

IB OR SACE?
AN INVESTIGATION INTO
STUDENT COURSE CHOICE AT THE
SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL
IN AN ADELAIDE SCHOOL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables and Figures.....	iii
List of Appendices	vii
Glossary	viii
Abstract	ix
Declaration	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction to the Portfolio: IB or SACE?	1
Contents for the Introduction	2
Project 1: Deciding for the Future: Year 10 Survey	44
Contents for Project 1	45
Project 2: Coping with the Present Decision: Year 11 and 12 Studies	131
Contents for Project 2	132
Project 3: Evaluating the Past Decision: A Retrospective Study of 1999 Alumni	186
Contents for Project 3	187
Conclusions to the Portfolio: Satisfying the ‘Customers’ in Senior Schooling	268
Contents for the Conclusions	269
Appendices	287
Bibliography	319

ERRATUM: page 68, line2 'cannot' should be 'should not'

TABLES and FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Table 1	IB AND SACE LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS	28
Figure 1	THE EXTENDED ESSAY, TOK AND CAS COMPONENTS OF THE IBDP.....	14
Figure 2	IBDP CURRICULUM.....	15
Figure 3	IBDP ASSESSMENT.....	16
Figure 4	SACE SUMMARY	23

PROJECT ONE

Figure i.1	A SNAPSHOT OF TYPICAL IB/SACE STORYLINES TO BE FOUND IN THE MEDIA.....	56
Figure i.2	OVERALL BREAKDOWN OF STUDENT CHOICE REGARDING IB and SACE	60
Figure i.3	STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT	61
Figure i.4	PARENT ATTENDANCE AT COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT.....	62
Figure i.5a	STUDENTS WHO HAVE READ THE YEAR 10 COURSE HANDBOOK	63
Figure i.5b	STUDENTS WHO READ THE YEAR 10 COURSE HANDBOOK, BY COURSE SELECTION	64
Figure i.6	CONSULTATION WITH THE HEAD OF HOUSE	64
Figure i.7	HEAD OF HOUSE INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	65
Figure i.8	INFLUENCE OF THE HEAD OF HOUSE	67
Figure i.9	CONSULTATION WITH THE CAREER COUNSELLOR.....	68
Figure i.10	STUDENTS WHO CONSULTED WITH CURRENT IB/SACE STUDENTS	70
Figure i.11	FATHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	73
Figure i.12	MOTHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	74
Figure i.13	COMPARISON OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE BY GENDER, IN PERCENTAGE TERMS.....	75
Figure i.14	SIBLINGS WHO HAVE COMPLETED YEAR 12	76
Figure i.15	SIBLING INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	77
Figure i.16	CLOSEST FRIENDS DOING THE SAME COURSE.....	79
Figure i.17	FRIENDS' INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	80
Figure i.18	MEDIA INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	81
Figure i.19a	ASSISTANCE OF COURSE CHOICE IN FUTURE CAREER.....	82

TABLES and FIGURES continued

Figure i.19b	SAGE/IB DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES FROM Figure i.19a	82
Figure i.20	STUDENT INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY	83
Figure i.21	STUDENT INTENTION FOR FUTURE STUDY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA	84
Figure i.22	COURSE CHOICE RELATED TO FUTURE STUDY NEEDS	86
Figure i.23	DISTRIBUTION OF BLANK RESPONSES THROUGHOUT PASTORAL CARE GROUPS	88
Figure i.24	DISTRIBUTION OF 'NO/NONE' RESPONSES THROUGHOUT THE PASTORAL CARE GROUPS	89
Figure i.25	SUMMARY OF THE BLANK AND 'NO'/'NONE' RESPONSES.....	118
Figure i.26	RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFIED A SINGLE FACTOR AFFECTING CHOICE.....	119
Figure i.27	RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFIED MULTIPLE FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE	120

PROJECT TWO

Table ii.1	ELEMENTS THAT COMPRISE THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY	142
Figure ii.1	OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES TO 2002 RESULTS.....	151
Figure ii.2	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: GENERAL EXPECTATIONS	154
Figure ii.3	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: SUBJECT EXPECTATIONS.....	155
Figure ii.4	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: CAREER EXPECTATIONS	156
Figure ii.5	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: EXAM EXPECTATIONS	157
Figure ii.6	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: FRIENDSHIP EXPECTATIONS	158
Figure ii.7	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS	161
Figure ii.8	VIEWS ON THE ALTERNATE COURSE	162
Figure ii.9	COMMENTS ON ADVICE ON CHOSEN COURSE	164
Figure ii.10	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ON YEAR 12 COURSE ASSESSMENT	172
Figure ii.11	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ON YEAR 12 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS	174
Figure ii.12	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	176
Figure ii.13	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT FUTURE ASPIRATIONS.....	178
Figure ii.14	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT OLDER STUDENTS AS ADVISORS	179

TABLES and FIGURES continued

PROJECT THREE

Table iii.1a	STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE 1997 COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT	197
Table iii.1b	PARENT ATTENDANCE AT THE 1997 COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT	197
Table iii.2	1997 STUDENTS WHO HAD READ COURSE SYLLABI	198
Table iii.3	1997 CONSULTATION WITH THE HEAD OF HOUSE.....	199
Table iii.4	1997 CONSULTATION WITH A CAREER ADVISER	200
Table iii.5	FATHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	201
Table iii.6	MOTHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	201
Table iii.7	COMPARISON OF MOTHER'S AND FATHER'S INFLUENCE	202
Table iii.8	SIBLINGS WHO HAD COMPLETED YEAR 12.....	203
Table iii.9	1997 SIBLING INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	204
Table iii.10	1997 STUDENTS WHO CONSULTED WITH OTHER STUDENTS	205
Table iii.11	1997 CLOSEST FRIENDS DOING THE SAME COURSE	206
Table iii.12	1997 FRIENDS' INFLUENCE OVER COURSE	207
Table iii.13	1997 MEDIA INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	208
Table iii.14	THE 1997 CHOICE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR FUTURE PLANS	209
Table iii.15	1997 STUDENT INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY	210
Table iii.16	1997 INTENTION FOR FUTURE STUDY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA	211
Table iii.17	WAS THE 1997 COURSE CHOICE DIRECTED BY FUTURE STUDY NEEDS?	211
Table iii.18	COMPARATIVE GUIDE TO TER CONVERSION RATES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA	215
Table iii.19	CORRELATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CHOICE WITH DEGREE OF INFLUENCE: IB RESPONDENTS.....	216
Table iii.20	CORRELATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CHOICE WITH DEGREE OF INFLUENCE: SACE RESPONDENTS	219
Table iii.21	IB AND SACE WORD COUNT COMPARISON	264
Figure iii.1	IB STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON COMMENTS ABOUT THE TWO COURSES	213
Figure iii.2	SACE STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON COMMENTS ABOUT THE TWO COURSES..	217
Figure iii.3	REFLECTIONS ON USEFUL ADVICE RECEIVED WHEN CHOOSING A COURSE .	221

TABLES and FIGURES continued

Figure iii.4	REFLECTIONS ON ADVICE THAT COULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL WHEN CHOOSING A COURSE	223
Figure iii.5	SUBJECT CHOICES OF SACE AND IB STUDENTS	225
Figure iii.6	UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE, BONUS POINT SCHEME	226
Figure iii.7a	RELATIVELY EASY TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES	229
Figure iii.7b	MIXED TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES	230
Figure iii.7c	DIFFICULT TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES.....	231
Figure iii.8	POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS FOR IB RESPONDENTS.....	233
Figure iii.9	POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS FOR SACE RESPONDENTS	235
Figure iii.10a	IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS GAINED FROM SACE RESPONDENTS	237
Figure iii.10b	IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS GAINED FROM IB RESPONDENTS	238
Figure iii.10c	COMPILATION OF SPECIFIC SKILLS IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS	239
Figure iii.11	ELEMENTS MOST ENJOYED IN THE SACE/IB COURSES	242
Figure iii.12	ELEMENTS LEAST ENJOYED IN THE SACE/IB COURSES	245
Figure iii.13	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION a	248
Figure iii.14	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION b	249
Figure iii.15	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION c	250
Figure iii.16	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION d	251
Figure iii.17	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION e	252
Figure iii.18	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION f	253
Figure iii.19	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION a.....	254
Figure iii.20	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION b.....	256
Figure iii.21	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION c.....	257
Figure iii.22	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION d.....	259
Figure iii.23	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION e.....	261
Figure iii.24	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION f.....	262

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	Permission letter – 2002.....	287
APPENDIX B	Year 10 Survey – 2002.....	288
APPENDIX C	Headmaster A’s Letter – 2001	292
APPENDIX D	Year 11 Study – 2003.....	293
APPENDIX E	Year 12 Study – 2004.....	296
APPENDIX F	IB/SACE Letter for Alumni Survey.....	299
APPENDIX G	IB Alumni Survey – 2007	300
APPENDIX H	SACE Alumni Survey – 2007	308
APPENDIX I	IB Learner Profile, IBO website – 2009	316
APPENDIX J	SACE Student Qualities, SACE website – 2009	317
APPENDIX K	Excerpt from Headmaster B’s Newsletter – 2009.....	318

GLOSSARY

The terms below are described in greater detail when introduced in a relevant context.

CAS	Creativity, Action and Service. A compulsory requirement of the IBDP. At the time of the research, students had to document that they had spent 50 hours each on a series of activities that involved creativity, for example, the arts; action, for example, sports and service, for example, community volunteer projects.
EE	The Extended Essay is a compulsory component of the IBDP, a piece of individual research demonstrating an independent, supervised study to produce a 4,000 word paper on a topic chosen by the student.
IB	International Baccalaureate
IB-DP	International Baccalaureate- Diploma Programme (ages16-19)
IB-MYP	International Baccalaureate-Middle Years Programme (ages11-16)
IB-PYP	International Baccalaureate- Primary Years Programme (ages3-12)
Focus School	The school at which this study was carried out.
Head of House	The staff member in charge of a House, a pastoral care group which incorporates students from all secondary year levels at the Focus School.
HESS	A Higher Education Selection Subject is a SACE Stage 2 subject acceptable for university admission. (HESS general subjects were formerly known as PES and PAS, Hess Restricted subjects = SAS).
PES/PAS/SAS	Subjects in SACE were given these terms depending on how they were assessed; Publicly Examined Subjects, Publicly Assessed Subjects or School Assessed Subjects.
Post-compulsory Schooling	During the time of the research, the compulsory age for attending school was 16 (usually denoting Years 11&12). New legislation passed in 2007, meant that from the beginning of 2009 the compulsory age was increased to 17.
Reception - Years 11&12	The entry point for students starting their formal primary education, around five years of age. Successive years are numbered after that; Year 1, Year 2 and so on: the final 2 years are Year 11&12.
SACE	The South Australian Certificate of Education.
SL/HL IB Subjects	Subjects in the IBDP are designated Standard or Higher level. The latter require more content.
SSABSA	The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia, now the SACE board (as of July 2008).
TER	Tertiary Entrance Ranking. In South Australia, tertiary institutions use a tertiary entrance rank score to assist the selection process of students into courses. This score is calculated from the student's SACE or IB year 12 results.
TOK	Theory of Knowledge. This is a compulsory IBDP course that is an interdisciplinary inquiry into the complexity of knowledge. It involves a study of different ways of knowing and the nature of evidence.

ABSTRACT

This portfolio is an investigation of the process of students' decision-making in choosing between two courses, the South Australian Certificate of Education (a local credential) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, in the final two years of their senior schooling. This investigation was carried out at an independent school for boys in Adelaide between 2001 and 2009.

The aim of the investigation was threefold: to establish what factors were affecting the course choice of the Focus School's students; to examine how these students as „customers“ articulated the risks involved in this decision; and to gain a student-based appraisal of the two course policy.

Three separate projects made up the research portfolio, entitled „Deciding for the Future“, „Coping with the Present Decision“ and „Evaluating the Past Decision“. The first was an inquiry by survey of 116 Year 10 students about to embark on their chosen course. The second examined the responses from two surveys administered to a subset (17) of the above students as they studied their chosen course in Year 11 and Year 12. The third was the analysis of survey material from 20 former students about their chosen course and their subsequent directions since leaving school ten years earlier. The data, collected from qualitative research questionnaires that were a combination of closed and open-ended questions, were then analysed thematically.

The findings indicated that their course choice was a complex and highly individual process that could be the result of competing forces such as personal likes and dislikes, short and long term ambitions and pragmatic and aesthetic motivations. Students could be interpreted as customers shopping for a product and weighing up how to manage the risks in an educational marketplace. It was hoped that, from these findings, the school community would have a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes which would lead to better support for students and others who were involved in such a decision.

The data analysis also demonstrated some important differences in long term outcomes for the students doing each course; as well as a degree of customer satisfaction with what the choice of courses offered them.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed.....Date:.....

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¹ The term Headmaster is the official title of the incumbent Principal at the Focus School. It shall be adhered to throughout this research.

IB or SACE?

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INTRODUCTION TO THE PORTFOLIO

IB OR SACE?

CONTENTS

1. Preamble: The reality of course choice	3
2. The Focus School and its changing emphases	5
2.1 Reshaping the student „self“ in a contemporary global context	7
3. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP)	10
3.1 History of the IB	11
3.2 Philosophy of the IB	12
3.3 Curriculum and assessment of the IBDP	14
4. The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)	17
4.1 History of the SACE	17
4.2 Philosophy of the SACE	20
4.3 Curriculum and assessment of the SACE	22
5. Comparing the two awards	24
5.1 The South Australian context	24
5.2 The Focus School context	26
5.3 Comparing learner characteristics	27
6. The aims of the research portfolio	29
6.1 Investigating the specific factors in the students“ decision-making	29
6.2 Understanding how the students managed the risk of choice	31
6.3 Gaining a student-based appraisal of the two-course policy	32
7. The individual and the decision-making process	32
8. Method	35
8.1 Student focus	35
8.2 Anonymity	38
8.3 The role of the researcher	38
9. The research portfolio	39
9.1 Presentation	39
9.2 Project 1: <i>Deciding for the Future: Year 10 Survey</i>	40
9.3 Project 2: <i>Coping with the Present Decision: Year 11 & 12 Studies</i>	40
9.4 Project 3: <i>Evaluating the Past Decision: A Retrospective Study of 1999 Alumni</i>	41
9.5 Concluding remarks	42

INTRODUCTION TO THE PORTFOLIO

IB OR SACE?

