

The International Secondary Certificate (ISC) of the Independent Examinations Board (IEB): Follow-up Quality Assurance Study

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In 2021, Ecctis undertook an international benchmarking of the International Secondary Certificate (ISC) of the Independent Examinations Board (IEB). Within the report, Ecctis recommended the benefits of conducting “a further review of the use and impact of the quality assurance processes, following a full year of curriculum implementation and assessment”. This is because, at the time of the 2021 study, the ISC (as a new qualification) had not yet completed a full assessment cycle and, therefore, all quality assurance processes in 2021 were reviewed on paper, rather than in practice.

In early 2023, Ecctis conducted a detailed review of assessment samples, marking samples, and the updated quality assurance handbook. Exploratory meetings were also conducted with IEB staff and with staff from Stellenbosch University’s Unit for International Credentialling (SU-UIC) – the external quality assurance body for the ISC.

Key Findings

Overall, Ecctis’ follow-up quality assurance review has sustained the finding from the provisional quality assurance review in 2021: that appropriate internal procedures are in place to assure the ISC, supported by external critique and support from SU-UIC.

The marked assessment samples reviewed from a selection of ISC subjects indicate that high-quality assessment papers were delivered and were effectively marked and thoroughly moderated. Across all reviewed subjects, the range of cognitive skills assessed, and the weighting of these within the examination papers, aligned with expectations established in curriculum overview documentation.

The quality assurance handbook provided a detailed and comprehensive overview of structures and procedures that are in place to assure the quality of all facets of the ISC, including the development and updating of subject curricula, assessment (including development, implementation, marking, moderation, standardisation and release of results, etc.), appointment and operation of oversight panels and boards, and provision of support to (and oversight of) ISC schools.

The ISC is currently in a “transition phase”, in which students who were studying the NSC internationally have been transitioned across to the ISC. The documentation reviewed and the meetings undertaken by Ecctis made clear that the progress through this transition phase has been planned and is ongoing. Some procedures and the relationship with SU-UIC will continue to evolve during this period.