

The approach to IB DP/CP awarding for schools in conflict-impacted countries where it is deemed exams cannot be taken safely

Summary

At the IB, we recognise the profound impact that conflict has had on students, schools, and wider communities, and we acknowledge that students' experiences and circumstances differ depending on their local context. Our priority during such circumstances is to ensure that students are able to receive fair, meaningful, and internationally trusted outcomes, even where examinations cannot take place for reasons beyond their control.

The IB's strong preference remains that students sit examinations wherever this is safe, lawful, and practicable, as examinations provide the most direct and robust evidence of student performance. However, in limited and exceptional circumstances - where Ministries of Education, or schools under Ministry discretion, mandate that it is not safe for examinations to be administered - the IB may implement the Non Exam Contingency Measure (NECM) as a last resort safeguard.

While the Non Exam Contingency Measure (NECM) usually applies to students enrolled in schools located in countries affected by conflict-related safety constraints, it may also apply to students based in regions impacted by conflict and studying with IB Diploma Programme online schools. These schools operate fully online, and students are ordinarily taught, assessed and take examinations in their country of residence using local host schools. In such circumstances, some of these students may reside in countries where Ministries of Education, or schools under Ministry discretion, have determined that examinations cannot safely take place. In these cases, the NECM may be applied based on the conditions in the student's country of residence and therefore exam location, rather than the registration status.

The NECM is a safety-focussed approach designed to enable students to receive results where examinations cannot be held safely. Under the NECM, schools are required to upload **all** internal assessment work for **all** affected students. This work is externally assessed by IB examiners, meaning that student grades are based on externally assessed evidence, rather than teacher marking or moderation alone. Ordinarily, only a sample of internal assessment is submitted for moderation; under the NECM, submission is extended to every candidate to ensure a robust evidential base.

Teacher provided information, including predicted grades, is used for contextual and analytical purposes within the NECM. Please refer to the guidance document, [Predicting IB Grades](#) (the section Uses of IB Predicted Grades). This explains that in exceptional circumstances, where exams need to be cancelled, predicted grades may be used as one piece of evidence by the IB to award outcomes.

The IB provides a distribution of predicted grades to each DP subject in schools with more than 5 students registered: this distribution is calculated from grades awarded in the previous 3 years. It provides a guide to keep predictions realistic, but schools are able to deviate from this distribution if they feel that they have sufficient evidence.

In these circumstances schools may also be asked to provide evidence to support predicted grades. Predicted grades are used to support quality assurance, sense checking, and comparability analysis, alongside coursework outcomes and historical performance data. This enables the IB to model what students might reasonably have achieved under normal examination conditions, while maintaining appropriate professional judgement and safeguards.

The IB will ensure that students awarded grades through the NECM and those sitting examinations are held to comparable standards. This includes:

- Comparing individual school performance with their performance in previous years;
- Ensuring that expected (predicted) performance reflects actual historical performance;
- Checking that standards of awarded grades are comparable between the exam route and non-exam contingency;

The IB recognizes that awarding grades without examinations is inherently complex and that no non-exam approach can perfectly replicate live examination performance. For this reason, the NECM represents a best endeavours approach under exceptional circumstances, supported by enhanced expert scrutiny and human judgement. Additional resources and senior oversight have been built into the process to ensure confidence in outcomes.

Where students are able to relocate safely and register at alternative IB schools outside affected areas, the IB will support these candidates to sit examinations as usual.

The IB is committed to working closely with regulators, schools, governmental bodies and universities, as well as students, parents and teachers, to maintain confidence in the integrity and value of IB results. Our overriding aim is to ensure that all students - regardless of awarding mechanism - receive fair and comparable outcomes that support their progression to the next stage of their education in these exceptional circumstances.

When we will apply NECM

[The IB will add the relevant criteria in this section depending on the circumstances triggering the NECM as a mitigation]

For M26, NECM applies if:

- *MoE has mandated that exams cannot go ahead.*
- *MoE has provided discretion at a school level as to whether exams can go ahead or not.*
- *MoE has not determined - IB has contacted schools in conflict impacted regions and the IB school has indicated and evidence that it is not safe for exams to go ahead.*

Setting Grade Boundaries

The IB applies its standard grade award procedures for each subject. Subject grade boundaries established through the examination route are also applied to students assessed under the non-examination contingency measure (NECM).

As part of this process, the IB reviews the alignment between predicted grades, internal assessment performance, and final subject grades using the standard boundaries. Where necessary, minor adjustments

may be made in line with normal grade award practice, but boundaries are expected to remain as closely aligned as possible across examination and non-examination routes to ensure fairness and comparability for all students.

Calculating fair grades without examination scores

The coursework components- internal and external assessments - that feature in many IB courses, provide evidence of attainment for awarding purposes even in the absence of examinations. The IB also uses school-submitted predicted grades.

Predicted grades are a core and established part of IB assessment practice and apply to all schools, all subjects with external assessments and every examination session, regardless of whether results are awarded through written examinations, or, where applicable, the NECM. As such, it is vital that IB predicted grades are accurate reflections of a student's demonstrated level of attainment.