1. Preamble: The reality of course choice for students

The second years were given something new to think about during their Easter holidays. The time had come to choose their subjects for the third year, a matter that Hermione, at least, took very seriously.

„I could affect our whole future,” she told Harry and Ron, as they pored over lists of new subjects, marking them with ticks.

„I just want to give up Potions,” said Harry.

„We can’t,” said Ron gloomily. „We keep all our old subjects, or I’d’ve ditched Defence Against the Dark Arts.”

„But that’s very important!” said Hermione, shocked (Rowling, 1998, p. 186).

In one section of the novel by J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), the dilemma of choice for students and the complex nature of decision-making and influence are played out wittily. Although one can identify with the sorts of strategies and processes in play, the magical world of Harry Potter shields the reader from the very real tensions of such decision-making. Amusement aside, the experience of making such choices which may ultimately affect career paths, as well as the uncertainties about the course content, the balancing of conflicting information and the desire to please and appease various stakeholders, weigh heavily upon the student approaching the end of secondary schooling.

Such individual balances are highlighted in the following five cases, culled from the experiences of Year 10 and 11 students at an Adelaide secondary school as they tried to select the course which would offer them the better pathway through the final years of their schooling and beyond. These examples were recorded in the mid 1990s when

the School that is the focus of this research (hereafter called the Focus School) introduced the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP) as an alternative to the existing South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) course. They focus on the students' process of deciding which course to follow, the immediate aftermath of the decision and how students dealt with the subsequent implications of such a choice.

Example One: A student in Year 10 is canvassing the idea of doing IB in Year 11 and switching to SACE in Year 12. He is likely to have large commitments to sport and there is a possibility of leadership positions in Year 12. SACE will meet these circumstances better, he feels. He ultimately selects the SACE model for continuity and consistency.

Example Two: A student in Year 10, in evaluating his options for Year 11 and 12, has sought advice from parents, staff, information nights and friendship groups. He is still uncertain as to which course he should choose. He flips a coin.

Example Three: Student C is enrolled in the IB. He is managing the requirements of his standard level subjects, but is not finding the higher level subjects at Year 11 easy. After consultation with a variety of staff and his parents, he decides to switch to the SACE model. He can maintain the same subjects without a differentiation in level.

Example Four: Student D is enrolled in the IB. He decides that after Year 11, his responsibilities to his chosen sport and other extra-curricular activities require an

enormous time commitment. He switches to the SACE model which does not require such substantial additional academic loads.

Example Five: Student E has embarked on the SACE model at the beginning of Year 11. Initially he was happy with the decision. Within a few weeks it becomes apparent that part of his enjoyment of school is intrinsically tied to his friendship group. These friends are doing the IB. He is able to switch courses while maintaining similar subject choices.

Such a variety of responses to the issue of course choice made it evident that the underlying thinking of students was critical in their ultimate decision. How were students making such decisions? What were the factors influencing such decisions? What were the longer term outcomes of the choices they made? In order to understand the nature of these questions and the responses to them, it is important to have some understanding of the Focus School, its recent history and the curriculum options offered to its students in Years 11 and 12.

2. The Focus School and its changing emphases

The school under investigation is an independent school for boys located in metropolitan Adelaide, close to the city centre. It has a population of around 1100 students and has a non-selective entry policy. The school has both primary and secondary domains, spanning the levels of Reception through to Year 12. It also has an early learning centre that caters for three to five year olds.

The Focus School is an institution in transition. The School's governing board is particularly mindful of its contemporary status and its future disposition.

The School provides excellent leadership opportunities and epitomises the values of respect, compassion, teamwork and service. Through the provision of extensive information technology and an innovative approach to teaching and learning, our boys are prepared to make active and ethical contributions to a global society [School website].²

Over the last decade the School has responded to an imperative (both from internal and external forces) to attain more explicit „professionalism“ in areas such as greater transparency regarding curriculum content, assessment practices, teaching appointments and promotions, pastoral care procedures and policy development. In its endeavour to do this, it has recast much of its strategic planning and day-to-day functioning around a business model. The role of „Headmaster“ has been referred to in passing as the „CEO“ and his senior advisory group of teachers is now the „management team“. The former role of „bursar“ has become a much higher profiled „business manager“ and the „admissions officer“, once the prerogative of a seasoned teacher who worked within the school term while maintaining classroom duties, has been overtaken by an incumbent who works to a traditional business office schedule. The School, at the time of the research, employed a Human Resources manager to work with the school's personnel in a more co-ordinated and deliberate manner. Stationery, logos and signage have all been redesigned so as to have a more contemporary feel and a consistency of branding.

² This website can be supplied if requested. There is no explicit reference to this website so as not to contravene the agreement of anonymity between the researcher and the Focus School.

The wider community, particularly the students and their parents, are identified at times as both consumers and clients, while the marketing to current and potential audiences has become more systematic, targeting local, national and global arenas via a variety of media, particularly information and communication technologies. The pressure of creating a presence in a competitive market place can be observed when surveying the home pages of many other comparable schools as well. Access to school material on line has become *de rigueur*.

2.1 Reshaping the student ‘self’ in a contemporary global context

One conclusion to be drawn from this new phase of promotional material and optional programmes by educational institutions is that the notion of „student“ is being reformulated. This has been identified by Beryl Langer (in Beilharz & Hogan, 2002, p. 9) in the following way.

Just as children in the hunter-gatherer societies must learn to hunt and gather, children in peasant societies to till the soil and care for animals, and children in industrial societies to take on a sense of self as „worker“, children [today] must learn to shop.

This insight was epitomised by a phrase of the current Headmaster when, in a recent newsletter (see excerpt in Appendices, Appendix K), he referred to

...the most important customers of all, the boys.

Given this context, at a superficial level the research in this thesis can be interpreted as a form of market research into the consumer satisfaction with educational products available to customers completing the final two years of their secondary schooling. At a deeper level, it probes and analyses the decision-making strategies of individual

boys on the verge of adulthood, who are endeavouring to resolve issues relating to their future that they believe are both critical and crucial for their livelihoods and lives.

A second perspective that informs discussion around the contemporary student is the notion of the „risk society“. Beck (2006, p. 4) describes modern society as becoming

...a risk society in the sense that it is increasingly occupied with debating, presenting and managing risks that it itself has produced.

In his 1992 book on this topic, where he defines risk as „a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization“, Beck (1992, p. 21) establishes that there are risks referred to as essentially environmental and others that are related to the individual. It is this latter concept which impinges on this research.

Slattery (1991, p. 256) builds on Beck’s idea to clarify the nature of contemporary society.

Beck thus characterises modern society in terms of risk and distinguishes it from pre-industrial and industrial society by the fact that risks today are largely man made and global...As man [sic] gains more and more control of his universe so, paradoxically, the risks to life and to the earth itself seem to become far greater and to affect all humankind.

This analysis is expanded to describe some of the implications for those living in the „risk society“.

The paradox is equally reflected in the social structures of societies today. As the individual becomes freer and more independent so, paradoxically, the social structures that previously protected people start to collapse...

Beck identifies a new and fundamental shift in the relationship between society and the individual; a new mode of socialisation as society starts to prepare its young for the risks of the future...

Managing risk is now as much a personal dilemma as a social one. In an age where the individual seems freer than before - materially, psychologically and spiritually - people ironically are more vulnerable and helpless...

[Individuals] have to learn how to evaluate and manage risk and to take responsibility for their own actions if they are to survive and thrive...

In the open and opportunistic societies of today it is individual decision making, decision making about lifestyles, about personal habits and personal mores that will determine the future (Slattery, 1991, p.256).

The student and his³ „personal dilemma“ of course choice, together with the idea that his decision does represent a risk that may have considerable consequences for his future, are themes readily identified and articulated in the body of the collected data. These issues of consumer choice and risk became a reality for senior boys when the Focus School introduced an option into the senior secondary programme of study.

In 1998, the school began to offer two alternate courses designed for students in their final two years of secondary schooling. These were the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). The former is officially co-ordinated in South Australia where the curriculum is developed and assessed. The IB headquarters are located in Geneva, although the largest curriculum and assessment centre is situated at Cardiff, UK.

The current structure of each course owes much to its historical beginnings and educational philosophy, which in turn has informed the nature of curriculum and assessment practice within each course. A brief overview of these courses and some discussion as to their similarities and differences follow. From this comparative

³ Masculine terms are used when referring to students, as the research was entirely conducted at a school for boys.

analysis, several factors emerged as potential indices affecting student choice. These factors were examined against student views in the ensuing research.

3. The International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP)

The International Baccalaureate programme now provides educational courses to all age groups of primary and secondary schooling and is thus divided into three components:

PYP: the Primary Years Programme- introduced in 1997 for students aged 3-11;

MYP: the Middle Years Programme-introduced in 1994 for students aged 11-16; and

DP: the Diploma Programme- a two-year programme aimed at students aged 16-19.

It should be noted that as the Focus School did not offer either the International Baccalaureate Middle Years or Primary Years Programmes (IBMYP and IBPYP), in any future references to the school's International Baccalaureate course, it can be assumed that it is the Diploma Programme that is being discussed. Further, as it is the International Baccalaureate convention that the word „programme“ is so-spelt, this convention will be adhered to in this research.

This research focuses on the DP. It is a feature of the DP that it is seen as an entity spanning two years. While it can be viewed as an extension of previous learning experiences, its history indicates that it evolved as a two year programme characterised by some specific features which justify considering it as a separate course in its own right. Furthermore, as already indicated, the Focus School only delivered the DP at the time of the research.

3.1 History of the IB

The evolution of the IBDP has been traced from the early 1960s, where there was a thrust from the International School of Geneva to offer a pre-university exam that, sat anywhere in the world, would be internationally recognised and would provide a university entrance benchmark to aspiring tertiary candidates from around the globe. This concept started to be explored in 1962 by the International Schools Association. The pre-university programme envisioned had two important dimensions: a practical consideration and an educational function.

International schools had been faced with the increasing problem of preparing their senior students for entry into a range of different national tertiary institutions. The various requirements meant a complex exercise, often expensive in teaching and administrative resources, in order to prepare students for different national university entrance requirements. Were there an international pre-university qualification available, these international schools would benefit in two distinct ways. First, schools would not have the demands of different national educational programmes imposed on their own courses and in their own context. Second, there would be no need to segregate students along national lines in order to deliver discrete prescribed national agenda. To be able to deliver a single standardised international course would encourage the teaching of programmes with a global focus rather than those conforming to insular obligations. This impetus for a new system cannot merely be viewed as a reactive response to existing problems. Peterson (1972, p. 14) reported that there was

...an opportunity for experiment and research in curricula and examinations which could have an innovatory influence on national systems.

From 1963 to 1967, financial grants funded the exploration of a prospective international course. The International Baccalaureate was deemed „a practical project“, although „the principal challenges were identified as [an] appropriate curriculum, exam and examiner status, international recognition for the IB, the support of high profile schools and financing of the IB“ (Peterson, 1972, p. 13).

Investigations into the nature of the course established a core regulatory format. A student was deemed to have passed the DP and gained a Baccalaureate qualification by passing examinations in six subjects (generally three at higher level and three at subsidiary-later, standard- level). Subject selection was limited to a prescribed matrix and the assessment process provided results on a graded scale. Further, a suite of other set tasks that needed to be satisfactorily completed was later developed.

Between 1970 and 1976 ongoing experimentation was carried out to determine the viability of the DP. This involved the establishment of a number of provisional aspects. With the agreement of several tertiary authorities to accept selected students prepared by accredited schools, the push was on to proceed with the development of syllabi and to trial examination material. A successful review of the entire process recommended after this period that the status of the programme be deemed permanent.

3.2 Philosophy of the IB

The introduction of the International Baccalaureate, while addressing the need of a common international pre-university entry requirement, attempted to achieve broader philosophical outcomes.

It had been stated that

Advanced academic work... will demand five qualities which are not generally and equally distributed among the age group. These are a capacity for conceptualization and analysis, a memory good enough to hold a number of facts or concepts in the mind simultaneously, an unslaked curiosity, a capacity for recognizing and, in rare cases, formulating new interpretations of available information, and a commitment to the intellectual formation and solution to problems (Peterson, 1972, p. 34).

Therefore, it was the aim that the design of any pre-university course should focus on promoting such qualities within each discipline and that examinations, in turn, should be designed to help identify such qualities.

The developers of the IB also maintained that there should not be a narrow concentration on purely academic performance, but that an emphasis should be placed on the personal development of the student;

What is of paramount importance in the pre-university stage is not what is learnt but learning to learn (Peterson, 1972, p35).

Consequently, three compulsory requirements, the Extended Essay (EE), Theory of Knowledge (TOK) and Creativity, Action and Service (CAS) are included as compulsory components to address the personal growth of the students. These core components are defined on the next page, **Figure 1**.

Figure 1 THE EXTENDED ESSAY, TOK AND CAS COMPONENTS OF THE IBDP (IBO, 2009)

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 14
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

3.3 Curriculum and assessment of the IBDP

The curriculum, now officially disseminated and examined in three languages (French, English and Spanish) evolved from a fundamental tension between catering for the needs of a generalist approach to education, focusing on the acquisition of skills for higher learning, and the need to provide students with specialised knowledge in discrete subject areas. The course taxonomy has been depicted in the following diagram to be found on the diploma curriculum from the IBO website, **Figure 2**.

