

ECOLINT AND THE ORIGINS OF THE INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

Phil Thomas



Ecole Internationale de Genève
International School of Geneva

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Preface

The origins of the IB at the Ecole Internationale de Genève / International School of Geneva (widely known as “Ecolint”) can be explained as both an idealistic venture and as a pragmatic response to the changes that were occurring in the city, the school and the associated communities during the early 1950s and 1960s.

The idealism dates back to the school’s founding and reflects Geneva’s role as a major international centre. The city has always had a reputation for educational innovation dating from Jean-Jacques Rousseau, through the Ecole Nouvelle movement to the establishment of the Piaget Institute in 1929. In November 1920, the Permanent Secretariat of the newly formed League of Nations arrived and, as with most other international or inter-governmental organisations, educational provision for the children of staff members soon became an issue. The school was thus founded in 1924 by a group of the League’s staff members who saw it as a pioneering venture which would take advantage of recent educational pilot schemes. From the outset it was to be an international school promoting the League’s ideals of peace and international understanding.

The School narrowly survived the Second World War to become the oldest international school in continuous existence in the world. The League was succeeded by the United Nations Office in Europe and by a number of UN agencies and the School was thus well placed to continue its service role and its mission as an innovative institution. The international community of Geneva increased sharply, augmented by the arrival of several large multinational corporations. The character of the School changed profoundly as it was transformed from being a small bilingual pioneer into a much larger institution with, by 1960, 1,500 pupils, with a ratio of 75% studying through the medium of English and 25% in French. Most parents wanted their children to progress to university, and by the 1960s the school was preparing its school leavers for four national examinations – the Swiss Maturité, the French Baccalaureate, the British GCE O and A levels, and the US College Board exams. Timetabling the vastly different requirements was a nightmare and, since classes were small, severe financial problems were inescapable.

A new factor in the 1950s was the rapid expansion of so-called “international” schools in many cities throughout the world and the emergence of a transient school population moving between such schools. Ecolint had already assisted in creating one of these: the United Nations International School in New York (UNIS). In 1951 Ecolint, UNIS, and the small UN Nursery school in Geneva, together with a school in Paris, convened a meeting at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris to explore the possibility of greater cooperation between these schools. As a result, the International Schools’ Liaison Committee was formed, changing its name to the International Schools Association in 1956. Funds were almost

non-existent, and the committee members were almost all officials from international organisations with no active participation in educational matters other than as well-intentioned and strongly motivated parents or school board members. Most resided in Geneva and Ecolint provided the Association with a single room as an office. The President of ISA was usually a member of the Ecolint Governing Board. ISA held annual conferences, but its accomplishments were negligible.

Matters began to change when John Goormaghtigh, a Belgian of remarkable ability, with great diplomatic and language skills, became Chair of the Ecolint Governing Board in 1960 and Desmond Cole Baker Director of the School's English Language Programme (ELP) in 1961. It is worth noting that the school had been divided into two linguistic sections in 1957, a decision that was to result in turmoil in the mid-1960s. It now became clear that both men shared a vision more in keeping with the original mission of the School. They resolved to use ISA, still conveniently accommodated at the school, to make it a reality. The aim would be to persuade other "international" schools to adopt common programmes of study to facilitate student transfer and to create truly international programmes of study, free of the perceived drawbacks of national systems, for example the encyclopaedic nature of the French Baccalaureate and the intense specialisation of British GCE Advanced Levels. The prospect of having one programme to replace Ecolint's now four – the Swiss, the French, the British and the American – might also solve Ecolint's financial problems, a pragmatic rationale for the change.

Ecolint's Governing Board agreed to second a member of staff to tour such schools to explore their interest in helping to launch the project. Cole Baker appointed Robert J. Leach, a dynamic American history teacher, who made a 120-day tour covering 24 schools in 16 countries and three continents. His subsequent reports make fascinating reading and led him and his Ecolint colleague Michael J. Knight to attempt a categorisation of international schools. In their judgment, no school, not even Ecolint, met their expectations.

