. Its strong emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving interdisciplinary learning aligns with our pedagogical approach.

Going beyond this, the four IB programmes have tangible benefits for students, with research in NSW indicating that the curriculum can provide students with a greater opportunity to excel at their studies, think more critically and choose their pattern of study. It is the global aspect of the qualification that sets it apart from State and Territory certificates.

However, accreditation and ongoing compliance with the IB requirements is a costly and time-consuming exercise. It takes 2-3 years to become fully accredited, during which time schools must make an application for candidacy fee of approximately AU\$5829 and annual fees of up to AU\$12,910 per programme, which are payable throughout the accreditation process. Ongoing staff professional development is compulsory, with some courses only available overseas.

Maintaining accreditation also requires schools to undertake a rigorous evaluation process. Schools must undergo general evaluation every 4-5 years. Schools must also be open to - and fund - visits from the IB Organisation’s representatives at any time with reasonable advance notice regarding their implementation of specific programmes.

For some schools, the IB will not be suitable as an alternative to the HSC, given their focus on maintaining a prime position in the so-called league tables. Many parents value these tables as indicators of academic excellence. Many Australian schools offer both the state accreditation as well as the IB Dip – but this can be a costly exercise if class numbers are small.

However, ‘leading schools’ such as Cranbrook, Kambala, Newington College, Redlands, Ravenswood, The Kings School and Trinity Grammar all offer the IB and Hunter Valley Grammar and St Paul’s Cranebrook offer all three programs – or are moving towards doing so. Hunter Valley Grammar, in particular, provides us with a fascinating and instructive case study.

Case Study Hunter Valley Grammar School HVGS

The full story behind the association between HVGS and the IBO can be found at this link.

[HVGS and the IB](#)

The then HVGS Principal undertook extensive research in the IB in 2019. Since then, Hunter Valley Grammar School has become a candidate school in the Diploma Programme and the Career-related Programme. If HVGS is authorised in both these programs, then HVGS is well on its way to being the first school in Australia to offer all four programmes and hence be the first World School in the country– a title reserved for schools that offer all four programmes.

The HVGS CP outline looks like this:

The International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme (CP) allows for students to complete career-related courses as the centre of their Years 11 and 12 studies, in conjunction with other career-supporting subjects.

Subjects taught as part of the CP include:

Career-related studies (Australian VET courses).

Students choose from:

- o Certificate II in Hospitality – Kitchen Operations
- o Certificate II in Primary Industries – Agriculture
- o Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care
- o another VET subject offered by the local TAFE
- o Compulsory career-supporting CP subjects:
- o Language and Literature (equivalent to HSC English)
- o Business Management (equivalent to HSC Business Management)
- o Language development
- o Personal and Professional Skills
- o Reflective project
- o Service Learning

Listen to HVGS Director of IB Programmes Pauline O’Grady to find out what career opportunities this presents for students and why other students should consider this pathway.

Why is the IB CP a pathway students should explore?

It is a great way for students to develop skills in applied knowledge, critical thinking, communication, and cross-cultural engagement in their interested career. It is a real

world approach to learning. Students can study their career of choice whilst guided by their teachers in a supportive environment.

What are the students currently studying in the IBCP at HVGS?

Students are studying Early Childhood Education and Care, Primary Industries and Support Services (Aged Care). Two Year 11 students have moved into further studies. One student was granted early entry into Tocal Agriculture College, and another accepted a hospitality apprenticeship.

Currently, a Year 12 student is undertaking her career studies in VET Certificate III in Early Childhood Education and Care in our Early Learning Centre (ELC). She is refining her skills in a real-world setting, positioning her as a preferred applicant as she transitions into the workforce.

What other aspects of the IBCP support the development of students' careers?

There are many aspects of the IBCP that support students' careers, including:

- Students undertake 50 hours of service learning to apply their skills in a practical setting whilst helping others.
- Students are given the opportunity to use this service towards attaining a Duke of Edinburgh Award.
- Courses in personal and professional skills and language development, teach skills suited to a workplace.
- The Reflective Project develops research and critical thinking skills, by investigating an ethical dilemma associated with a student's career area.
- Completing two Diploma courses develops students' academic skills.

What qualifications will the students receive by the end of the programme, and what are their options post school?

Students will graduate with a VET Certificate in their career area plus the IB Career-related Programme Certificate.

HVGS is now committed to both the IB CP and the IB Dip.

We are pleased to announce that Hunter Valley Grammar School has decided to offer the IB Diploma Programme, pending authorisation of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO). This is the fourth of the IB programmes and will place HVGS in the unique position of being the only four-programme IB World School in NSW and one of the very few four-programme schools in Australia. In pursuing the IB Diploma, HVGS will harken back to the pioneering spirit that marks its origins as a grammar school in the Hunter Valley and demonstrates our commitment to offering an IB education to students from three to eighteen years of age.

Currently, we are seeking candidacy from the IBO to offer the IB Diploma from Year 11 2025 (thus to our current cohort of Year 9 students). Given the detailed

process involved in seeking recognition as an IB Diploma School, the timeline of 2025 has been thoughtfully considered and agreed as a realistic and achievable goal for the School in consultation with the IBO.

The IB Diploma is highly regarded as a robust, differentiated, and enriching course of study around the world. The introduction of the IB Diploma will mark a natural progression in our academic programs, offering Senior students an additional and exciting pathway towards their future.