Figure 2 IBDP CURRICULUM (IBO, 2009)

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 15
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

The IB curriculum is structured around pupils experiencing a variety of components. Students are required to study some curricula (usually three subjects) at standard level, but also must study some (usually three subjects) at higher level. The distribution of subject requirements means that first and second languages, mathematics and both experimental and human sciences are core elements. There is room for a „free choice“ subject as well as the compulsory core.

Methods of assessment are outlined as follows, in **Figure 3**, taken from the programme-assessment section of the same IBO website.

Figure 3 IBDP ASSESSMENT (IBO, 2009)

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 16
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Two undercurrents driving the assessment rationale have been identified. There is recognition that the need for examinations should not obstruct good classroom practice. Furthermore, there is not to be a single instrument in the assessment process, that is, there is a combination of both internal and external assessment. It is understood that if an external exam were the only method of assessment, then

candidates whose personality favoured the examination would be advantaged over candidates who exhibit more reflective or persistent traits.

4. The South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE)

The SACE is a South Australian qualification gained by students to acknowledge formally successful completion of their secondary education. The regulation and administration of this certification process is conducted by the SACE Board of South Australia (formerly SSABSA, the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia).⁴ While a local qualification, educationally SACE „is an internationally recognised credential that opens pathways leading to vocations and careers, further studies and employment“ (The SACE Board, 2009).

4.1 History of the SACE

Prior to 1960 in South Australia, students moved into predictable pathways when they reached the end of compulsory education at age 14. There were several formal levels of attainment which tended to define a student’s career path.

Some students left school at the age of fifteen, after the Intermediate Certificate, to enter unskilled or semi-skilled occupations or to embark on apprenticeships to become skilled tradesmen [sic]. Others left school after the Leaving Certificate at the age of sixteen, entering white collar occupations as clerks and secretaries in public service, commerce and industry. Those remaining for the Leaving Honours year (Year 12) prepared for university. The Leaving Examination at the end of Year 11 was required for Matriculation, and the University did take entrants from that point, but Leaving Honours Studies were

⁴ At the time of the research, SACE was usually conducted over a period of two years and the curriculum was generally assessed at each year; as Stage 1 (Year 11) and Stage 2 (Year 12).

strongly recommended as background for some university courses (Gilding, 1988, p. 4).

By 1966, it was evident that competition for university places was increasing and there was need for a better selection process. In 1968, the Intermediate exams were abolished, followed by the Leaving exams in 1974. A Matriculation programme was introduced at Year 12 where students were required to study at least five subjects. The subject distribution meant that at least one subject had to be chosen from a designated list of the sciences and another from a list of the humanities. Student results were then scaled to render scores comparable through a statistical process. While Matriculation was a credential that served students intending to undertake post-school education, it soon became the only external public credential within the secondary system, one which was considered to be inappropriate or irrelevant for those moving directly into the workplace.

A Report of the Working Party on Post Compulsory Schooling entitled „Beyond Compulsion“ acknowledged that,

in South Australia, the Committee of Enquiry into Education, chaired by Dr. J. Keeves (1982), reported that upper secondary education was “at the crossroads” and called for a redirection of resources to achieve the substantial changes required. Echoing the conclusions of a number of other studies conducted recently in Australia, the Committee pointed to the over-academic approach of the traditional role of secondary schools in preparing a minority of students for competitive examinations and tertiary entrance. For the majority of students, courses were said to be lacking in relevance and interest because of insufficient knowledge, social development and preparation for the world of work and citizenship (South Australia Working Party on Post Compulsory Schooling, 1982, p. 2).

Against this backdrop a further report entitled a *Response to the „Enquiry into Immediate Post Compulsory Education“*, articulated the new imperatives influencing curriculum development and change. The report is too comprehensive to expand on in this portfolio, but perhaps the flavour of the priorities driving reform can be captured in the following passages.

Any curriculum pattern must accommodate a range of curriculum offerings which are designed to meet the needs of all students for whom the Education Department is responsible (South Australia Education Department, 1987, p. 19).

A redevelopment of the current post compulsory curriculum must be undertaken in order to redress the balance between knowledge and skills and understandings to ensure that all young people have an opportunity to develop the essential learnings (South Australia Education Department, 1987, p. 23).

The evolution of the current SACE course from the previous incarnation of the Matriculation qualification can be interpreted as a response to complex demands placed upon the education system due to social and economic changes apparent in South Australia throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Some of these are identified below.

Australia's pattern of migration has been such that a significant number of families come from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Changes have occurred in Aboriginal communities.

The roles of women have continued to change.

Advancing technology has contributed substantially to radical changes in the structure of the workforce.

The structure of work has altered from relatively large percentages of workers in stable long-term full-time employment... to more vulnerable short and fixed-term employment contracts.

Two opposing trends, towards higher degrees of specialisation and less employment security and towards multiple skill development and more entrepreneurial opportunities, can be seen at work in the economy (Gilding, 1988, p. 5).

In 1983 SSABSA, the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia was established and continues to have (as the „SACE Board“) the legislative responsibility as the sole credentialing agency. The following year it took over the former Matriculation certificate. In light of the various reports into post-compulsory education and the pioneering work done in evaluating different assessment models, some of which included public examination and moderated school assessment, the SACE model evolved.

Since 1992, SSABSA has administered the SACE credential. It is worth noting that the current SACE has been through a recent lengthy review and

the future SACE is the new South Australian Certificate of Education, which will be introduced from 2009 in Government, Catholic and Independent schools with senior secondary students.

The future SACE will provide a structure for students in Years 10, 11 and 12 to learn key skills and knowledge. The new certificate will build upon the achievements of the current SACE (SSABSA, FUTURE SACE, 2009).

It needs to be understood that this research has been carried out with students who experienced the original SACE model.

4.2 Philosophy of the SACE

While it is evident that societal changes were rapidly occurring from around the early 1960s, it is clear that these changes were influencing the structure and provision of education, particularly in the years affecting school leavers, by the mid 1980s.

In 1985, a report on the Quality of Education Review Committee suggested that education should respond to and embrace the following features:

The education system will need to enhance the capacities of individuals e.g. development of skills and ingenuity.

Service industries have expanded... [creating] changes in the traditional boundaries of occupations... Many of the new jobs will involve a high degree of client contact and interpersonal skills.

Education and training arrangements in Australia have been based on the labour force needs of an industrial economy... This pattern is obsolete... A much greater proportion of young Australians will have to complete a broad level secondary education as a foundation on which to build the necessary occupational skills.

Many schools find themselves with significant concentrations of students of non-English speaking background and a range of first languages.

Schools are increasingly being called upon to provide social support services formerly undertaken by families or communities.

Children and teachers take to school a widening range of attitudes, beliefs and values (Karmel & Quality of Education Review Committee, 1985, pp.189-190).

On the theme of equity and economic well-being, Gilding reported the

...need to create structures for our education system which will enable schools and other educational agencies to provide for all young people the educational services which will enable them to take part fully and productively in modern society (Gilding, 1988, p.7).

While these statements embraced an overall educational philosophy, these aims had the most direct bearing on the final years of secondary education as was anticipated in a document on higher education circulated by the then Minister of Employment, Education and Training.

An increase in school retention rates to Year 12 and extension of these higher rates across income groups and geographic regions will have implications for

curricula...for teacher education and retraining and for income support and infrastructure provisions (D.E.E.T. & Hawkins, 1987, p.18).

The emerging SACE (1983-1992) course therefore sought to offer a wide range of subjects to candidates, different combinations of assessment arrangements and great flexibility within its operations to cater for all people in its ambit and the diversity of their post secondary needs.

4.3 Curriculum and assessment of the SACE

The following material is documented on the SSABSA website.

To meet the requirements of the certificate, students need to take a balanced range of studies, generally over two years, although no particular time limit is specified. Stage 1 of the SACE is usually studied in Year 11 and Stage 2 of the SACE is usually studied in Year 12. Students may negotiate alterations to this schedule. The studies include English or English as Second Language, Australian Studies, and Mathematics at Stage 1 (Year 11), as well as a selection from other subject groups.

To be awarded the SACE, students must study 22 semester (half-year) units, some of which may be combined to form full-year programmes; reach a level of satisfactory achievement in at least 16 of the 22 units; meet the subject pattern requirements (SSABSA, About SACE, 2009).

There is a wide range of subject choices and assessment models and, under certain circumstances, course material can be negotiated to meet the needs of individuals and SACE guidelines. The figure, **Figure 4**, below summarises the key components of the SACE model. The material is documented on the Australian Government Education website in the secondary school section for South Australia.

Figure 4 SACE SUMMARY (Australian Government & AEI, 2009)

Curriculum

Stage 1 SACE subjects are SSABSA accredited subjects based on curriculum statements. Stage 2 SSABSA accredited subjects are known as HESS (Higher Education Selection Subjects) and are accepted for admission to university. HESS are classified as general – the subject can count towards any university course, or restricted – the subject can count towards some university courses. Students can also take VET subjects, which are restricted, and non-HESS subjects.

SACE subjects are offered in units. Each unit represents 50 to 60 hours of classroom and school-based activity time. Subjects are 1 unit for a semester-long subject or 2 units for a year-long subject. Students must take at least 22 units of Stage 1 and 2 subjects.

Subjects offered in senior secondary include English or English as Second Language, Australian studies, science and mathematics in addition to many others.

Qualifications and assessment

Students are awarded the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) following successful completion of Stage 1 and 2 to the required standards. Students also receive a Record of Achievement which records subject results for Stage 1 and Stage 2. Eligible students also receive a Tertiary Entrance Statement for admission to higher education.

Assessment of Stage 1 subjects is school-based and moderated by SSABSA. Stage 2 subjects have at least 50% school-based assessment. Some Stage 2 subjects have an external assessment component of up to 50%. All Stage 2 subjects can be used in the calculation of the Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER).

Access to higher education

SACE students are also issued with a Tertiary Entrance Statement which has a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) for admission to higher education. The TER is derived from a university aggregate devised by the South Australian universities which is calculated on the 5 best subjects. It is reported as a number between 0 and 99.95.

To be eligible to enter higher education there were also other conditions imposed on students concerning their subject choices. This depended on their anticipated career choice or criteria established by the higher education institution or relevant professional association.

5. Comparing the two awards

5.1 The South Australian context

Both the origins of the IBDP course and the early SACE model trace back their evolution to the 1960s. There is also evidence that both courses were again affected by significant changes in the 1980s. In Australia, an immediate logistical issue needed to be addressed when secondary school enrolments rose markedly (Saha & Keeves, 1990, p. 57). Other emerging general societal factors affecting the development of the SACE model throughout the 1980s such as an increase in non-English speaking immigrants, changes in Indigenous communities, women's roles, advancing technology and the nature and structure of work, have been documented above. In the IB programme, Elizabeth Fox also records a shift in focus of the course during this same period.

Although the development of the IB was examination driven in the first instance, it was fundamental curriculum issues - the balance between breadth and specialization, between requirements and choices, as well as the selection of content - which underlay the structure of the programme (Fox, 1998, p. 66).

As schools introduced this programme, a survey of schools

... conducted in 1984 confirmed that the main factors influencing schools' decisions to adopt IB were academic excellence, the challenge inherent in the syllabuses, the appeal to gifted students, and the opportunity to upgrade and enrich the curriculum school-wide (Fox, 1998, p.73).

In South Australia, these considerations included the increasing competition for university places and the need to refine selection criteria, the push for higher Year 12 retention rates, an ideological imperative to provide for the educational aspirations of all candidates, changing economic and social conditions affecting post-secondary

schooling opportunities and the increasing face of globalisation and technological advances.

As this research relates to the senior years of secondary education, it is important to understand that the processes at work are the result of a dynamic between two roles in these credentialing years. The first role is as a „preparation for additional formal study“ (Saha & Keeves, 1990, p. 5), while the second role is as a „termination of study“ (Saha & Keeves, 1990, p. 5) which as elsewhere explained, was intended to provide a preparation for the workforce. This is not to suggest that the processes are purely functional, but that recognising the existence of these two strands highlights the different approaches to curriculum development within the two course models. It could be argued that the new SACE course model evolved from the theoretical framework of the conflict model. Although not strictly adhering to a Marxist economic explanation nor to Connell’s emphasis on cultural process, there is a strong undercurrent in the Keeves report (see above, page 18) that the former Matriculation system served only a small yet powerful student group and that this needed to be resolved by a major assault on curriculum and assessment so as to cater for all people and their educational and employment needs.

In the case of the IB, it could be argued that the course was developed to assist those wishing to prepare for higher education and, as such, represents more the consensus framework where,

under the pressure of challenge to the status quo those with power either allow or generate curricular change within the bounds of the present system. Present assumptions are not changed, though they may be extended or elaborated (Musgrave, 1979, p. 22).

In both the IB and SACE models under investigation, courses are still undergoing various changes. It has already been noted that the SACE course which provided the model for this research has been reviewed and, from 2009, a new model will be rolled out. In the IB, too, reviews are carried out on a regular basis in all subject areas and much of the changes so implemented are driven from the IB's own research section. As such, these evolving courses cannot necessarily be said to be the singular products of particular processes at a given time. Rather, they are essentially processes at work.

5.2 The Focus School context

The Headmaster of the school under investigation, in an address to staff 1997 at which I was present, highlighted some of the factors that he considered as important to having both courses on offer at the school. In part they reflected the ideas stated above, but they also emphasized some other needs specific to the Focus School. There had been and still was a growing awareness of global dimensions affecting local communities. This was manifest in a school situation where the student population was becoming more transient and the increase in technologies, like the Internet, was promoting an international outlook for education. While students could travel with their SACE, this qualification was perceived as not as easily portable as the IB. The number of students applying for tertiary education interstate and overseas had increased, and the IB was seen to serve that need.

Another significant issue in education had been the emerging emphasis on addressing the needs of boys' education. With two courses on offer that had differing assessment criteria, structures, demands and options, it was anticipated that a wider student population could have its needs catered for more effectively.

A further dimension explained by the Headmaster was the professional development of the staff. He argued that offering both courses at the Focus School provided diversity and challenge not only for the students but also for the staff in terms of their professional development.