ISA had meanwhile been accorded recognition by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1956, and Cole Baker began to exploit this connection to win modest UNESCO grants in a variety of fields aiming to promote international understanding. The most fruitful of these funded a conference held at Ecolint in August 1962 on the teaching of social studies, in preparation for which Ecolint's English Language Programme historians prepared a draft Contemporary History course from 1913 to the present day. This in itself was revolutionary, since few historians believed that the teaching of contemporary history was a valid field of study. This was "Current Affairs". 60 persons attended, representing 22 schools, and the conference ended with the passing of a resolution calling on ISA to continue its curriculum work with the aim of establishing an international baccalaureate. It is here that the term "IB" first appears, and an article was subsequently published in *La Suisse*, the local newspaper, entitled "Vers un Baccalauréat International?"

Leach adapted his final history course over the 1962 - 63 school year to test this new syllabus and 4 students sat the final exam, adjudicated by the department's historians. One enterprising lad persuaded Harvard to grant him sophomore standing on the basis of his certificate. In addition, during the summer of 1963 Michael Knight took the syllabus to several British universities and gained agreement that it could be accorded A level status. University recognition was thus already acknowledged to be a vital aspect of the project.

Cole Baker pressed ahead and secured a new UNESCO contract to fund an ISA conference on the teaching of modern languages and their role in promoting internationalism. This was held at the International School of Milan in August 1963. Back at Ecolint, Cole Baker found the funds to appoint a part-time secretary to ISA and persuaded Nansi Poirer, a senior staff member, to form a staff committee to coordinate the work in other departments within the context of a future IB.

Curiously, for a so-called international school, Ecolint's ELP (English Language Programme) did not teach Geography except in the junior secondary classes under the guise of social studies. Cole Baker therefore advertised in the spring of 1963 for a Geography teacher and at my interview with him in London I was introduced to his vision of international education. I was enthralled. On arrival at the school in September 1963 I was assigned to start formal Geography courses and to co-teach the economic and social sections of the new Contemporary History course, now extended to cover a two-year period. Underprepared, I was lucky to have a half day free to carry out research at the UN library, there being no suitable text books for a course (with options) of a global dimension. To assist us and to give the course greater validity, Cole Baker arranged for staff from the University of Geneva's Institute of Graduate Studies in International Affairs, headed by Professor John Siotis, to form a panel which met regularly with our historians. It was from this group that eventually, in January 1965, the International Schools Examination Syndicate (ISES) was established. It was chaired by John Goormaghtigh, with Desmond Cole Baker as its treasurer and Ruth Bonner as its office manager. Two local experts, Professor Panchaud, Head of the University of Lausanne's School of Education, and Dr. Sarawate, Deputy Director of the International Communications Union (ITU), were also brought in.

The Exploratory Stage 1964 – 1965

Among the many Ph.D. and Master's theses on the early days of the IB, Daniel Wagner's for the University of Michigan uses this term to describe the 1964 – 65 period. It seems very appropriate.

Gene Wallach and I shared the teaching of the contemporary history course which was the only trial course in existence over the 1963 - 64 academic year. As part of Nansi Poirer's commission, ELP departments were asked to produce draft syllabi in their subject areas. There lay a source of danger, since each department started work in splendid isolation, with myself, a singleton, as the only geographer. Some kind of standard needed to be set, and Ruth Bonner duly distributed copies of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. Its cognitive domains had appeared in 1956; the affective domain was hot off the press in 1964. Nansi's committee consisted mainly of ELP heads of department, with myself, representing Geography, being the "outsider". Certain departments were very active, such as English which numbered six, Modern Languages under Rodney Stock, and especially Mathematics with Elsie Howenstein and P. K. Ghosh, who was to become the first Chief Examiner in Mathematics.

I remember that discussion focused, during the early months, on two levels corresponding to British O and A levels. Nansi then organized a whole-day seminar of the Secondary School staff (again mainly

ELP) in which we somehow came up with a draft proposal which was meant to be distributed to interested schools to be “shot down”, as one participant put it. This “Draft Proposal for an International Baccalaureate” was published in the *ISA Newsletter Bulletin* 31 in June 1964. The first page makes the case for a broad-based curriculum avoiding over-specialisation and “that an essential part of a student’s education should be knowledge, however summary, of man’s achievements in all parts of the world”. It also emphasises the inclusion of a world literature course as an integral feature of the curriculum. The second page entitled “The Form of the Examination” strangely covers only the lower level examination for students roughly 16 years of age! No mention at all is made of the higher level intended for the final two years of schooling. It ends, however, with the following words: “The Staff of the International School of Geneva firmly hopes that, with expert advice and practical help, the fundamental ideal of such a scheme – an International Baccalaureate – may be realised.” I am not aware of any response to this proposal, since only one other school attended the first international conference in the spring of 1965 and that was Atlantic College. How did they get involved?

