



Guidelines for developing a school assessment policy in the Diploma Programme

What is an assessment policy?

An assessment policy is derived from the school's and the IB's assessment philosophy and principles, which must be consistent with each other. It is constructed around educational and pedagogical values and, therefore, represents a statement of intent and action describing principles and practices for achieving educational goals relating to all aspects of assessment.

IB expectations for schools regarding assessment are outlined in the programme standards and practices document: *Standard C4: Assessment*, reproduced below.

Standard C4: Assessment

Assessment at the school reflects the IB assessment philosophy.

1. Assessment at the school aligns with the requirements of the programme(s).
2. The school communicates its assessment philosophy, policy and procedures to the school community.
3. The school uses a range of strategies and tools to assess student learning.
4. The school provides students with feedback to inform and improve their learning.
5. The school has systems for recording student progress aligned with the assessment philosophy of the programme(s).
6. The school has systems for reporting student progress aligned with the assessment philosophy of the programme(s).
7. The school analyses assessment data to inform teaching and learning.
8. The school provides opportunities for students to participate in, and reflect on, the assessment of their work.
9. The school has systems in place to ensure that all students can demonstrate consolidation of their learning through the completion of the Primary Years Programme exhibition, the Middle Years Programme personal project and the Diploma Programme extended essay, depending on the programme(s) offered.

Formative assessment represents the process of gathering, analysing, interpreting and using the evidence to improve student learning and to help students to achieve their potential. It is one essential component of classroom practice and needs to be integrated into the curriculum. The assessment policy will make clear to the whole community what the expectations and practices relating to formative assessment in the school are.

Summative assessment is concerned with measuring student performance against Diploma Programme assessment criteria to judge levels of attainment. Teachers must be aware of the principles and practices that the IB uses to conduct summative assessment. Summative and formative assessments are, therefore, inherently linked and teachers must use their knowledge of IB summative assessment expectations and practices to help students improve performance in a formative way.

Constructing and implementing an assessment policy is intended to help the school to engage meaningfully with IB assessment expectations and develop these in the context of the school's unique circumstances. Diploma Programme schools operate in numerous different contexts with differing national and federal expectations concerning student assessment. The IB respects that this is the reality but, at the same time, it is absolutely essential that schools understand and implement IB assessment expectations and practices so that students are given the optimum chance of succeeding in the programme.

Steps for developing an assessment policy

The first stage is to improve understanding of IB assessment principles and practices by reading all the relevant programme and subject guides and attending appropriate professional development events. Once a good level of understanding is reached, it is important to compare IB expectations and the practices in the school.

The IB does not publish a definitive assessment policy because a crucial process occurs when the school synthesizes its own expectations and practices ([that may be determined by national or federal requirements) with those of the IB. If the IB is the only educational programme that the school offers, this will be an easier task but even then it is essential to generate a common understanding of expectations and practices that suit the context of the school. If the school is also required to assess and report using other prescribed systems, a good deal of thought needs to go into considering how best to incorporate these together. This may involve a synthesis or a decision to run some aspects in parallel. How this is going to be achieved in a way that is consistent with the requirements and expectations of the different systems must be articulated in the policy document.

Any successful assessment policy must be a living document that is used by teachers and administrators to improve practice. For this reason it needs to be written collaboratively and the IB will expect to see evidence that it is “lived in practice” during the authorization and evaluation stages. Many schools establish a small working group of teachers and administrators (sometimes including students) to write the document. It is, however, possible for one individual to write the policy, provided extensive collaboration has occurred so that the policy reflects a common understanding.

What is included in an assessment policy?

The assessment policy needs to contain the following.

1. A statement of the philosophy and principles that underpin all assessment practice

This can be organized in a variety of ways. Some schools include a section listing the purposes of assessment and indicators of effective assessment and assessment practice. However this section is organized, it must be consistent with principles and practices expected by the IB, but may contain additional or modified principles to take into account the needs of the school and the requirements of other authorities.

2. A section detailing assessment practices that teachers are expected to follow, covering both formative and summative aspects

This may be specific to the IB or it may explain how different expectations, resulting from different systems, are handled. This section (or, alternatively, forming separate sections) will include statements clarifying expectation and practices about:

- grading/marking
- recording and reporting
- homework.