5.3 Comparing learner characteristics

Both the IB and the SACE qualifications have identified certain student/learner characteristics which are seen as the desired outcomes of the respective courses. These are delineated on the following page, **Figure 5**. The IB Learner Profile can be found on the IB website and a copy of this is included as Appendix I. The SACE profile is termed 10 SACE Student Qualities, can be found on the SACE website and a copy of this is included as Appendix J with permission from the author Jim Dellitt. For the purpose of ease of comparison the material was presented in a single figure where the IB material is listed first unshaded, while the SACE information follows, shaded.

Table 1 IB AND SACE LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

The IB Learner Profile: IB learners strive to be:	
Inquirers	They develop their natural curiosity. They acquire the skills necessary to conduct inquiry and research and show independence in learning. They actively enjoy learning and this love of learning will be sustained throughout their lives.
Knowledgeable	They explore concepts, ideas and issues that have local and global significance. In so doing, they acquire in-depth knowledge and develop understanding across a broad and balanced range of disciplines.
Thinkers	They exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively to recognize and approach complex problems, and make reasoned, ethical decisions.
Communicators	They understand and express ideas and information confidently and creatively in more than one language and in a variety of modes of communication. They work effectively and willingly in collaboration with others.
Principled	They act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities. They take responsibility for their own actions and the consequences that accompany them.
Open-minded	They understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories, and are open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities. They are accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view, and are willing to grow from the experience.
Caring	They show empathy, compassion and respect towards the needs and feelings of others. They have a personal commitment to service, and act to make a positive difference to the lives of others and to the environment.
Risk-takers	They approach unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought, and have the independence of spirit to explore new roles, ideas and strategies. They are brave and articulate in defending their beliefs.
Balanced	They understand the importance of intellectual, physical and emotional balance to achieve personal well-being for themselves and others.
Reflective	They give thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience. They are able to assess and understand their strengths and limitations in order to support their learning and personal development.
10 SACE Student Qualities. It is intended that a student who completes the SACE will [in the following areas]:	
Confidence	be active, confident participant in the learning process
Responsibility, self-direction	take responsibility for his or her learning process.
Challenge, excellence, achievement	respond to challenging learning opportunities, pursue excellence, and achieve in a diverse range of learning and training situations.
Independence, collaboration, identity	work and learn individually and with others in and beyond school to achieve personal and team goals.
Thinking, enterprise, problem-solving, futures	apply logical, critical, and innovative thinking to a range of problems and ideas.
Communication, literacy	use language effectively to engage with the cultural and intellectual ideas of others.
Numeracy	select, integrate, and apply numerical and spatial concepts and techniques.
Information technology	be competent, creative, and critical user of information communication technologies.
Citizenship, interdependence, responsibility towards the environment, responsibility towards others	have the skills and capabilities required for effective local and global citizenship, including a concern for others.
Lifelong learning	have positive attitudes towards further education and training, employment, and lifelong learning.

The student profile attributes are on the whole fairly similar, particularly in terms of promoting young people who are thinking inquirers, effective communicators, yet acquirers of knowledge ready for challenges, independent in outlook and judgement. Both courses acknowledge that the learners are the active agents of their own education and, as such, need to be both enterprising and responsible in their endeavours. Each course also emphasises that learners should be prepared to sustain their learning throughout their lives and be aware that they are citizens in a global community.

There are also some discernible differences. The IB course articulates more strongly the personal growth traits of its students particularly toward being caring and open-minded, while the SACE course specifically details the importance of acquiring skills such as literacy, numeracy and information technology and explicitly developing citizenship. This is not to say that the other course does not contain such elements, but simply suggests that the emphasis on the desired qualities is different.

6. The aims of the research portfolio

The three main aims which emerged for this research are articulated below.

6.1 Investigating the specific factors in the students' decision-making

Initially, the practical concerns of the Focus School about the decision-making process drove the research. As each new Year 8 class started in the senior school of the Focus School, students and parents alike would ask teaching and administrative staff at many levels what course choice would be the better option for the final years

of their or their children's secondary schooling. Initially, the questions would be of a general nature in the early years, trying to solicit subject selection guidance and gauge academic purpose and performance. Towards the middle of their senior school years, the questions tended to become more insistent and loaded, sizing up the availability of certain teachers, negotiating the subject demands of various coursework, comparing TER conversion rates, university entrance subject requisites, perceptions of kudos, and the likely impact of sporting, leadership and other extra-curricular activities on curricular academic commitments.

The Focus School recognised that the different emphases within the learner characteristics of each course did translate into different offerings in the syllabus of each course. Therefore it became a matter of concern to know how far the style, nature and particular offerings of each course were determining the students' course selection. A series of very specific questions relating to course selection was thus identified:

- The IB course, by its very nature, purports to be an international credential, while the SACE claims to be recognised internationally. As the student population of the Focus School is quite fluid, due to the working transfers of families or future university aspirations of students, was one course obviously more attractive to students for the reason of the portability of the credential?
- Was the fact that in the final year of schooling the usual subject requirement of IB was six subjects (as well as further prescribed elements) unlike the five subjects at SACE, likely to affect choice?
- Was the smaller more prescriptive IB subject matrix on offer at the Focus School more or less attractive than the SACE counterpart?

- Was it considered important that the SACE course allowed students to study discrete units of work over the two years, gaining accreditation in subjects at the one year halfway point of the course unlike the IB where the course culminated after two years of work?
- Were students who had experienced a very wide range of practical/more vocational subjects in Years 8-10 interested in pursuing these through SACE or following different subject offerings in the IB? The Focus School did not offer any of these practical/more vocational subjects in their subject offerings for the IBDP.
- Were the requisite IB subjects of Maths, Language, English and Science proving to be an attraction or not?
- Were the compulsory CAS, TOK and EE components of the IB an incentive or even a disincentive?

6.2 Understanding how students managed the risk of choice

The background reading for the research highlighted wider educational issues linked to the concept of students as risk-taking consumers in a global educational market. In their decision to pursue one course over another, they were to be asked to identify factors upon which they had deliberated informing this decision. It was hoped that the manner in which they handled the personal dilemma of the risks involved in such a decision would also be disclosed. The opportunity to analyse the process as well as the outcomes would provide greater insight for the Focus School into the elements at work in the decision-making.

6.3 Gaining a student-based appraisal of the two-course policy

There were no specific questions directly asking for a student assessment of the school's two course policy. Yet, to what extent was the offering of two different courses more effectively catering for student needs? It was hoped that answers to this fundamental question for the Focus School could be inferred from the level of „customer“ satisfaction or not that emerged from the findings in the data. The open-ended questions at the end of Projects 2 and 3 afforded the participants opportunities to give their views on how suitable the chosen course had proved in their experience and what the longer term outcomes had been for them.

7. The individual and the decision-making process

The research in this study focused on the decision-making processes of secondary students about to embark on their final two years of schooling. This involved investigating their course choices and finding out what, for these students, were the significant features and factors of this process. The focus of the investigation was on the individual and his deliberations and actions with regard to course selection.

According to Haralambos and Holborn, the writings of Anton Weber argued that

A social action was an action carried out by an individual to which a person attached a meaning; an action which in his [Weber's] words, „takes account of the behaviour of others and is thereby oriented in its course“ (2000, p.1051).

This position presents a theoretical stance that locates the individual and his/her deliberative actions within a social milieu and defines the interaction that takes place between the two. This stance was further pursued by American schools of sociology, particularly by the philosopher George Mead, who was concerned „like Weber...with

explaining social actions in terms of meanings that individuals give to them“ (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000 p. 1056). This sociological theory became known as „symbolic interactionism“ and tended „to focus on small-scale interaction situations rather than large-scale social change“ (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, p. 1056). They go on to describe Mead’s view of the individual and society.

Mead’s view of human interaction sees humans as both actively creating the social environment and being shaped by it. Individuals initiate and direct their own action while at the same time being influenced by the attitudes and expectations of others in the form of the generalized other. The individual and society are regarded as inseparable, for the individual can only become a human being in a social context. In this context individuals develop a sense of self, which is a prerequisite for thought (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, p. 1058).

Following this tradition, Herbert Blumer is credited with developing Mead’s concepts in a more systematic way. In part, this was a counter position to those who portrayed an individual’s actions more in terms of a mechanistic response, as espoused by those adopting more behaviouristic or functional models.

According to Blumer (1969, p. 2),

Symbolic interactionism rests in the last analysis on three simple premises. The first premise is that human beings act towards things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them. The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters.

As the discussion unfolds, Blumer places emphasis on two specific attributes of his model, the concept of meaning and the process of interpretation. He explains that „meaning „is not a static entity, but one which is defined and refined by the ways in

which the individual interacts with the „things“ around him. [„Things include everything that the human may note in his world-physical objects...other human beings...categories of human beings...institutions...guiding ideals...activities of others and such situations as an individual encounters in his daily life [sic]“ (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). The nature of this interaction is more than merely „an interplay of psychological elements“ (Blumer, 1969, p. 5) and is in no way automatic, but rather represents a „formative“ process whereby

...individuals modify or change their definition of the situation, rehearse alternative courses of action and consider their possible consequences. Thus the meanings that guide action arise in the context of interaction via a series of complex interpretive procedures (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, p. 1058).

From personal observation and experience, I have often witnessed that a student may generally prefer one course over another, claiming that it suits his own personal situation. When questioned, this claim is usually based on the reading and information he has researched about the two courses. There is often a weighing up of advantages and disadvantages for each course. These can be articulated in many ways, for example, the student may be attracted to the specific subject content in the IB or the Stage 1 and Stage 2 format in SACE. The student’s final decision is often established with an eye to meeting his future aspirations.

The personal reflections from students recall the three premises of Blumer in the explanation of his approach. Either all three are found in their entirety, as in the above example of course choice, or they may be implicit or explicitly represented to some degree in briefer recollections.

One of the criticisms of this model is that it is limited by its particularity, in that it is concerned with an investigation isolated in a specific context and time frame- „Interaction in a vacuum“ (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000, p. 1059). The resultant narrow focus is then claimed to have no grounding in broader social contexts and is without historical reference. In terms of the qualitative nature of this research, the particularity of the investigation is unavoidable. Furthermore, one could argue that the Focus School does not sit in a vacuum. While it is acknowledged that the student responses were located within a given context, it was anticipated that, with the longitudinal aspects of this research, an historical dimension would be in evidence and that this historical record could, in turn, be used to inform future students about possible issues affecting their own decision-making.

8. Method

8.1 Student focus

It has already been suggested that the contemporary student in the global environment can be depicted as a consumer in a risk society. It was, therefore, the student's perspective in the decision-making process that was the key concern in this research, although throughout the research there were other stakeholders whose views were taken into account.

Any evaluation of the processes underlying course selection touches upon areas of motivation, choice and values; while indicating that such phenomena could claim to be part of a psychological evaluation of individuals, the key concern for this study was the relationship between the student and his choice of course. The resulting

research adopted a humanistic sociological perspective for its method, as identified in the following (Secombe & Zajda, 1999, p. 283).

This is the name given to that orientation in sociology which in Poland and the United States has been associated with the names of Florian Znaniecki, William I. Thomas and Robert M. MacIver. This school emphasised the need to accept human values and activities as facts, just as human agents themselves accept them, and stressed the need to interpret all social and cultural activities from the standpoint of the actors themselves, not merely that of the outside observer.

It was apparent that, as all responses were from students attending the same school and thereby inhabiting, as it were, the same micro-culture, the context hence was concerned with the „phenomena of culture“ (Smolicz, 1974, p. 13) and its accompanying „phenomena of consciousness“ (Smolicz, 1974, p. 13). These required an investigation structured, in part, around the notion of the „humanistic coefficient“ to identify any underlying structures behind such decision processes.

The student of culture seeks to discover any order among empirical data which depends upon conscious human agents, is produced, and maintained by them. To perform this task he [sic] takes every empirical datum which he investigates with what we have called its humanistic coefficient, i.e. as it appears to those human individuals who experience it and use it (Smolicz, 1974, p.15).

It must be acknowledged that many investigations informed by this approach have involved the interplay between group and individual levels; this investigation highlights only the personal/individual and the interaction between individuals. In its essence, the approach can be applied to both types of study.

The evaluation of the data required the analysis of much material that was gained from the introspections of the students surveyed. The interpretation of such data was therefore effected using the technique of *verstehen* (understanding). What drives such

a technique is an endeavour to assess the available empirical data along qualitative lines invoking an empathetic understanding of the material. In the introduction to his book, Martin (2000, p.1) describes *verstehen* as having different forms.

In its strongest form, Verstehen entails reliving the experience of an actor or at least rethinking the actor's thoughts, while in its weaker forms it only involves reconstructing the actor's rationale for acting.

Leaving aside the debate as to whether *verstehen* is a „method of verification“ or only a „method of discovery“ (Martin, 2000, p.1); the research undertaken in this instance is focused on each actor/student's rationale for acting. The use of this technique would represent, as Mokrzycki (1971) suggests, „a most important transition from certain objective characteristics of human behaviour to an insight into the human mind and the phenomenon of human consciousness“ (Secombe & Zajda, 1999, p. 294).

The interpretation of such reconstructive narratives has been problematic for some. As Smolicz highlights,

Znaniiecki argued that imaginative reconstruction can only be effective if the mental states of the person being investigated were in some form included in our own personal experience. In The Method of Sociology, he again warns that we can reproduce realistically or ideationally only those systems which are not too different from those we have already experienced (Smolicz, 1974, p. 41),

It is important to acknowledge that, in this research, the depth of interpretation was deemed important. It was anticipated that, as the researcher was sharing the same environment of the students, though their roles were differently defined, this shared micro-culture would by inference include shared personal experiences.

Jakubczak (1971, p. 153) has also articulated the importance of this particular methodological approach.

The personality of every individual, his aspirations, plans, dreams and the whole course of his life represent a unique and unrepeatabe phenomenon, formed against the background of the wider social processes of each epoch... Everyone leads his life and creates his written image for himself [sic].