One clue comes from a conference session of the European Teachers’ Association held in the spring of 1964 at the Institute Pédagogique de Sèvres in Paris. It was attended by the European Commission Schools, NATO schools and representatives of Ecolint and Atlantic College. Also represented was the University of Oxford Department of Education and, most importantly, several *Inspecteurs généraux* of the French Ministry of Education. A presentation on ISES was made and favourably received, especially when it was made clear that ISES was to be a bilingual French/English venture.

Another connection arose from the fact that at Ecolint we had two or three post-graduate student teachers from the University of Oxford’s Department of Education resident in our boarding houses. Their tutor Dr. W. D. (Bill) Halls visited to monitor them and expressed interest in our ISES work. He must have reported this back to his Director, A. D. C. Peterson, who appeared *in persona* as the 1965 tutor. Since Peterson was already involved with Atlantic College (AC) I feel that here lies the key to the involvement of the College, which was to have a great influence on the emerging programme and its character. In the autumn of 1964 we find AC applying to join ISES and becoming the host of a languages colloquium in October – the first instance of Ecolint staff members actively collaborating with AC staff. The Ecolint team included Nansi Poirel (English), Rodney Stock (French) and Nan Martin (English as a Second Language).

The financing of the project must have been an ever-pervasive problem, which may help to explain why not all departments at Ecolint were as enthusiastic as English, Modern Languages, History, Geography and Biology, perhaps fearing that their voluntary work would come to naught. Through the good offices of Georges-Henri Martin, Deputy Chair of the School’s Governing Board and Editor of the *Tribune de Genève*, overtures were made to the Twentieth Century Fund for assistance. This necessitated a sounder legal basis than that of ISA and led to the earlier history panel “morphing” into the new ISES Council established in January 1965. The Twentieth Century Fund’s donation of US \$70,000 became the first major contribution towards the project’s realisation. In retrospect it seems a modest sum, but it opened the door to other donations in the future. One of the conditions of the grant was the dispatch to Geneva of an American educational journalist who was to observe and report on our progress. Martin Mayer published his findings in a book entitled *Diploma*, another source for the project’s history.

The ISES Council was chaired by John Goormaghtigh, with Cole Baker as its Treasurer. It was given office space within the school. Several notable personalities were recruited to the Council, including Professor Panchaud, Dr. Sarawate, by now Secretary-General of the ITU, and Rector Capelle of the University of Nancy, a renowned reforming figure within the French Ministry of Education.

However, the most important event of the “exploratory” period was the holding of the first major International Colloquium, which took place at Ecolint in March 1965. 50 persons attended, including six French Inspecteurs généraux and representatives of British Examination Boards. This four-day gathering had two aspects. As Ecolint staff, we had been asked to prepare draft syllabi. Five were presented, as mentioned earlier. Study groups evaluated them. Each group consisted of teachers from Ecolint and AC and experts invited from leading European universities (France, Switzerland, Germany and the UK).

In parallel, one group considered the programme as a whole, now being spoken of as a “package” rather than as separate subjects. Two key figures here were Gérard Renaud, Ecolint’s teacher of Philosophy, and Inspector Smeerverde of France. It is they who made the vital breakthrough on the final day, producing a model of seven subjects – three at “higher” level and four at “subsidiary” — almost the “hexagon” as we now know it.

This model appropriately avoided the excessive specialisation of the British system, the perceived encyclopaedic nature of European systems, and the à la carte short courses of the US. Moreover, at its core was an emphasis on learning to learn (the influence of Rector Capelle came to the fore here). A commitment to promoting international understanding underpinned everything, as well as the idea of developing “active world citizens”. There was general approval of this model, which could claim to be a new departure in educational terms, unlike any existing national model. In essence, it concentrated on programmes and activities over the final two years of secondary schooling. The conference recognised the need for each component of the package to attain an acceptable level for university entrance; this was to be negotiated in the years ahead. Thus we might claim that, by the spring of 1965, the exploratory period had reached a successful conclusion. At this point, Cole Baker persuaded a generous donor to fund the travel of 25 Ecolint staff members to visit leading US and Canadian universities in July.