Predicted grades represent a time-locked professional judgement of the grade a student would most likely to be awarded by the IB, based on evidence gathered over the entire course of study and the published grade descriptors. This expectation is unchanged under the NECM, where predicted grades are used in place of examination results.

Predicted grades reflect overall subject attainment and are not dependent on, for example, revised IA submission timelines. While coursework extensions appropriately support delivery challenges, predicted grades must remain fixed to preserve integrity and to ensure equitable treatment across the cohort.

Under the non-exam contingency measure, applied only to subjects with exam components, a student's grade for a subject will be based on:

- Coursework mark (Cw)
- Predicted grade (PG)

The PG will be used in place of an exam score, therefore:

- Total mark = Cw + PG (PG converted into a mark)
- Both coursework and exams have the published weightings applied: Cw (between 20-45%) + PG (the remaining 55-80%).

For this approach, a common approach to predicting fair and realistic grades in schools is vitally important. The IB uses three years of school data (where available) to generate the range of grades that a given year's students would be likely to achieve in each school, in each subject. Schools will be provided with these predicted grade distributions (through IBIS) to help guide assignment of predicted grades to their students (see details provided in *The role of school-submitted predicted grades in fair assessment* below). The IB has also published a guidance document to support schools in predicting realistic IB grades: [Predicting IB Grades](#). Checks will be carried out on predicted grades, targeting the following:

- Schools that have awarded higher predicted grades than the distribution provided
- Students who have a predicted grade that is more than 3 grades higher than their coursework grade.

Schools/students that are identified during these checks will be asked to provide supporting evidence of their predicted grades in the form of mock exams, classroom tasks and any other assessment tasks the teacher has used in deciding the predicted grades. This supporting evidence is checked by an examiner. If the evidence does support the predicted grades, they are accepted. If not, the school is asked to change the predicted grades.

The predicted grade is converted into the middle mark in the range for a particular grade. When calculating the “middle” mark to award for predicted grades the IB generally uses grade boundary data from the previous year.

The role of school-submitted predicted grades in fair assessment

Historically, IB schools and teachers have varied in the accuracy with which they predict the final grades awarded to their students: some have predicted accurately, some under-predicted student performance, but most over-predicted.

In the normal grade awarding process, predicted grades are used to draw general conclusions about the relative strength of the cohort and in checking the grades that have been awarded, but they do not contribute to students’ final grades. For these purposes, the variety of approaches teachers have taken to predicting grades has not mattered as much as the consistency of approach from year to year. However, it would be grossly unfair to students on both routes to merely utilise variously derived predicted grades uncritically on the non-exam contingency route.

In order to achieve a transparent process that retains teachers’ role in grade awarding through predicted grades, the IB and IB teachers need to work together to ensure that predicting grades is approached in a consistent and comparable manner in all subjects, in all schools and in both routes. Predicted grades should be based on the whole body of work a student has produced for a subject. The guidance document [Predicting IB Grades](#) and the relevant [IB Diploma Programme grade descriptors](#) should be read carefully to determine which grade most closely describes the student’s body of work, rather than highlights of it.

IB published [grade descriptors](#) are the foundation of awarding IB grades. For each group of subjects, extended essays and ToK, characteristics of student performance are described for each grade (from 7 to 1, or A to E). Grade descriptors are holistic, describing skills and understanding that should be evident within a student’s body of written, oral and practical work for a subject, in order to justify award of a particular grade.

During grade award meetings in December and June, these grade descriptors are used by teams of senior examiners to arrive at recommended grade boundaries. Using their expert judgement, senior examiners scrutinise samples of marked student work and compare characteristics of this work to characteristics detailed in the grade descriptors. In this way, they determine which grade best fits the qualities of the work. Although statistical analyses and summaries of feedback from teachers are also used in determining final grade boundaries, it is the grade descriptors (and consideration of samples of student work against them) that give real-world meaning to the IB published grades.

The grade descriptors are equally valuable for teachers in providing feedback to students on their work and progress; reporting achievement to students and parents; and providing predicted grades to universities and

the IB. We strongly recommend that teachers collaborate in the process of grade prediction in order to standardise their approach.

The IB will also provide the range of grades that a given year's students would be likely to achieve in each subject based on previous performance at each affected school. Schools will be provided with these distributions of predicted grades (through IBIS) to help guide assignment of predicted grades to their students. Remaining within the upper limit represented by these distributions should ensure a realistic and representative degree of differentiation of student performance. However, we recognise that schools can have years in which the performance of their students does not follow the school's historic pattern. Therefore, the recommended predicted grades are based on the previous three years of school data in order to establish a pattern of performance. In addition, three measures will ensure that variations in individual student performance can be reflected in teachers' predicted grades:

1. When calculating the recommended predicted grades, we always round up for the top grade (see table 1).
2. The recommended predicted grades constitute an upper limit, not a target. Lower grades should be allocated if a group of students is weaker.
3. If any of the distributions of predicted grades provided do not fit the students, functionality in IBIS will allow schools to exceed that distribution. However, if schools choose to exceed a distribution, they must be prepared to provide supporting evidence to the IB if request to do so. The IB will contact schools to request supporting evidence. This supporting evidence will need to consist of three pieces of work for a sample of students in the class. The students included in the sample will be selected by the IB, not the teacher.
4. Where coursework marks do not support a school's predicted grades for a subject, the school may be required to provide supporting evidence to the IB. The IB will contact schools to request supporting evidence. This supporting evidence will need to consist of three pieces of work for a sample of students in the class. The students included in the sample will be selected by the IB, not the teacher.