8.2 Anonymity

Every effort was made throughout the research to maintain the anonymity of current and former students and staff who attended the Focus School. This, in part, was an agreed understanding between the researcher and the Focus School, but also to fulfil ethical requirements established to protect the rights and privacy of minors. No specific names are referenced, and titles of people and public websites are obscured. Specific website details can be supplied upon request. As some respondents were interviewed once, others twice and some three times across Projects, respondent codes were not practical for the qualitative analysis. Each Project as a discrete entity reported on the data from its particular respondents.

8.3 The role of the researcher

In the management of material documented in this portfolio, I had multiple roles. I was a teacher in the Focus School who taught at Year 11 and Year 12 levels in both the IB and SACE courses, was a pastoral care mentor and knew personally many of the respondents. This had an important influence on the research in two ways. The

students knew and trusted me as a researcher⁵ and, as a consequence, their levels of co-operation and readiness to say what they really thought were quite high. Second, in analysing and interpreting their responses, I was able to make use of levels of personal understanding of the boys and the school culture which would not have been available to other researchers. These roles posed a dilemma when writing. I decided to manage this by alternating between the first person when including information that I felt corresponded to my personal experiences or observations at the Focus School and the third person, as the researcher, when documenting more formal conclusions.

9. The research portfolio

9.1 Presentation

The Introduction of the portfolio establishes the context for the research, its rationale, aims and methods. The structure of the portfolio, which had a longitudinal dimension covering a time frame of several years from 1997 to 2008, revolves around the three major projects that lie at its centre. In the preamble to each project a piece of prose, poetry or a painting has been selected. Each extract served two purposes. The first was to provide a distinctive feature to distinguish the projects. The second was to use this feature as a metaphor characterising the material within the separate projects.

Each project is articulated more comprehensively in the following sections. A comprehensive literature review can be found in Project 1, where specific issues

⁵ In fulfilment of my M. Ed. Studies, I had previously conducted research by survey at the Focus School.

relating to the research data are initially raised. Although each separate project within the portfolio framework reaches a conclusion to its own discrete findings, there is a final concluding piece which seeks to draw all the themes and tropes together.

9.2 Project 1: *Deciding for the Future: Year 10 Survey*

This Project focused on the 2002 Year 10 student cohort at the Focus School. This cohort was a group of 137 students who were divided into eleven pastoral care units. At the time, these students had just selected which course they would do to finish their formal secondary schooling. The aim was to explore the reasons behind students choosing either to do the SACE or IB programmes. A mixed-methods survey was constructed to ask students to explain their motivation for selecting a particular course. This survey ascertained, for example, how respondents found out about the courses, whether family members had completed either course, how significant a role were friends, family, teachers and media in the decision-making, or whether the requirements for future careers influenced the decision. The data was then analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods appropriate to the data.

9.3 Project 2: *Coping with the Present Decision: Year 11 and 12 Studies*

This Project concentrated on a subset of students from that same 2002 Year 10 cohort. They were students from one of the pastoral care groups, some of whom had chosen to study the IB course, while others had selected the SACE. The decision to use one pastoral care group as the respondent group not only enabled students from each course to be surveyed but was also convenient for the practical arrangements of the school. A longitudinal study was carried out whereby these students were tracked and

asked to respond to questions over 2003 and 2004, the two years of their senior course. These questions focused on how the students were coping with their chosen courses and whether they felt satisfied with the choices they had made.

The method for both the Year 11 and 12 studies involved a meeting at which a written survey response was collected from each student. These responses were analysed qualitatively in terms of the short term (two year) ramifications of these students' decisions. The conclusions were arrived at through an interpretative analysis. This longitudinal approach was used to allow student decision-making to be monitored closely, since if students were surveyed once at the outset or conclusion of their studies, there could have been some important variables and outcomes that only an ongoing investigation could discover. There had been some suggestion that the IB students could form a group isolated from their peers, for example, and such a longitudinal study would be able to determine if this were the case or not.

9.4 Project 3: *Evaluating the Past Decision: A Retrospective Study of 1999 Alumni*

The final part of the research was again based upon a subset of students from the Focus School, but these respondents were selected from among alumni rather than current pupils. In 1999, the Focus School first had candidates graduate from both the SACE and IB courses. These students had started their courses in 1998 and a survey to interview them was scheduled for 2008. It was therefore a decade since they had made their course selection and then left school. Letters and accompanying surveys were forwarded to 25 IB and 25 SACE students at their last known addresses.

Twenty alumni responded to survey questions concerning how their course selection had happened, as far as they remembered; whether their chosen programme had met their expectations; and how it had affected, if at all, their professional choices. The survey was not only designed to canvass their decision-making, but also to gauge their views and responses to a series of quotations that had been made about both their courses from media and other external sources. The responses to this survey of former students were analysed according to qualitative and quantitative practice, but from an interpretative perspective. The questions in this survey replicated some of the material of the original survey for Year 10 students in Project 1, so there was an opportunity for some qualified comparative analyses to be done.

9.5 Concluding remarks

It is now over a decade since the Focus School introduced the IBDP as an alternative course to SACE in the senior years. There has been no formal investigation of factors influencing the students' decisions. No follow-up study has been carried out to ascertain the outcomes of course selection and its effects on later career pathways. Nor has there been any formal attempt to evaluate the School's policy decision to introduce a second course of study in the senior years. Furthermore, in the 1990s and early 2000s, there was little external literature to provide guidance.

It was therefore seen as a valuable exercise by the Focus School to have some formal research investigating these issues; some market research into the level of the customer satisfaction of the student consumers of two distinctive product lines: IB or

SACE? Did the decision to offer both courses at the Focus School pass the students' „taste test" or was it a matter of „*caveat emptor*"?

It was with the School's permission and encouragement that the research projects that make up this portfolio were begun.

**DECIDING FOR THE FUTURE:
YEAR 10 SURVEY**

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PROJECT ONE
DECIDING FOR THE FUTURE: YEAR 10 SURVEY

CONTENTS

1. Preamble	46
2. Aims	48
3. Literature review	48
3.1 Parental influence	49
3.2 Peer influence	50
3.3 Tertiary aspirations	54
3.4 Newspaper reports	55
4. Method	57
5. Findings	59
5.1 Distribution of the 2002 student cohort into course selection	60
5.2 Official dissemination of course details.....	61
5.2.1 The Information Night	61
5.2.2 Course booklets.....	62
5.2.3 Consultation with the Head of House	64
5.2.4 Consultation with the Career Counsellor.....	68
5.3 Unofficial influences over course choice.....	70
5.3.1 Students who had consulted with current IB/SACE students.....	70
5.3.2 The role of parents and their advice.....	72
5.3.3 The role of siblings and their advice.....	75
5.3.4 The role of closest friends affecting IB/SACE students	78
5.3.5 The role of media reports	80
5.3.6 The nexus between choice of course and career	81
5.3.7 The possibility of tertiary study	83
5.4 Open-ended comments on key factors affecting course choice	87
5.4.1 Analysis of responses not identifying key factors	87
5.4.2 Analysis of responses identifying key factors	90
6. Conclusions	114
6.1 Conclusions based on the findings from closed questions	115
6.2 Conclusions based on the findings from the open-ended question	117

PROJECT ONE

DECIDING FOR THE FUTURE: YEAR 10 SURVEY

1. Preamble

Let us begin with an imaginary description of students in the throes of choosing their courses for the following year.

The second years were given something new to think about during their Easter holidays. The time had come to choose their subjects for the third year, a matter that Hermione, at least, took very seriously.

„I could affect our whole future,“ she told Harry and Ron, as they pored over lists of new subjects, marking them with ticks.

„I just want to give up Potions,“ said Harry.

„We can’t,“ said Ron gloomily. „We keep all our old subjects, or I’d’ve ditched Defence Against the Dark Arts.“

„But that’s very important!“ said Hermione, shocked.

„Not the way Lockhart teaches it,“ said Ron. „I haven’t learned anything from him except not to set pixies loose.“

Neville Longbottom had been sent letters from all the witches and wizards in his family, all giving him different advice on what to choose. Confused and worried, he sat reading the subject lists with his tongue poking out, asking people whether they thought Arithmancy sounded more difficult than the study of Ancient Runes. Dean Thomas, who, like Harry, had grown up with Muggles, ended up closing his eyes and jabbing his wand at the list, then picking the subjects it landed on. Hermione took nobody’s advice but signed up for everything.

Harry smiled grimly to himself at the thought of what Uncle Vernon and Aunt Petunia would say if he tried to discuss his career in wizardry with them. Not that he didn’t get any guidance: Percy Weasley was eager to share his experience.

„Depends where you want to go, Harry,“ he said. „I’s never too early to think about the future, so I’d recommend Divination. People say Muggle Studies is a soft option, but I personally think wizards should have a thorough

understanding of the non-magical community, particularly if they "rethinking of working in close contact with them - look at my father, he has to deal with Muggle business all the time. My brother Charlie was always more of an outdoor type, so he went for Care of Magical Creatures. Play to your strengths, Harry."

But the only thing Harry felt good at was Quidditch. In the end, he chose the same new subjects as Ron, feeling that if he was rubbish at them, at least he "d have someone friendly to help him (Rowling, 1998, p. 186).

Within this fictional account several of the themes represented in the thinking of the story's characters resonate with the actual deliberations of a specific group of Year 10 students at the Focus School facing the task of choosing their courses and subjects for the final two years of their secondary education. The dramatic exclamation, "It could affect our whole future!" serves to highlight the apparent enormity of such a decision felt by some students. The conversations about subject likes and dislikes, and those about the teachers whom students like and dislike, are frequent features of conversations echoed by students and their parents both in formal and informal settings on the campus of the Focus School. Students are indeed concerned with the relative workloads of subjects, the perceived difficulty of course content and the consequences for selection of „hard“ or „soft“ subjects. Students acknowledge their need for support and information to assist their decision, and, just as documented in the above excerpt, the guidance can be derived from a multitude of sources. Advice from family members or friends may be sought, and other students are sometimes approached. The inevitable dilemma is faced of whether one should „play to your strengths“ or choose a more narrowly vocational suite of subjects.

2. Aims

The initial aim of this project was to investigate the process of student course selection in the senior years of the Focus School in order to establish what factors were affecting Year 10 students in their decision between the IB Diploma Programme and the SACE course. It was anticipated that, as there were likely to be several factors involved, it was important to identify and articulate these factors. A further intention was that, by asking students about the nature of the guidance they sought to reach their decisions, one could assess the relative merits of the formal mechanisms that were in place at the school to provide such guidance, and also, to detect any informal mechanisms used by students in assisting their decision-making.

It was also hoped, from the evidence collected, to evaluate the factors which the students identified in order to gain some understanding of the weighing up of these factors in the course decision-making process. This would offer insight into the manner in which students handled the risks involved with such a personal dilemma.

3. Literature Review

The internal deliberations of Year 10 students were set against a variety of external factors that could possibly influence their decision-making. In the opening remarks of their paper, Phelan, Davison et al. (1991, p. 224) highlighted some of the external social influences impinging on a student's school life.

On any given school day, adolescents in this society move from one social context to another. Families, peer groups, classrooms, and schools are primary arenas in which young people negotiate and construct their realities. For the

most part, students' movements and adaptations from one setting to another are taken for granted.

These „primary arenas“ of social context emerged in the research as key foci for the line of questioning in the survey put to the students.

Of these arenas already identified by the Focus School as worthy of further exploration, one was the possible role played by parents in their son's decision-making.

3.1 Parental influence

In his discussion of family decision-making, based on reviewing research from the previous twenty years, Goh (2007, p. 24) stated that

Past studies report that school choice decision was mainly a joint [mother and father] effort (Davis and Rigaux, 1974; Lalwani et al., 1999; Qualls, 1972; Stafford et al., 1996)...However, despite school choice decision being mostly a joint effort; the mothers have a greater level of influence in the joint decision.

This assessment was justified by reference to a number of studies.

Bosetti (2004) found that mothers were the key decision makers when it came to school choice. David et al. (1997) looked at the mother's role in school choice and found that across social class boundaries, mothers primarily did the groundwork necessary for informed decision-making...Reay and Ball (1998, p. 442) found that mothers were seen as the experts, responsible for collecting information on school choice options...These findings suggest that there is limited husband dominance when making the final school choice decision, and that wives have a higher level of influence in the family regarding school choice (Goh, 2007, pp. 25&26) .

Although Goh's concern was parental choice in the government school sector, the admissions officer of the Focus School in question considered that Goh's findings were an accurate reflection of his experience on the whole, although he felt cultural differences could affect the degree to which these influences were apparent. After further discussion, it was decided not only to include questions in the survey that related to possible parental influence affecting course choice but also to widen the familial sphere to siblings, to cover the possible influence of older brothers (some of whom would have attended the same Focus School) or sisters.

3.2 Peer influence

While families are one of the students' primary arenas, another important one is made up of their friends, classmates and other such peers. There is much literature around peer influence, particularly studies highlighting the nature of peer pressure on adolescent social behaviour, but not so much on the influence peers have on educational expectations or aspirations.

The early research of Picou and Carter (1976, p.12) assessed the „effects of significant-other influence on aspirations“. Their quantitative research was set against a decade of studies that had examined the impact of significant-others on „educational and occupational attainment“. In establishing the framework for their study, they asserted that „the emergence of self-conceptions, attitudes, and behaviour out of social interactions is the keystone of the symbolic interactionist perspective.“ Significant-others was the term used to refer to three specific groups, parents, teachers and peers. Their respondents were a group of high school seniors from urban and rural schools in Louisiana, all of whom were male. From their results they concluded that „compared

to other forms of significant-other influence, peer modelling influence had the strongest effects on aspirations“, although their study drew differences between urban and rural students in that the greater influence was perceived in the rural communities.

