INTRODUCTION TO THE IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME

The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is a rigorous pre-university course of studies, leading to examinations, that meets the needs of highly motivated secondary school students between the ages of 16 and 19 years. Designed as a comprehensive two-year curriculum that allows its graduates to fulfil requirements of various national education systems, the diploma model is based on the pattern of no single country but incorporates the best elements of many. The programme is available in English, French and Spanish.

The curriculum is displayed in the shape of a hexagon with six academic areas surrounding the core. Subjects are studied concurrently and students are exposed to the two great traditions of learning - the humanities and the sciences.

Diploma candidates are required to select one subject from each of the six subject groups. At least three and not more than four are taken at higher level (HL), the others at standard level (SL). By arranging work in this fashion, students are able to explore some subjects in depth and some more broadly over the two-year period; this is a deliberate compromise between the early specialization preferred in some national systems and the breadth found in others.
Distribution requirements ensure that the science-orientated student is challenged to learn a foreign language and that the natural linguist becomes familiar with laboratory procedures. While overall balance is maintained, flexibility in choosing higher level concentrations allows the student to pursue areas of personal interest and to meet special requirements for university entrance. Extra flexibility is provided by transdisciplinary subjects which can fulfill the requirements of two groups with one subject, thus enabling greater choice and/or some specialization (see Ecosystems and Societies, below).

Successful diploma candidates meet three requirements in addition to the six subjects. The interdisciplinary Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course is designed to develop a coherent approach to learning which transcends and unifies the academic areas and encourages appreciation of other cultural perspectives. The Extended Essay of some 4000 words offers the opportunity to investigate a topic of special interest and acquaints students with the independent research and writing skills expected at university. Participation in the school’s Creativity, Action, Service (CAS) programme encourages students to be involved in sports, artistic pursuits and community service work.

Subjects currently on offer at VIS are as follows:

**Group 1 : Language A1** (Mother tongue level, literature based):
English A1, German A1, both at Higher and Standard levels.
It is also possible to study a privately-taught language as an A1 language at HL or SL.

**Group 2 : Language B, A2, ab initio** (Foreign language, focus on communication):
English B and A2, both at Higher and Standard levels;
German B and A2, both at Higher and Standard levels;
German ab initio (no previous experience), Standard level only;
French B and Spanish B, both at Higher and Standard levels;
A privately taught language.

**Group 3 : Individuals and Societies**:
Economics, Geography, History, Information Technology in a Global Society, Philosophy; all at Higher and Standard levels;
Ecosystems and Societies, Standard level only.

**Group 4 : Experimental sciences**:
Biology, Chemistry, Physics; all at Higher and Standard levels;
Design Technology, Ecosystems and Societies, both Standard level only.

**Group 5 : Mathematics and Computer Science**:
Mathematics, Higher and Standard levels; Math Studies, Standard level only;
Further Mathematics, Standard level only (realistically only in addition to Math HL)
Computer Science (in addition to, not instead of, Mathematics) : Higher and Standard levels.

**Group 6 : Arts and Electives**:
Film, Music, Theatre Arts, Visual Arts; all at Higher and Standard levels;
OR one other subject from Groups 1 to 5.
Ecosystems and Societies: a transdisciplinary subject – Groups 3 and 4.
Available in 2005-07

**Ecosystems and Societies** can be used as –
- a Group 3 subject (Individuals and Societies)
- a Group 4 subject (Experimental Sciences)
- or to cover **both Group 3 and Group 4** with **one** subject.

Thus a student could take the following combinations for a full Diploma:

3 languages (Groups 1 and 2) and an Arts (Group 6) subject, plus Math (Group 5) and Ecosystems and Societies (Groups 3 and 4),
e.g. English A1 SL, German B HL, Spanish B HL, Visual Art HL, Math SL, Ecosystems and Societies SL

2 languages (Groups 1 and 2), 2 Arts subjects (Group 6) Math (Group 5) and Ecosystems and Societies (Groups 3 and 4),
e.g. German A1 HL, English B HL, Theatre Arts HL, Music SL, Math Studies SL, Ecosystems and Societies SL.

4 languages (Groups 1 and 2), Math (Group 5) and Ecosystems and Societies (Groups 3 and 4),
e.g. Russian A1 HL, Slovakian A1 SL, English B HL, German B SL, Math HL, Ecosystems and Societies SL.