In May 2025, 2024 and 2023 a school had a total of 10 grade 7, 50 grade 5 and 30 grade 4 in History SL. That is, 11.1% grade 7, 55.6% grade 5 and 33.3% grade 4. In May 2026 they had 28 students.

Applying the percentages, in May 2026 they would receive recommended predicted grades of 3.108 grade 7, 15.568 grade 5 and 9.324 grade 4. However, we round in favour of the students to 4 grade 7, 16 grade 5 and 8 grade 4.

Table 1: Example of how recommended predicted grades are calculated.

Where school predictions are carefully quality assured, the IB can fairly use a combination of predicted grades and coursework marks to arrive at final marks and grades for each student that best represent the most probable outcomes had the students sat their exams.

In the cases of new schools and new subjects in schools, where there are no histories of student performance, the IB will check that grade predictions in all subjects are consistent with normal patterns of relative performance in coursework and subject, in order to ensure that awarding is fair to all. We may need to contact schools where predicted grades differ from expected patterns to ask for their support in awarding fair grades to their students. The IB will need to adjust or even set aside predicted grades in the calculation of marks and grades for non-exam contingency students, where predicted grades are implausible.

Checking that grades are fair for each student

The IB's overall approach to maintaining grading standards across the whole cohort, and between the examination route and the Non Exam Contingency Measure (NECM), has been set out above. At a subject or system level, it is reasonable to compare outcomes with previous sessions to support standards maintenance. However, as previous exceptional circumstances have demonstrated, this assumption becomes less reliable at the level of individual schools and small cohorts, particularly where students have been unable to sit examinations due to the impact of conflict.

A key lesson from prior contingency awarding - including during the COVID-19 pandemic - is the importance of reviewing outcomes at the individual school level to ensure that NECM decisions produce appropriate and defensible results for students. The process followed by the IB therefore includes an enhanced review and scrutiny prior to the issue of results.

Review activity will take place before results are issued and will take several forms. In particular, the IB will consider outcomes at programme level (for example, Diploma Programme total points and IBCP outcomes), rather than focusing solely on individual subject results. This supports a holistic view of student performance and progression.

Where results for a school differ significantly from established historical patterns, the IB will investigate whether the available evidence supports those outcomes or whether they may be an artefact of the exceptional assessment route. For example, where the proportion of students achieving the diploma or high point scores differs markedly from previous sessions, outcomes will be reviewed in light of the full evidential base. Schools with small cohorts and/or limited historical data will be reviewed carefully, as statistical patterns are less stable in such contexts.

Predicted grades, will be considered as part of the quality assurance process. Historic patterns of achievement will be used to identify where predictions are informative and where they may be less reliable. Where prediction patterns are unusual, schools will be asked to supply supporting evidence.

Throughout the generation of final marks and grades, the IB will take deliberate steps to exclude bias in favour of, or against, students awarded through the NECM. Where any generosity or constraint is evident in NECM outcomes, this will be reflected appropriately in the determination of grade boundaries for the examination route, ensuring that neither group of students is systematically advantaged or disadvantaged. All students are awarded the same qualification, and fairness between routes is therefore essential.

Students on the NECM are able to challenge the predicted grade component of their final result through the Student-initiated Predicted Grade Enquiry (SiPGE) process, ensuring parity with the examination route, where all assessment components may be challenged through Enquiries upon Results. The process is initiated within the school and is designed to resolve concerns at the local level wherever possible. Students cannot apply directly to the IB which mirrors the approach for Enquiries upon Results. Grounds for a SiPGE are limited to:

- an identified administrative error,
- a failure to correctly apply school procedures (including internal quality assurance or consideration of access arrangements or mitigating circumstances), or
- an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement in the determination of the predicted grade.

For more information on the SiPGE process please see [here](#):

In conclusion

The Non Exam Contingency Measure represents a best endeavours approach to awarding grades in exceptional, safety-led circumstances where examinations cannot be administered. While it is not possible to perfectly replicate examination performance in the absence of exams, the NECM enables students to receive valid and meaningful outcomes that support progression to the next stage of their education.

Where NECM is used, the IB will undertake thorough review of outcomes for both the examination route and the NECM route prior to the release of results, applying enhanced expert scrutiny and professional judgement. The IB will continue to work closely with schools to build shared confidence that results issued in these exceptional contexts represent the fairest possible outcomes for students.