Reitzes and Mutran (1980, p.21) also made use of the concept, „significant others“, in a quantitative investigation into „variables which motivate college student plans and performances“. They maintained that

Indexes of the influences of significant others have been one of the major kinds of social psychological variables used in the investigation of educational expectations and academic performance...and little attention has been paid to person-selected significant others, that is, others identified by subjects (Reitzes & Mutran, 1980, p.22).

Their research not only looked at the impact of significant others in motivating students but also pointed to the importance of the students“ own selection of the significant others who influenced them.

Significant others, selected by the students, also aid in the socialization process, exerting both direct and indirect effects on academic performance and educational plans (Reitzes & Mutran, 1980, p.31).

In assessing the factors affecting students“ course choice, that is their educational plans, the role of their peers, friends or classmates needed to be elucidated from within the data collected from the surveys for this research. Further, there needed to be a mechanism for identifying any other significant influential individual chosen by a student.

The work of Kiuru, Aunola et al (2007, p.995) focused on the work of peer groups and their role „in adolescents“ educational expectations and adjustment“. The authors

studied a sample of ninth graders whose median age was 15 years. They made the following assertion.

Aside from parents and teachers, peer groups form a natural context for thinking about the future. For example, adolescents often discuss their future-related decisions with their peers. Peers are also an important source of future-related information among adolescents. Moreover, young people may model their peers' decisions concerning future education, particularly when they are uncertain of their own plans. Peers are also likely to provide feedback on adolescents' expectations when future-related issues are discussed in peer groups (Kiuru, Aunola et al., 2007, p.996).

In their concluding discussion they suggested that one of the limitations of their study was that their data collection was solely school based and might not have included information about peer group influence that existed outside the school. In the research of this portfolio, this constraint was specifically avoided through the wording of questions. In fact, several students from the Focus School referred to advice they had received externally.

They also expressed concern that their study necessitated that each respondent could only be associated with one peer group although there was evidence of adolescents belonging to more than one peer group. „In particular, among boys whose peer networks are relatively loose and interconnected, the procedure used in the present study may have missed some peer group connections“ (Kiuru, Aunola et al., 2007, p 1007). They concluded that their findings were significant,

because they suggest that peer groups play an important role in how adolescents plan their future education; this in turn may have long-term consequences for their future life trajectories (Kiuru, Aunola et al. 2007, p. 1007).

Although the research for this portfolio did not set out to specifically measure the extent and influence of peer groups, it did seek to establish by qualitative means which peers, if any, were influencing decision-making and the nature of that influence. One similarity between this research and the study above was that neither explored the impact of specific peer groups (for example „loose groups“ or „dyads“). At the Focus School, it was simply accepted that there were many occasions outside the classroom, through extra-curricular and co-curricular activities as well as pastoral care units for various peer groupings to occur both horizontally and vertically by age.

One study that has examined the impact of specific peer groups, focused on the experiences of students at an Australian boarding school. This study, a qualitative analysis of memoirs, highlighted the significant role that friendships played in these students“ lives. From such comments as „The most positive aspects of School life are having friends with you to go through the good and the bad times“ (White, 2004, p. 231), White concluded that

From the memoirs of the respondents it was clear that friendship was the strongest value that emerged in the students“ lives at boarding school. It was the type of friendship that was enduring, intense and in some cases transcended cultural differences (White, 2004, p. 314).

These findings on friendship did, in turn, resonate with the words of some of the students in this study and informed later discussion.

Outside the „primary social arenas“ of a student“s life, two more peripheral influences emerged as possible factors affecting student choice. The first related to the possible nexus between course choice and career aspirations, while the second focused on the

possible role the media played in affecting course choice. The analysis of earlier studies dealing with these topics is given below.

3.3 Tertiary aspirations

Recent studies have indicated that „Between 1976 and 2001 the proportion of people in their twenties who hold a non-school (post-secondary) qualification has increased.... This means that, including those still studying, some form of post compulsory education is now a normative experience for Australian young people“ (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, p. 502). This increase in tertiary⁶ participation was set against a backdrop of social-economic factors affecting Australia, documented in the following (Wyn & Woodman, 2006 p 504).

By the early 1980s, in Australia, across both metropolitan and regional areas, the decline in manufacturing and many primary industries and the deregulation of markets had a very direct impact on employment opportunities, especially for those entering the labour market for the first time.

Implications for these trends were delineated (Wyn & Woodman, 2006, pp. 504 & 505) accordingly in two statements.

The Finn Report recommended the adoption of a target of 95% national completion of secondary education by the year 2001 (Australian Education Council Review Committee, 1991, p. xv). More recently, government policies have created the expectation that a majority of young people will, in addition, have a post-secondary qualification appropriate to the changing nature of the Australian workforce... (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1995, p 504), and

A central assumption was that economic growth in a knowledge-based economy would be promoted by workers with particular skills, and across a wide range

⁶ The term tertiary education is used to denote both the higher (university) sector and the vocational education and training (VET) sector.

of measures, vocationally oriented education that meets the needs of employers and the economy has been the central goal of mass post-compulsory education. (NBEET, 1995, p. 505).

With such an emphasis being placed by government on the obtaining of post-secondary qualifications, survey questions were developed to evaluate a possible nexus between course and career choice. This was also deemed important in view of the Focus School's history of strong participation rates in university study.

3.4 Newspaper reports

A search was made of articles from the sole metropolitan broadsheet newspaper in Adelaide, *The Advertiser*, spanning a period from 1998-2008. There were just fewer than 100 headlines found for articles relating to IB, while there were around 450 articles relating to SACE. Further searches were made using national and international media data bases. Of all these, there are too many to include in this research, so a selection has been made to provide a snapshot of the typical themes of this material. The figure below documents a representative array of newspaper headlines about both the IB and SACE courses to which the local community, schools, their students and parents were likely to have been exposed.

Figure i.1 A SNAPSHOT OF TYPICAL IB/SACE STORYLINES TO BE FOUND IN THE MEDIA

Sample of IB media	Sample of SACE media
<p>Scholars join ranks of the world elite. Kleinig, X., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 5/01/08, p 3.</p>	<p>Perfect exam news for 808. Chapman, J., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 21/12/05, p15.</p>
<p>HIGH SCHOOL International alternative for Year 11, 12 Students' new course to uni. Kleinig, X., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 24/02/07, p 44.</p>	<p>More subjects to meet demand. Chapman, J., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 15/12/03, p 7.</p>
<p>Boys show they too can be perfect. Vlach, A., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 5/02/07, p 7.</p>	<p>RESULTS Girls average more As in 96 of top 108 subjects. Female Year 12s the ones to beat. Hood,L., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 13/05/08, pg 3.</p>
<p>Forty years on, IB has gone to the top of class. Berecy, B., <i>Sun Herald</i>, 3/08/08, p 67.</p>	<p>NEW SACE push to see more students complete high school. Passport to a better future. Kleinig,X., <i>The Advertiser</i>, 24/07/08, p 47.</p>

Each year there are various reports on scholastic attributes presented in the media whether electronic, print, audio or video. The successes and high attainment scores of students in Year 12 exams are reported often in headline and front-page newspaper articles or television news clips. The gender and age of successful candidates are invariably commented upon. Some of the IB stories highlight that students are being groomed for life in a global society, whereas some of the SACE stories focus on how subjects offered within the SACE framework are well suited to the vocational needs of all students whatever their post secondary school aspirations. The prevalence of these stories often leads to judgements being made about specific schools or courses. These issues were examined in the questions asked of the boys in surveys and interviews and proved relevant to the analysis.

4. Method

Information about the Year 10 students' course choice was gathered by questionnaire. A survey was formally conducted in 2002 from a cohort of Year 10 students, at the end of their Year 10 course when their Year 11 course selection had been lodged in writing. On the day that the survey was carried out there were 116 (out of a possible 137) Year 10 students present. This represented, apart from the absentees, the total population of students who comprised the 2002 Year 10 cohort.

In the final week of the fourth school term, time had been set aside for these students to be assembled in order to distribute important information about the following school year. This information included administrative details, possible opportunities for work and service and subject requirements, as well as the completion of this survey. Parents had been informed that the survey was to be carried out but that it would not be conducted for any student where parental consent had been withdrawn. There was no consent withdrawn.

Inevitably the time allocation for this survey was severely compromised with the minutiae of other material being discussed. After a brief explanatory introduction, students were encouraged to answer as many of the questions as they could in the limited time available but were instructed to leave any question blank that they deemed necessary.

The survey itself was designed to have two components. The first component comprised a set of 21 questions related to student choice. These questions varied in subject matter but could be answered simply by circling the appropriate response from

a limited set of options. Fifteen of the questions were categorical in their framing while six were framed along Likert-style lines. The responses were to be interpreted along quantitative lines. Some of the questions were designed to provide the school with an evaluation of how relevant and effective their current formal procedures were in advertising and informing students and parents of the Year 11 and Year 12 options. Other questions were designed to see what information the students had sourced themselves and what factors they thought had specifically influenced their choice. Although the number of respondents totalled 116, not all respondents answered every question and this accounts for some variance in cohort size for different questions.

The second component of the survey was non-prescriptive. With the introduction of the IB course in 1998 as an alternative to the existing SACE course, there had been much covert and overt discussion by members of the school community about the two courses. Some of this was positive, but much which was not particularly helpful, was described as „misinformation“ by the school administration. In a letter at the time sent to parents (see Appendix C), the school Headmaster stated,

I have become aware of some „misinformation“ within the School community relating to SACE and the IB, and feel that it is important that certain facts are made clear...

The first point I wish to make is that we have been at pains to emphasise that the IB is an alternative pathway to SACE, not necessarily better but one that may suit some students just as SACE may suit others. We do not wish the IB students to be seen or to see themselves as some elite group.

It was determined, therefore, to include in this survey of 2002 Year 10 students, a question which asked whether they had heard any comments or opinions (positive or negative) about either course that had affected their choice. Some guidance was given

in very general terms as to what factors they might care to identify, for example, class sizes, teachers, workloads, better TER scores and so on. The replies to this question required a more specifically personal response and were to be interpreted qualitatively. It was hoped that the responses would identify any other unofficial factors affecting choice, as well as clarify what impact, if any, the aforementioned „misinformation“ had upon course choice.

It was anticipated that those questions which required less time to answer (that is, where students had to circle an option from a limited set of choices) would be preferred over the final question which required greater reflection and no ready response. Many staff present on that occasion expected that the final question (question 22) would be largely ignored for the sake of expediency.

The assumption that the lack of time would affect the level of response did, in fact, not prove accurate. The responses to question 22 were diverse, rich and individual, although on some occasions brief. The data from this question were analysed as a discrete unit in the following section of the project on findings.

5. Findings

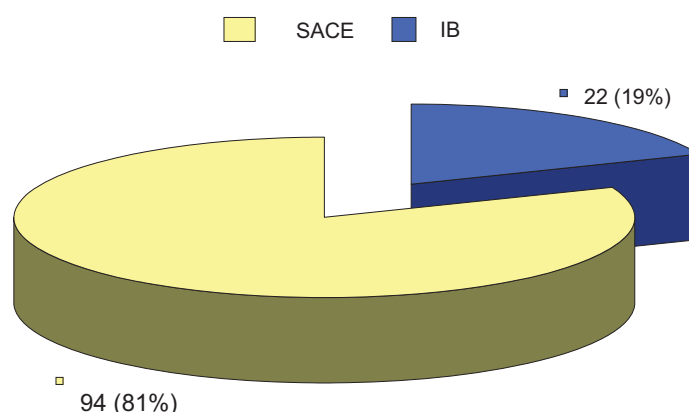
The material presented in this section has been classified in several ways. After an overview of course selection of the respondents in the group, the first set of findings analyses the data related to the respondents“ engagement with course information distributed to them by official mechanisms at the Focus School. This material was derived from a series of closed questions. The second set of findings examines data that related to possible unofficial influences upon course choice by these students,

also obtained by closed survey questions. The final analysis was based upon a qualitative analysis of the final question in the survey. This question was open-ended, although a series of prompts were provided, and focused upon an individual's own understanding of influences affecting their course choice.

5.1 Distribution of the 2002 student cohort into course selection

This initial finding was to serve two purposes. The first was simply to understand how student numbers for that year were distributed between the two courses at the school. As the IB programme had been introduced in 1998 it was decided to test the distribution of the IB/SACE candidates with the current Year 10 population, when looking at the separate pastoral care groups from the 2002 sample, and then compare it to other years. The figures taken in 2002 (Figure 2) suggest that the ratio of SACE to IB students was about 4:1.

Figure i.2 OVERALL BREAKDOWN OF STUDENT CHOICE REGARDING IB and SACE n=116



The school reported that this breakdown (of about 20% IB candidature to 80% SACE) was fairly consistent throughout the years that the IB/SACE courses had been run.

„20% is probably reasonable - sometimes a little more, sometimes less“ was the response of the School’s SACE/ IB co-ordinator in an e-mail to the researcher in 2008. Percentages could fluctuate moderately each year, he said, but as the school did not actively promote one course over another, any fluctuation in numbers was likely due to the requirements of individual students rather than any clique mentality.

5.2 Official dissemination of course details

5.2.1 The Information Night

For Year 10 students about to decide between the IB or SACE courses in Year 11 there are a variety of official avenues offered by the school where information can be obtained to assist in course selection. These can be accessed either by parents or students, although the student is more likely to initiate the process. While presenting information on each of the courses, the school had not formally assessed to what extent these information sessions were being utilised.

During Year 10 a course information night is held to provide information (for students intending to continue their final two years of schooling) about the availability, content and demands of the SACE and IB courses. The night is advertised widely and is hosted by a panel of senior staff who are there to advise on curriculum matters and possible career pathways.