Ecolint’s primary level teachers had meanwhile been working on an international programme for primary schools. The 1965 ISA summer conference was devoted to this and led to the publication of a model programme which, when it was published in 1969, sold out immediately and had to be hastily reprinted.

It is interesting to note that Desmond Cole Baker had sufficient confidence in the outcome of the March 1965 conference to publish in the November edition of *Comparative Education* an article entitled “Towards an International University Entrance Examination”, summarising the progress achieved thus far.

The Developmental Period 1965 – 1968: School cooperation – Ecolint/AC

Reviewing the list of participants at the March conference, it is remarkable to note that all of the teachers attending came either from Ecolint or AC. I think it would be no exaggeration to claim that the final shape of the IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) resulted largely from the collaboration of the staff of these two schools. Between them there seemed to be virtually complete agreement on the aims of the project and the path to be taken in its development.

Whilst it can be claimed that the project started at Ecolint, our AC colleagues made substantial contributions which are now considered key features of the IBDP. Without their participation, we might not have developed them in Geneva alone. Clearly, both schools were committed to the promotion of international understanding, peace and human rights and the development of the whole person. In this respect, AC benefited from the influence of two extraordinary educators. Kurt Hahn had been one of the leading founders of the College, of whom David Sutcliffe has written extensively. Although we in Geneva subscribed to the “education of the whole person”, we had little exposure to Hahn’s ideas and practice of character development, especially through the role of community service and of self-discovery through certain physical activities. In 1965 at Ecolint, we did not have a full understanding of what was to become CASS – a key core element of the IB programme. Quietly, yet most persuasively, this element emanated from the activities being pioneered at Atlantic College in South Wales.

The other notable influence was Alec Peterson, another founder of the College and of their quest for a true international programme for their students. Seeking balance in the curriculum, he had already discussed with Robert Blackburn, AC’s Deputy Head and Director of Studies, the idea of Higher Levels and Subsidiary Levels for each subject, a concept that was convincingly conveyed to the March conference by Robert.

I think it would also be fair to say that AC had greater experience than we at Ecolint in maintaining contact with a wider variety of universities to which their students would have access. With Peterson becoming Director-General of ISES and later IBO, these attributes were again invaluable in soliciting a favourable acceptance of the IBDP by universities. The cooperation between groups of staff from either school must be considered a highlight of the IB’s development, despite considerable practical difficulties. Both groups contributed voluntarily over and above their contractual obligations. Communications were difficult, consisting mainly of hand-written correspondence, the cost of telephone calls being prohibitive. Visits were irregular given the cost of travel and the time taken. It helps to explain why the “gestation” period of the IBDP 1963-68 was so long.

Another feature in which there was close co-operation concerned trial examinations. Apart from the History programme at Ecolint, the first trial exams in 1967 were limited to the two schools with students sitting single subjects. They also dominated the 1968 sessions. Since these nearly always included an oral component, the staff of each school visited the other as examiners, further cementing the level of cooperation. My first visit to AC was as the Geography examiner in 1968. As subject conferences were held from 1966 to 1968 to consolidate the subject contents of the curriculum, other schools began to participate, but the two schools were always in the forefront. Another contribution to

which AC can lay claim was the concept of school-based subjects serving a school in its local setting, but from which IB schools in general could ultimately benefit.

Syllabi, Teachers' Guides, Examinations: Geography – a Case Study

During the exploratory period, departments at Ecolint had been charged with proposing draft syllabi. Therein lay an opportunity to look for the best practices by comparing national models, ensuring thereby that there would be an emphasis on maintaining an international perspective. Mention has already been made of the use of Bloom's taxonomy to ensure compatibility between subjects in the three domains — cognitive, affective and sensory.

Moreover, the early 1960s saw advances in curriculum development in several countries, which certain subjects were able to adapt and adopt. The science syllabi, for example, were strongly influenced by the Nuffield science project work in the UK, whilst the Physics Subsidiary Level was strongly influenced by the Harvard Physics Project. The syllabi produced for the March 1965 conference were not yet divided into Higher Level and Subsidiary Level courses. This was to be the focus of work over the 1966-67 period, again mainly the work of Ecolint and AC staff, with an increasing input from the United Nations School (UNIS) in New York. The main reason for their late entry was that the school reached grade 12 only in 1966. The case of Geography was different.