3. Links between the assessment policy and other documents, articulated in full (for example, the school’s language and admissions policies)

4. Roles and responsibilities for implementing, evaluating and reviewing the assessment policy and for training new teachers

Once written, further steps have to be taken to ensure that the policy becomes a working document. To do so, the timing and responsibilities for review must be included in the policy (see point 4 above). As the school becomes more experienced with the IB, and as new ideas are developed and assessment practices are evaluated, it will be necessary to review and revise the policy. The school must also consider how best to communicate the policy in order to keep the school community informed.

Assessment considerations in the Diploma Programme

Formal assessment in the Diploma Programme, defined as assessment directly contributing to the final qualification, represents the final summative assessment practice in the IB continuum of education. Because of the high stakes nature of this assessment process, determining students’ possible pathways to further education, it is essential that teachers fully understand how formal assessment is conducted. Most formal assessment is external and includes examinations or work completed during the course and then

sent to an external examiner. Some formal assessment is internal, requiring the teacher to mark the work before it is moderated by an external moderator. Each subject guide explains the assessment model and practices for that particular subject. The principles, practices and challenges involved in formal Diploma Programme assessment are considered in detail in *Diploma Programme assessment: Principles and practice*.

Assessment practices in the Diploma Programme may well be very different from current school practices, so it is essential that the school fully understands Diploma Programme expectations and applies these to the school context within the assessment policy. Some key features of Diploma Programme assessment include the following.

- An emphasis on criterion-related (as opposed to norm-referenced) assessment

This method of assessment judges students' work in relation to identified levels of attainment, rather than in relation to the work of other students.

- A distinction between formal IB assessment and the supporting formative processes that schools need to develop for themselves
- Valuing the most accurate demonstration of student performance, rather than just averaging attainment grades over a reporting period
- Examining student understanding at the end of the course, based on the whole course and not just aspects of it

Students must be able to recall, adapt and apply knowledge and skills to new questions and contexts.

It is important to emphasize that the single most important aim of Diploma Programme assessment (consistent with the Primary Years Programme and the Middle Years Programme) is to support curricular goals and encourage appropriate student learning. Assessments are based upon evaluating course aims and objectives and, therefore, effective teaching to the course requirements also ensures effective teaching to the examination and other formal assessment requirements. Students need to understand what the assessment expectations, standards and practices are and these should all be introduced early, naturally in instruction as well as class and homework activities.

Teachers are responsible for designing and providing formative assessment structures and practices that help students to improve their understanding of what constitutes excellence and where their own work stands in relation to this. Formative assessment is also important for the teacher, as it should provide detailed feedback on the nature of the students' strengths and limitations. The emphasis here—a key component of learning how to learn—is on making the student a better judge of their own performance and then helping them to develop strategies to improve. Formative assessment focuses on assessment as an essential learning process. Schools should use a number of practices and instruments to support this, including: teacher-supported self-evaluation, systematic use of detailed assessment descriptors (rubrics, matrices), and peer evaluation mediated by the teacher (either face to face or using an ICT resource, such as a blog). Assessment instruments primarily designed for formal assessment at the end of the course should also be adapted and used formatively as part of the learning process. How schools approach formative assessment must be made clear in the assessment policy.

Teacher collaboration is essential where more than one teacher is involved in teaching the course, as schemes of work must be developed collaboratively. Final internal assessments are collected by subject, not by teacher, and are sent for moderation as school samples, not class samples. Teachers can improve practices by sharing ideas with their colleagues and observing classes, and teacher collaboration should, therefore, also be seen as one important aspect of professional development. How this is to be organized must be set out in the school's assessment policy.

Reporting will impact assessment practices in a school and becomes the face of assessment to both parents and students. This reality can impact on teaching and learning and, therefore, it is important to assess and report based on Diploma Programme assessment principles. Without this approach, it is likely that teachers will default to the practices with which they are more familiar, and the development of the programme will be held back.

Appropriate internal assessment timelines should be an expectation supported in the school's assessment policy. These are a very useful instrument to help students and teachers to plan their work in realistically manageable loads, as final assessment requirements cannot all be completed at the same time. IB World Schools need to develop timelines that are sensitive to their own specific environments and include in their construction both input from teachers and feedback from students.

Well-designed timelines reduce stress on students and allow time for teachers to provide feedback on drafts, check that the work is authentically that of the student, mark final pieces of work and prepare moderation samples in an organized fashion and before any due date. Effective timelines reflect a culture of collaboration among Diploma Programme teachers, whereby such teachers understand both the "big picture" of Diploma Programme design and have basic knowledge of each other's subject assessment requirements.

Further reading (available on the online curriculum centre)

Diploma Programme assessment: Principles and practice

The Diploma Programme: From principles to practice