Figure i.3 STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT n=116

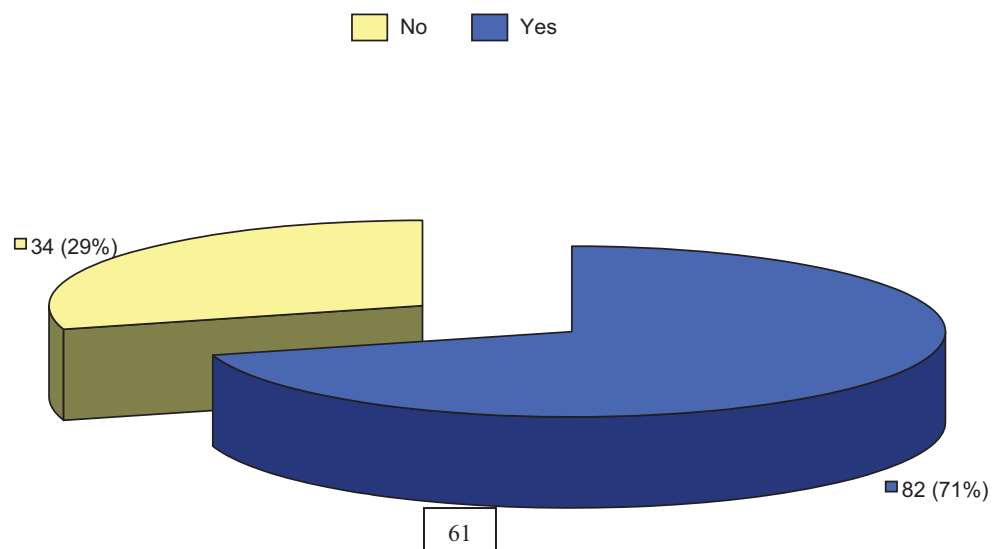
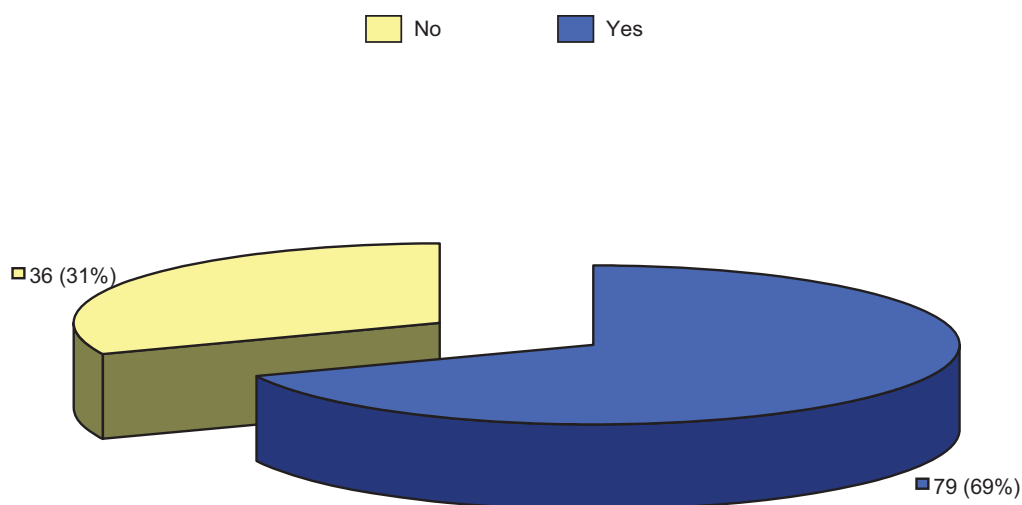


Figure i.4 PARENT ATTENDANCE AT COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT n=115*

* One student did not respond to this question.



From the data it was shown that 71% of potential Year 11 students attended this evening (Figure i.3). This was then compared with the number of parents (69%) who attended the same evening (Figure i.4). As most attended the night as a family, the discrepancy between numbers appeared curious, until further investigation initiated with individual students in Project 2 the following year, revealed that many parents of boarding students were often unable to be present on the information night. The finding revealed that the night was in fact attended by a majority of both parents and students.

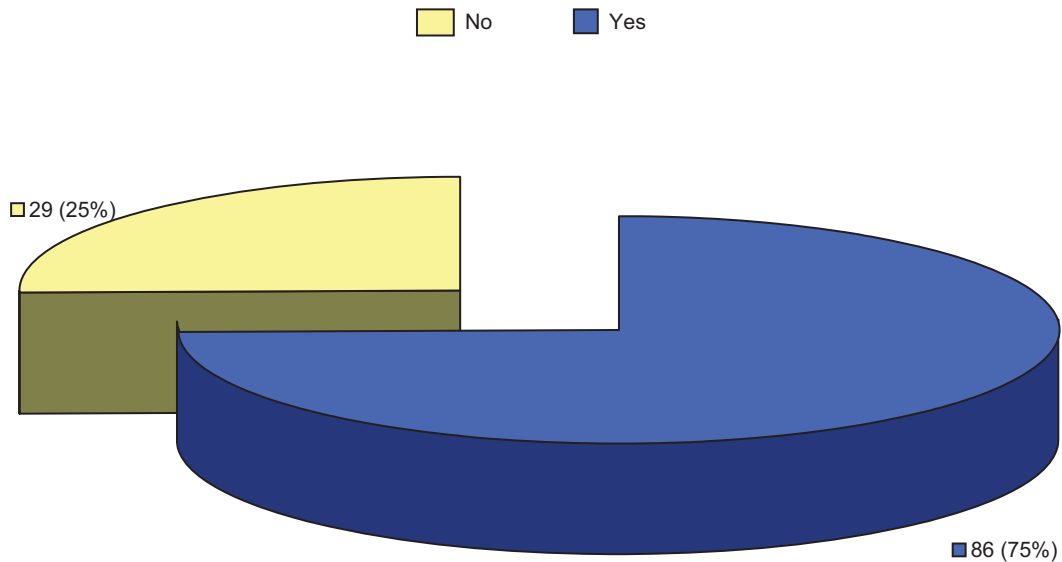
5.2.2 Course booklets

It is customary for all Year 10 students to be supplied with a booklet towards the end of the year, which not only covers the content and requirements of the IB and SACE courses but lists every subject offered at Year 11 and examines the content and assessment requirements of each. While this material is generated and distributed to students each year, it has never been assessed whether the material has indeed been

read by students. Of the 116 students who were surveyed, one student did not answer this question and hence the sample size was reduced accordingly.

Figure i.5a STUDENTS WHO HAVE READ THE YEAR 10 COURSE HANDBOOK n=115*

* One student did not respond to this question.



The survey of this particular group revealed that 75% of respondents had read the course handbook. The evidence supports the fact that a majority of students are availing themselves of this information.

Further to this overall finding the following material was extrapolated. The sample group of 115 was further separated by course selection and their yes/no answers were recorded as to whether they had read their designated course handbook.

Figure i.5b STUDENTS WHO READ THE YEAR 10 COURSE HANDBOOK, BY COURSE

SELECTION n=115

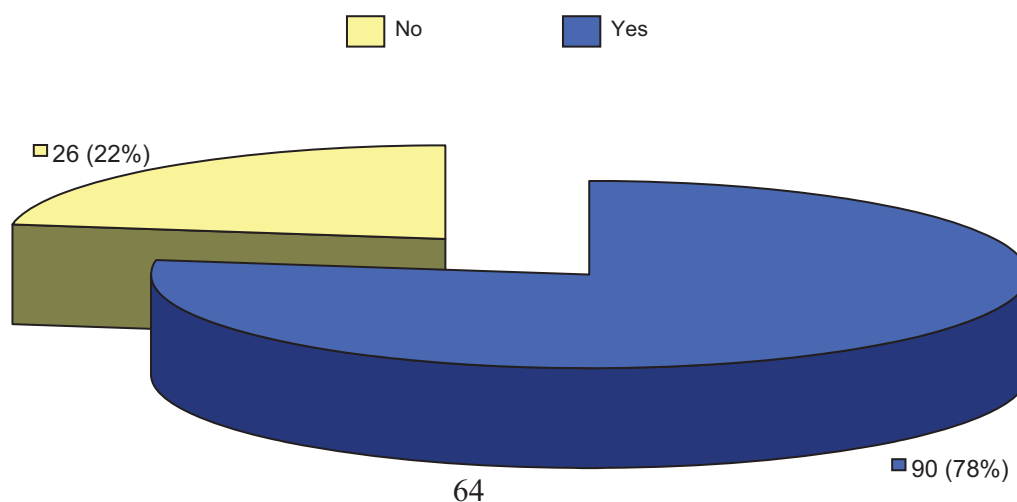
SELECTED COURSE	Yes	No	SUB-TOTAL
SACE	69 (71%)	28 (29%)	96 (100%)
IB	17 (95%)	1 (5%)	18 (100%)
TOTALS	86 (75%)	29 (25%)	115 (100%)

From this result, it is evident that the 2002 IB students used this material more assiduously than their SACE counterparts.

5.2.3 Consultation with the Head of House

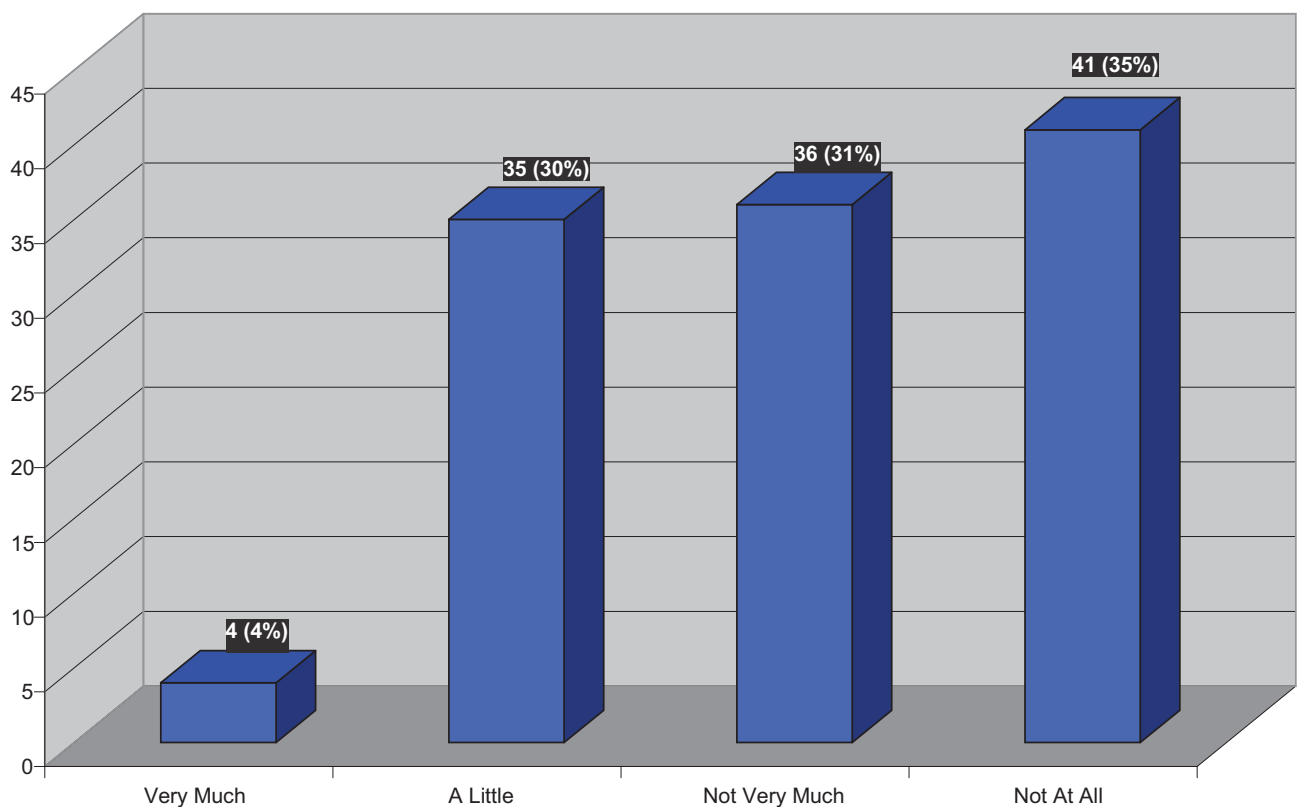
Further to the information night and the handbook material, which are generic in nature, the School encourages students to consult with senior staff who have pastoral care or counselling roles at the School. These are conducted with the individual student in mind and often take the form of a one-to-one interview. The student body is divided into 10 (previously 11) units called Houses, and the ten Heads of House (senior staff members) are assumed to take an active role in the students' choice selection.

Figure i.6 CONSULTATION WITH THE HEAD OF HOUSE n=116



It is interesting to note that 78% of the Year 10 students had consulted with their Head of House during the process of course selection. It would appear then that input from Heads of House was important in the overall scheme of information gathering, yet this was contradicted by the data presented below registering that their level of direct influence exerted over choice was not significant. As recorded in **Figure i.7** below, two thirds of students (66%) reported that their Heads of House were not greatly influential in the course choice.

Figure i.7 HEAD OF HOUSE INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=116



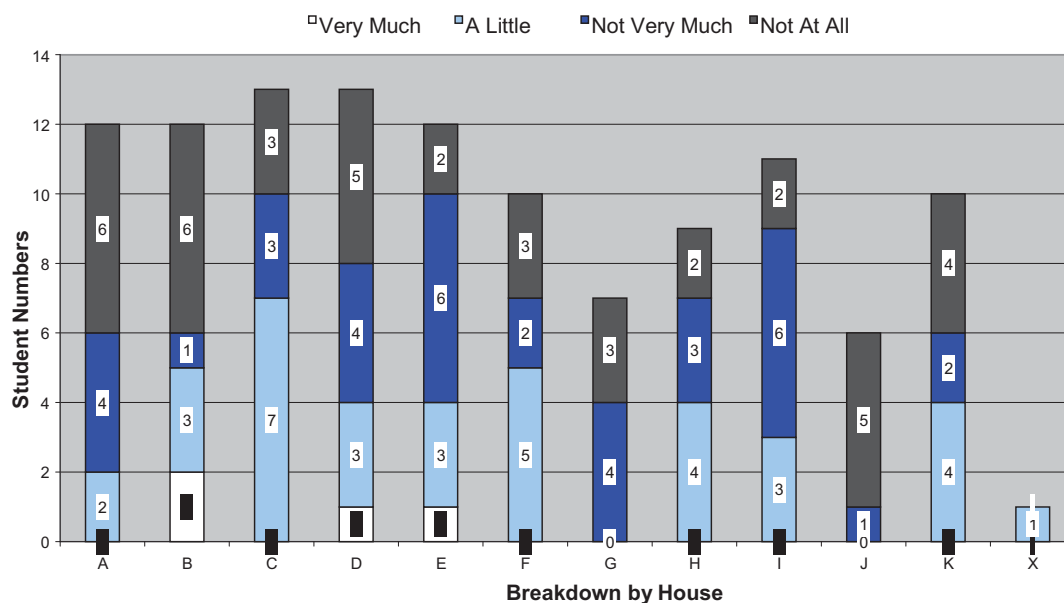
The discrepancy between the two findings that a) consultation with the Head of House by individual students was extremely high (78%), and b) that 66% of students reported that their Heads of House had not very much (31%) to no (35%) influence

over their choice was somewhat baffling. These findings were reported informally in the following year to the students participating in Project 2 of the research. Their comments helped to explain the apparent contradiction between these two findings.