From 1963 – 65 I was the only geographer on the ELP. With my poor command of French, there was only a tenuous contact with the "geographers" on the FLP, who in any event lacked the necessary background. My own thinking was heavily influenced by my experience of A Level work. The subject received only two periods a week in continental systems and was very descriptive. American schools did not teach the subject at all at school level, although it was highly developed at university level.

Thus, much of my early work within the ISES context was spent researching the philosophical basis for the subject as a Higher Level component of a future diploma — to justify its inclusion in what is now called the Group 3 subjects and thus to lay the foundations for a new syllabus. Looking back at the initial Teachers' Guide which I wrote, this philosophical analysis represented half of the guide and included a long bibliography of leading university geographers — mainly American and French.

Happily, this situation changed when AC's John Grant Wood came on board, and by 1967 I had been joined by three other superb geographers on the ELP in the persons of Joan McIlwaine, Peter Conway and Leslie Robb. The quality of the syllabus was greatly improved with their input. Luckily Grant Wood and I came from similar teaching backgrounds, both of us rooted in the regional school of Geography. This emphasis has long disappeared in more recent IB Geography programmes. We also both favoured a study of topographical maps and fieldwork as well as a thesis chosen by the student. Until 1968 many subjects required a thesis – an unbearable burden for the poor student until it was decided in 1970 that a single extended essay (EE) would be an integral component of the diploma. These draft syllabi were then subjected to rigorous scrutiny in the three subject meetings held between 1968 and

1970. We were able to attract top class university professors to endorse our work. In other words, IB syllabi were the products of grass-root teachers rather than being imposed by an examination board or national ministry. The first time Geography was chosen as an IB exam subject was in 1973, although trial examinations had been tested on volunteer students since 1968.

The aforementioned US visit by Ecolint staff in July 1965 proved particularly fruitful for Geography. I had somehow managed to contact the Chair of the National Association of American Geographers – Professor Philip Bacon of Columbia University. On my arrival he picked up the phone and virtually ordered leading professors across the country to meet me and discuss the draft syllabus. They were most supportive, since the subject was not taught at school level. By contrast, Professor Neville Scarfe of the University of Vancouver, who had taught me at the Institute of Education in London, thought we were being too traditional and conservative! Another fortuitous choice arose by my being able to attend the International Geographic Union’s Congress in London in 1966. There I explained to my former tutor at the London School of Economics (the famous Professor Dudley Stamp) what we were working on and that we wanted a chief examiner for Geography, whereupon he promptly walked over to the Secretary General of the Union, Professor Hans Boesch of the University of Zurich, and charmed him into agreeing to help us. He subsequently became the Chair of the Chief Examiners.

Strangely enough, the case of Economics was rather similar in that I was the sole economist at Ecolint; Jeremy Rowe and Andrew Maclehorse were my counterparts at AC. However, we were joined by two excellent economic thinkers who worked with us in the subject committees: a socialist professor from the University of Warsaw and Professor Lord Vaizey of Brunel University in the UK, who became the Chief Examiner.

Recruiting such eminent personalities gave the project considerable credibility. Another example was the arrival in Geneva on sabbatical leave of Harlan (Harpo) Hansen, Professor of German at Williams College and Chief Executive of the US Advanced Placement Program. He was soon co-opted on to the ISES Council and became a close friend of Alec Peterson, who had now taken over as Director General.

Progress amidst Turmoil – Ecolint 1966

Both Ecolint and ISES existed in precarious financial circumstances. Alec Peterson’s arrival gave the project new impetus and several more notable persons were added to the ISES Council, in particular Mme Hatingais, the French Ministry’s senior *Inspectrice*. The general schema was achieving greater clarity, with CASS firmly embedded but with the Extended Essay and the Theory of Knowledge still in the future. Some further modest grants appeared, from which subject committees benefited. ISES offices moved away from the Ecolint campus to an independent location, though daily contact was maintained.