Why the IB Diploma at HVGS?

At Hunter Valley Grammar School, we strive to provide differentiated *pathways to educational excellence* for our students. One of our strategic priority areas in our strategic plan is Excellence in Holistic Education:

HVGS is committed to maintaining high standards of excellence in learning across academics, social-emotional learning, vocational studies, arts, sports and service. HVGS values the whole student and is committed to providing innovative learning pathways that prepare students for the future while engaging their passions and challenging them to be global citizens who seek to make a difference in their world.

HVGS is committed to being a leading IB World School in Australia.

Is the IB right for us at Living School?

What are the Pros of IB?

1) Focus on Social Responsibility

The IBO believes in developing students who help create a better world. The IB curriculum has an extensive focus on social responsibility from a young age.

2) Well-rounded organised curriculum

The IB curriculum is well-equipped for the development of communication skills, both verbal and written, which is not found in other programmes.

The compulsory units allow participation in debates, research and analysis, and creative writing with verbal reasoning. These skills are significant for university and the job market.

3) IB Network

The IBO perhaps overstates the importance of the ‘wonderful IB Alumni network’.

4) Global recognition

This can be termed as one of the biggest advantages of an IB programme – the global recognition it offers. It has a complete international perspective. The IB Program is recognised in almost every country and by all leading universities.

5) University Preparation

The IB Diploma programme helps you with university preparation as it enhances skills with a holistic approach that includes academic and personality development skills. The IB Programme has units like ToK and CAS, which improve writing and research skills.

Cons of IB

1) Workload

There is no doubt that IB has subjects that are dynamic and relevant to a career, but this comes with immense workload and pressure. Some critics say students need to work enormously hard to complete the syllabus of these subjects. In terms of results, 45 is the maximum number of points you can get with IB; this, according to UK critics, is equivalent to 6 A-Levels at A grade.

As part of the workload students face the burden of learning a second language.

In addition to the subjects studied students must also undertake the Core components.

2) Lack of flexibility

The IB curriculum does pose a lack of flexibility due to the compulsory breadth of study it requires. IB does not allow a third subject in the same category. For students looking to study Medicine, some advisors suggest the best bet is the HSC syllabus – taking as much science and maths as possible.

Moreover, the subjects offered in the IB are dependent on schools; our students will have to select from the subjects that Living School offers, and some students might not have many choices.

3) Length of study

The IB Programme is not for shortcut people, and it is not an easy task.

To do well in the IB Program, you need to sweat it out for 2 long years with hard work and consistent work performance, measured in final exams marked externally.

5) Expensive

Students have to pay an exam fee, and as noted above, there are a number of additional and substantial costs to the school.

How off-putting are the cons? Here are some IB myth-busters.

‘The second language is a burden.’

FALSE! In Year 11, IB students can start learning a language at a beginner’s level, with no prior knowledge of that language. Schools can offer Ab Initio (meaning ‘from the beginning’) languages.

The IB recognises the immense benefits of studying a foreign language, namely enhancing the ability to communicate, developing conceptual understandings of how language works and gaining cross-cultural understanding and an international perspective.

‘Students have a very demanding load in year twelve.’

FALSE! The workload is no more demanding than an HSC load. Yes, IB students continue

their six subjects in Year 12, but only three of them will be studied at Higher Level, where the content will be greater. The other three subjects are studied at Standard Level, and this content is usually finished by May of Year 12.

‘The Extended Essay is too challenging.’

FALSE! The Extended Essay is an exciting part of the IB and enables students to research an area of interest with the assistance of a school supervisor. Students have over 12 months to work on their essay and gain many skills of research and writing, citing and referencing, which puts them in good stead for university.

‘The IB is not fun.’

FALSE! Approaches to teaching and learning in the IB make the courses interesting, enjoyable and exciting. Not only do students choose the direction of their own internal assessment coursework, but all disciplines are focused on teamwork and collaboration and are based on inquiry.

‘In the IB you have to do lots of hours of CAS.’

FALSE! Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS) is one of the core components of the IB and is based on the belief that education does not begin or end in the classroom. Students are supported by their mentors to identify learning outcomes that they meet by selecting experiences – most of which are part of student life: music, service work, sports training and games, fundraising, performing arts.

‘The IB is only for those who want to study overseas.’

FALSE! The IB is recognised throughout Australia and globally by universities and top employers. The IB is concerned with developing internationally minded students, and all universities hold the IB in high regard because they value the skills and attributes that IB graduates bring to their tertiary studies due to the learning style and structure of the program.

‘IB students must be excellent at science.’

FALSE! Whilst students do have to study a science, they can choose it at Standard Level, which is accessible to all students.

Where to from here?

Matters to resolve:

- Cheryl has proposed we offer the IB Dip and not the HSC
- The Conductor has proposed the IB Dip and the IB CP
- Visit to HVGS?
- If and when to become a candidate school? Board decision
- Nature of being a Candidate School
- Floating the proposal to the community
- Appointment of IB Coordinator
- Subject choices to offer in both DP and CP?
- Teacher PD
- Length of program at Living School? NB John’s three-year proposal

- Exam fee – absorb or pass on?
- Resources needed?
- Preparation and planning for Year 9 2024 cohort
- International student intake?
- Budget considerations