All these are acceptable full Diplomas but do not qualify for Matura Equivalence because they omit a “traditional” experimental science (Biology, Chemistry or Physics). But for genuinely talented linguists and artists who do not need Matura Equivalence, they deserve consideration.

**Matura Equivalence** can be obtained by successfully completing Grade 10 and then following appropriate IB courses in Grades 11 and 12. English, German, Mathematics and Biology or Chemistry or Physics are required courses for Matura Equivalence, and students who do not choose Geography or History as part of their programme are required to take extra supplementary courses in Austrian Geography and Austrian History to qualify for Matura Equivalence.

Further information is available in the current edition of Grade 11 and 12 VISTAS at [http://www.vis.ac.at/secondary/ib_information/vistasg1112/index.html](http://www.vis.ac.at/secondary/ib_information/vistasg1112/index.html)
Final choice:

In the second semester of the Grade 10 year, students make their final choice of IB programme. They are guided at this time by semester and examination grades, advice from the university and careers counsellors and by teacher recommendations. Experience shows us that students who attempt programmes for which they have not been recommended by teachers are usually unsuccessful. Parents are welcome to join these discussions and are invited to attend if problems are perceived with the programme chosen.

The guidelines for acceptance into the IB programme in Grades 11 and 12 are as follows:
Successful completion of Grade 10, at VIS or another school.
A high level of competence in English, since all courses except languages are taught and examined in English.
Motivation for further study and a willingness to share responsibility for the day-to-day ordering of school life.
Grade 10 achievement grades of at least 5 (good), and preferably better, in subjects selected for Higher level study
Sufficient teacher recommendations to make a viable programme.

Guidelines for acceptance into the IB Diploma programme in Grades 11 and 12
As above, plus
In the June report of Grade 10 and/or the Grade 10 examinations,
A total of 16 achievement points in subjects to be studied at Higher level,
A total of 12 achievement points in subjects to be studied at Standard level,
In the January and June reports of Grade 10, comments indicating good attitude and effort.

Please also note the following extract from the Grade 11-12 VISTAS booklet:

1. All courses are offered subject to demand. It is not possible to run a large number of courses with a very small number of students in each. The normal minimum is 5 students, but the average has to be considerably higher. Students must be ready to accept a second choice if necessary. The exception is a student’s Mother Tongue: this can be studied on a 1 to 1 basis as tuition is financed privately.

2. For less popular subjects it may not be possible to be certain until the actual start of semester exactly which sets will have recruited enough students. Subjects are arranged on the timetable to provide a great variety of courses, but there are very likely to be some clashes which will limit your choice. There is no way of guaranteeing everyone exactly his or her personal choice.

3. The school reserves the right not to accept an application for a course which appears to be beyond a student’s ability.

4. It may be possible for suitably-qualified students to anticipate (take one year early) a B Standard level Language and/or one other subject.
The award not only of the International Baccalaureate Diploma but also of the VIS Academic Diploma and the VIS General Diploma require the taking of IB examinations and payment of IB examination fees, currently incorporated in tuition fees.

Once a programme has been agreed, students follow this (subject to timetable restrictions) in Grade 11. Changes may be made in the first half of the first semester of the Grade 11 year but become more difficult to effect successfully later.

Students start the Theory of Knowledge course and their CAS activities at the start of the Grade 11 year. In the second semester, they are introduced to the Extended Essay procedure with the aim of completing much of the work for this during the summer break between Grades 11 and 12. Internal examinations are held at the end of the Grade 11 year. Careers and university advice is offered throughout Grade 11 and formal applications are made during the first semester of the Grade 12 year. It is during this semester that most of the coursework required for internal assessment is completed in accordance with a set of deadlines compiled in an attempt to spread the workload as much as possible. Mock examinations are held in February of the Grade 12 year and the formal IB examinations take place in May.

Throughout Grades 11 and 12 student progress is carefully monitored. Students and teachers agree on target grades and regular comparison is made with these targets and current achievement, with intervention action being taken if it seems that students are underachieving.

Results are issued in July, after graduation, and advice is available to candidates at this time. Diplomas and Certificates are issued at the end of August.

For further information please see the school website at http://www.vis.ac.at/secondary/ib_information/index.html or contact the IBDP Coordinator at (0043 1) 2035595.