Meanwhile Ecolint’s Governing Board had charged Desmond Cole Baker with a study of the school’s finances and structure. In due course Desmond produced a plan for re-unifying the two language programmes. In essence this involved:

- Bringing the two language sections under one administration
- A bilingual approach to a unified curriculum
- Phasing out national examinations in favour of the ISES or IB programme – a highly controversial issue which persists to this day!
- Making up to 35 staff members redundant in order to ensure the financial viability of the School.

The Board were initially favourable to this proposal and voted to implement it, provoking a furious reaction from the FLP staff, who were those most affected by the redundancies, and FLP parents. Even *Le Monde* in Paris wrote an article criticising an American takeover of the School! Conversely, ELP staff were generally supportive, but there was no real attempt at a dialogue between the two sections. I got involved, being the Chair of the ELP Staff Association.

There followed an explosion of angry reactions over several weeks, leading to an Extraordinary General Assembly of the Association of the International School of Geneva. It was a catastrophic meeting lasting six hours in the Palais des Nations. The Governing Board retracted its support for the plan and set up a reconciliation commission of three former ambassadors of the old League of Nations (no less!). The net result was a decision to recommend the appointment of a Director General to preside over the two sections. This led to the resignation of Desmond Cole Baker, a severe loss of leadership for the ELP. ISES was less affected because of the presence of Alec Peterson. Desmond remained in Geneva for another three years as Director of ISA, with a permanent office in Geneva for the first time in its existence.

Despite this turmoil, there was little effect on the life of students in the ELP. Enrolment was still buoyant, exam results uniformly high, extra-curricular activities in music, drama and sports flourished. As before, the gap between the two language programmes remained as wide as ever, and for the academic year 1966 — 67 the school operated as two sections. John Goormaghtigh resigned as Chair of the school's Governing Board in favour of concentrating on chairing ISES and steering it through to becoming the IBO, finally achieved on October 28th, 1968.

The Reconciliation Commission's main recommendation was the creation of the post of Director General to unify the school. The first Director General (in office from September 1967) seemed a good appointment — Irving Berenson, an American academic fluent in French — although his first action was to demote Desmond Cole Baker's two Deputy Heads. Tragically, he died within 4 months of his appointment, necessitating a new search and the appointment of René-François Lejeune in September 1968. Meanwhile ISES was to hold its most important international conference at Sèvres in February 1967. Who would represent Ecolint?

The ISES International Policy Conference at Sèvres in February 1967

This policy conference was partly enabled by the payment of the first tranche of a new grant from the Ford Foundation. It was convened jointly by ISES, UNESCO and the French Ministry of Education. It

can only be regarded as epoch-making. It has been well described by Peterson in his “Schools without Frontiers” and by Leach in his “International Schools and their Role in International Education”, as well as in several masters and doctoral theses. It led to the transformation of ISES into the IBO, set directions for its future development, and ensured considerable institutional support for the foreseeable future. The conference was limited to 50 participants – ISES staff, representatives of several governments and senior staff of the main participating schools, including Ecolint, AC and UNIS. In the absence of a head of school, Ecolint was represented by Leach and Thomas, as those who had the most experience of the project since its inception.

Over the four days of the discussions, participants met either in plenary sessions or in one of two commissions, one dealing with assessment and related issues and the other with curriculum matters and university recognition of the future diploma. Several contentious issues were hotly debated but calmly resolved to general satisfaction. I highlight some of these issues as follows:

- The format of the Diploma: National traditions generally dictated the combinations of subjects studied by secondary school pupils, options only being available within a narrow range of categories or streams. For several participants the proposed structure of the Diploma offered a relative freedom of choice and emphasis that was outside their previous experience. Happily they were convinced by our arguments.
 - There was approval of the 1-7 marking system, chosen as such because it was different from any other existing national system. There was also considerable discussion as to whether the entire school population would be capable of a complete diploma or doomed to failure without any recognition. Desmond Cole, head of UNIS, proposed the concept of issuing certificates for non-full diploma candidates — a neat solution which has been justified over the years. 42 points was therefore to be a perfect score (bonus points had still to make an appearance). Which score should be counted as a pass? This was fixed at 24 points for the Diploma as a whole, 4 points in each of the six courses, regarded as being equal to a pass in the French *Baccalauréat*. However, a system of compensation was agreed if one of the HL scores was a 3. A welcome degree of flexibility was emerging.
 - A further area of discussion revealed, in my opinion, wide confusion as to the configuration of schools. Formal schooling began at different ages in Europe — in the UK at 5, in most European countries at 6, in Scandinavia at 7. How meaningful was it, then, to refer to the final two years of secondary education? How many school years must lead up to them? The issue achieved extra significance in the light of the American readiness to grant sophomore status to students with European qualifications after 13 years of schooling. Most of these discussions failed to take account of the national differences in the starting age of formal schooling. Wisely, I think, the IBO has ignored this debate and allowed member schools to designate their own nomenclature for the “graduating” class.
 - Other areas of considerable discussion concerned oral examinations and the role of internal assessment. National systems varied greatly in this respect. As far as IBO was concerned, there were the considerable constraints of the costs involved in travelling expenses as well as in standardising
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the grading. For several years the latter was solved by using cassette recordings by which Chief Examiners could monitor standards. The conference also agreed that an independent Board of Chief Examiners be established with full control over the examination process.

- Confirmation to offer the examinations in two languages was widely welcomed and the concept of a bilingual diploma agreed.
 - The most controversial subject area was Mathematics and whether the subject should be compulsory. Various Maths panels had wrestled with the idea of “mathematical literacy” for all. The principal, indeed only serious opposition came from the British, whose GCE O and A Level arrangements allowed pupils to opt out of Mathematics altogether after O Levels, normally taken around the age of 14/15, whilst mathematically gifted pupils, thanks to the British specialisation, were able to take the subject to the very high standard that was required for successful entry into mathematical and science faculties at university. The Mathematics Higher Level and Subsidiary Level syllabi presented to the conference were estimated to be very challenging and might possibly result in an otherwise deserving student failing the diploma. Whilst Maths was finally confirmed as a compulsory requirement within the diploma, the underlying issue was not resolved until the introduction of Mathematical Studies in the mid-1970s to complement the already existing course at the Subsidiary Level.
 - Considerable discussion took place on the role of objective testing (multiple choice examinations). These were seen to be valid in some subjects but also prone to difficulties when translated into several languages. Conference agreed however that further consideration be given to this exam format pending more extensive testing.
 - The French contingent continued to argue in favour of Philosophy being a compulsory element as in their Baccalaureate. In the end Peterson and Renaud came up with the idea of the “Theory of Knowledge” (ToK) which has now been recognised as “the jewel in the IB crown”. In reality, at the time, they were probably the only ones who had any idea of what it might entail. But it sounded convincing, since it aimed to ensure that a degree of reflective integration could take place across the subjects of the diploma. The emphasis lay in an understanding of the philosophical basis of each discipline and how the subject categories reflected ways in which humans think about knowledge.
 - Recognition of the diploma for university entry was a key aspect of the discussions and was complicated by the disparity between the autonomous selection practised by many universities and centralised systems like that of France. The solution agreed was that the period 1970 – 74 be regarded as a trial period to be limited to 500 students from a limited number of schools (14). A limited number of governments thereby guaranteed recognition of the diploma within their jurisdictions. In the event this date was later postponed until 1975 and the number of schools and students was far greater than originally envisaged, partly due to demand and partly to the need for revenue from examination fees. Small monetary contributions were promised by a number of governments. These were to be the effective arbiters of whether the trial period had been a success. Formal approval for this increase in numbers was given *post facto* at the Hague Intergovernmental Conference in 1975.
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- The need for a research facility within IBO was recognised and established at the Oxford Department of Education under Bill Halls, who had an excellent reputation in this respect in European circles. In fact, this “international” conference was very Eurocentric, with only marginal representation from Africa and none from the Asian and Pacific region. Nonetheless, the international dimension was always paramount and focussed on securing student participation from around the world.

The stance of UNESCO during the conference was never really clear. It had given early support with its initial contracts and certain governments (Switzerland and Belgium) had proposed a degree of recognition. The organisation seemed interested in the project in the context of comparative education and for several years there was some hope in IBO circles that it would become a subset of UNESCO and thus feature in its budget. This hope proved forlorn, and perhaps this was beneficial in the long run, as the IB thereby avoided developing in its early years into the kind of bureaucratic institution which some of us fear it is now in danger of becoming.

The successful conclusion of the conference was therefore a major milestone in the history of the IBO.

In May 1967, 108 students at AC and 37 at Ecolint volunteered to sit trial exams, albeit in single subjects covering most areas of the Diploma curriculum. This number was to increase to 332 in 1968 (AC 169, Ecolint 94, and four other schools), and to 720 in 1969, by which time many were sitting the full battery of exams.

In parenthesis, it may be interesting to add how the numbering of IB schools came about. This task fell to Ruth Bonner when registering schools for the first Diploma examinations. She decided that there would be no 001 and the rest listed alphabetically. Thus Chailly Lausanne became 002 and the UWC of the Atlantic 017. Ecolint with its 3 sections after 1973 became 008, 009, and 010 to provide IBO with three sources of income!

The IB gets underway 1968-71

The Sevres conference confirmed and consolidated ISES/IBO’s situation as a valued and respected educational pioneer. In September 1968 a handful of students began studying as full diploma students, the largest number being at UNIS which had only recently reached the stage of being a Kindergarten to Grade 12 school. Twenty nine students were successful in becoming the first Diploma holders in 1970. The UNIS Diploma holders proceeded to enrol in Princeton, Yale, MIT, Tufts and Wellesley in the USA and Oxford and Sussex in the UK, not a bad selection of universities. A group of nine students also commenced their Diploma studies at Ecolint in 1968, but for reasons which still escape me they did not sit their Diploma exams until 1971.

There were several important developments of note during this period. The first was the establishment of a Board of Chief Examiners, appointed by but independent of the IBO hierarchy. These Chief Examiners set the examination questions and monitored the performance of Assistant Examiners

who, in the early days, were almost all practising IB teachers. IBO has resisted establishing a bureau of full time professional examiners in the belief that teachers benefit from being examiners who are fully familiar with classroom conditions. This commitment, whilst ensuring integrity and reliability, was also expensive as all examiners had to be paid in US dollars, sterling and Swiss or French francs.

After the trial exams in 1969, an unforeseen but highly valuable feature appeared in the form of consultative conferences with a selection of students, teachers and IB staff. The first took place at the European Organisation for Nuclear research (CERN) near Geneva, and as a participant I saw its immense value. Further meetings were held in Geneva in 1970 and 1971 which chief examiners also attended. Sadly, after the 4th session at AC in 1972 they were discontinued owing to the burden of financing participants, much to the regret of many within the organisation.

Financing the IB continued to be a major problem for the first ten years of the organisation. The main sources of revenue were school membership and examination fees which were arguably kept too low in order to support and encourage member schools. Foundation funds were drying up since these were usually granted for start-up projects. Government subventions also remained at a very modest level but nevertheless represented continuing governmental support and interest in the project, which was still in its critical experimental stage.

During this time the IBO staff was still of minuscule proportions but, thanks to the intellectual strengths of Alec Peterson and his Deputy Gerard Renaud and the indefatigable energy of Ruth Bonner, they gradually managed to articulate the philosophical strength of the IB through several scholarly articles and a series of IB General Guides from 1973 onwards. These usually opened with a reaffirmation of what those of us who had participated held to be the basic principles of international education. Thus the IB came to be seen to reside in the realm of “General Education” or “Liberal Education”. It sought to promote international mindedness and understanding, the education of the whole person, forming what we increasingly refer to as “active, world citizens”. Yet each student, whilst expressing such characteristics, was to maintain roots within his or her own culture. There was a balance in the curriculum between the cognitive and the affective and an emphasis on learning how to learn. At that stage it was well articulated in Prof. Richard Whitfield’s guide to the Theory of Knowledge by reference to the six areas of meaning requiring exploration — symbolic communication (languages and mathematics), empirical enquiry (the sciences), relational understanding and perspective (social sciences), aesthetic expression and character formation (CASS), and a moral dimension. These have stood the test of time.

Biography of the author

Philip Thomas joined the International School of Geneva in 1963 to teach Geography and Economics. He spent 35 years at the school, serving as Head of Department, Campus Head and Assistant Director General. He was Chair of the Standing Conference of Heads of IB Schools between 1977 and 1983, with 20 years’ membership of the IB Council of Foundation, including 15 as its Secretary. He has led over 100 IB school accreditation visits.



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