The students outlined that, in 2002, all students were required to submit a standard form indicating course/subject selection to the school to formalise their Year 11 commitment. This form needed the signature of their Head of House, whose duty it was to conduct, where possible, a one to one interview with the student about their intended course of study. The Head of House's role tended to be towards the end of the Year 10 course information program, hence students were reporting a „consultation“ with their Head of House, but in reality this consultation was in large part only to formalise their decision, not to advise upon it.

While the numbers suggested that, across the board, the Heads of House did not exert strong influence over student decision-making, it was decided to further breakdown these figures to see if individual Heads of House affected student choice differently.

Figure i.8 INFLUENCE OF THE HEAD OF HOUSE n=116



In all but one House (C, where a majority of students recorded that the Head of House had influenced their decision „a little“), no other Houses recorded evidence that individual Heads of House were having much influence in the decision-making process. In fact, information from seven (A, C, F, G, H, I, J, and K) out of the eleven Houses reported no student whose decision was strongly influenced by the Head of House. A quantitative analysis of the data revealed that only four students from three Houses felt their Heads of House had strongly influenced their decision.

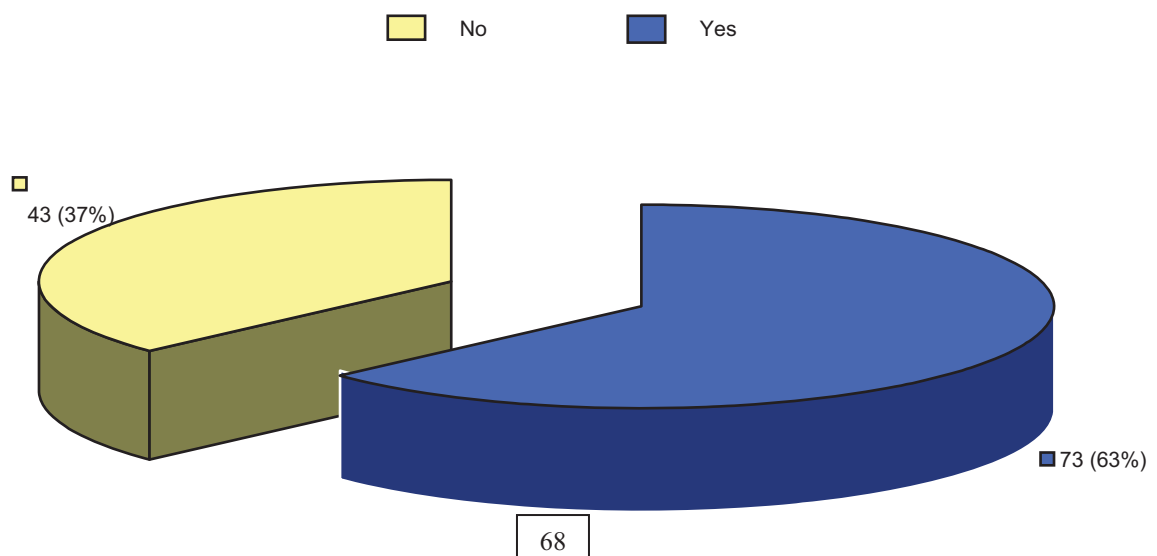
While the number claiming strong influence was small, the role of the Head of House should not be dismissed in the information gathering process. A feature that emerged from the later qualitative work was the weighting of the influence given. While the findings of **Figures i.7** and **i.8** suggested that only 4% of students reported that their Head of House influenced their decision „very much“, three of the students recorded that they had been actively counselled against choosing the IB course, while the

fourth student had been urged to consider the IB course. While the number who documented the significance of their Head of House's influence was low, it should not be underestimated how powerful the influence was in that small number of cases, as all four students had acted on the advice.

5.2.4 Consultation with the Career Counsellor

The current career counsellor has been in the position since 1999. The role has evolved into managing a wide range of enterprises informing and directing student pathways, particularly of students in Years 10, 11 and 12. Such enterprises include information nights, advertisement of career details and information days, addresses to students about tertiary entrance requirements and the organisation of career nights and work experience opportunities. The career counsellor is available to work with students and interested parents, while often working with Heads of House and other senior staff to assist student decision-making. The interaction with the career counsellor may be of a formal nature or may be more informal. It was hoped that the survey of Year 10 students would measure the extent to which students had personally utilised this resource.

Figure i.9 CONSULTATION WITH THE CAREER COUNSELLOR n=116



From the data it was evident that almost two thirds of the 2002 students had dealt with the career counsellor and that this number compared favourably with the findings in Project 3 (see later research). Students who had left the school in 1999 had, on the whole, not reported a high degree of interaction with a career adviser and had, in some cases, recorded that they had consequently made poor decisions about tertiary opportunities. They had not been aware of some tertiary entry requirements in certain states of Australia; most of these related to general secondary prerequisite subjects needed by individual universities or specific faculty expectations regarding secondary subject choices.

There is no overarching set of criteria that prescribe a regulation entry experience into any university in Australia. As different universities have different matrices governing course entry, some students find that their subject selection at secondary level may prevent them from doing their chosen course at their preferred university. Although the onus is on the applicant to make the necessary inquiries to avoid later disappointment, the school career counsellor has access to the latest tertiary advice or readily has the means to ascertain any potential issues with regard to university admissions.

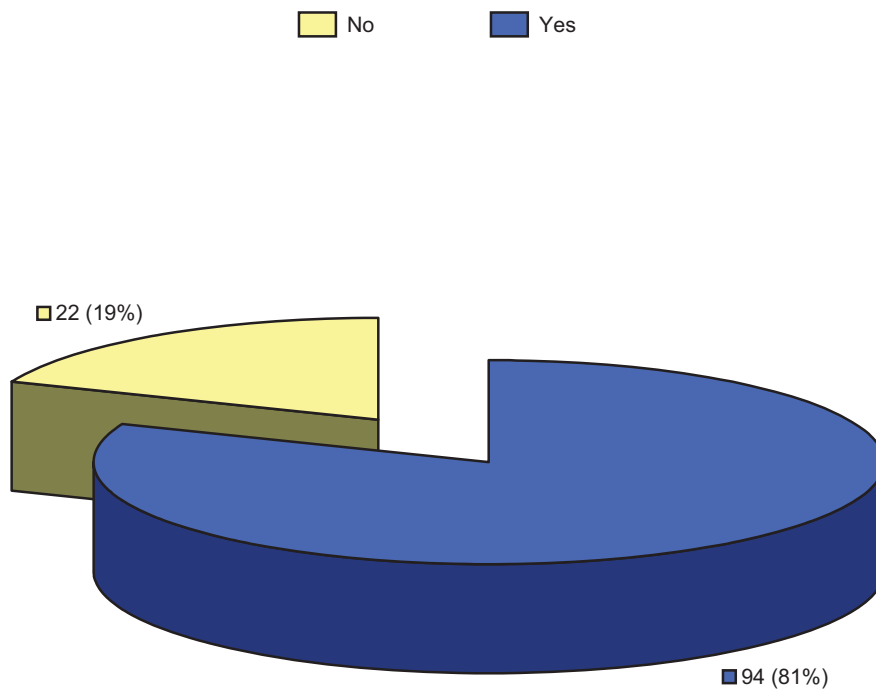
It was apparent that a few students in the 1999 cohort (pre-counselling days) had found that the subject combinations they had chosen for their course prevented them from pursuing a chosen path; the SACE students were compromised more severely. The IB, with its six subjects and compulsory English, Maths and language strands, offered a better fit of subjects to fulfil the various tertiary requirements throughout Australia and beyond.

In contrast, the greater flexibility of the SACE to offer courses designed to allow combinations of subjects, some of which were structured to provide for pathways other than university, meant that students had to be particularly careful not to choose terminating subjects if they wished to enter the tertiary sector.

5.3 Unofficial influences over course choice

5.3.1 Students who had consulted with current IB/SACE students

Figure i.10 STUDENTS WHO CONSULTED WITH CURRENT IB/SACE STUDENTS n=116



One factor that emerged as a significant indicator used by students in seeking advice on course choice was the role of older students currently doing one or the other course. In 2002, there was no formally organised structure where current IB/SACE students

spoke to the aspirant Year 11/12 students. It was found that some Houses occasionally invited older students to address the Year 10 students, but this was by no means an officially endorsed or routine strategy. An analysis of the graph (**Figure i.10**) above indicates that 81% of those surveyed recorded that they had consulted with a current student. The demand of aspiring students for course information from current SACE or IB students was very high. This information gathering was not part of any formal school process, yet the evidence suggested that this was a powerful mechanism for disseminating material about course choice. Subsequent findings in Project 2 of this research further delineated some of the idiosyncrasies of this type of unstructured information gathering and are discussed later. Suffice to say that the school now invites former IB and SACE candidates to speak at the Year 10 information night and to reflect on their perceptions of the last two years.

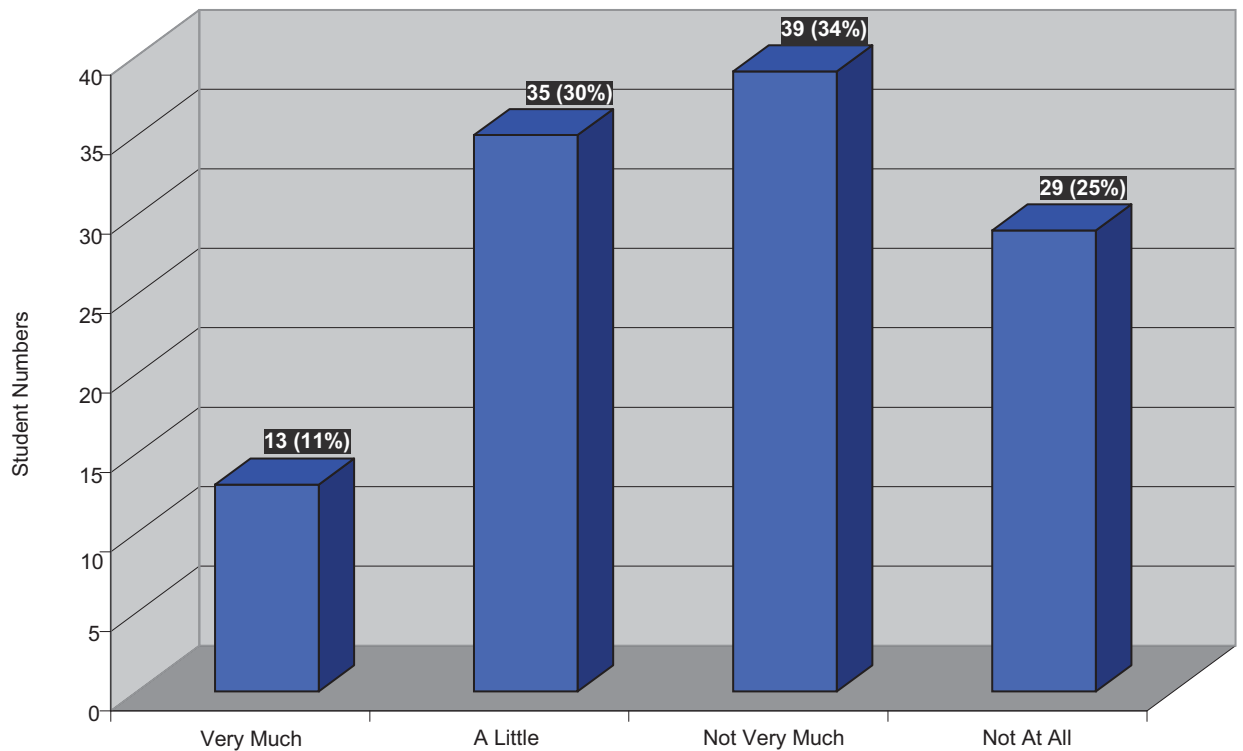
Furthermore, qualitative evidence documents that students do not simply want information about the practicalities of the course they are to choose, but they want information about the likely experiences of such courses. It emerged from later research that many aspiring students themselves had initiated contact with students in the year levels just ahead of them to discuss all manner of topics regarding the prospective courses. The full significance of this informal consultation is discussed in Project 2, **4.4.5**. From observation, this information gathering process was student-driven and informal. Its usefulness relied upon its spontaneity and to have the process formalised may be counterproductive.

5.3.2. The role of parents and their advice

While information has been uncovered as to the School's formal guidance, it was interesting appraising the role of the family in assisting students to make course choices. Would the more familial or personal connections prove more influential in the decision-making process? The impetus for this question came out of the literature alluded to in section 3 of this Project. While the material there looked at the degree to which parents make educational choices (that is, school choice) for their offspring, it was decided to see whether parents also played a role in the decision-making process of course choice for their children, bearing in mind that their children were now nearing the end of their secondary education. It must be remembered that a large number of parents had been present at the course information night. It must also be reiterated that all the students at the school are male.

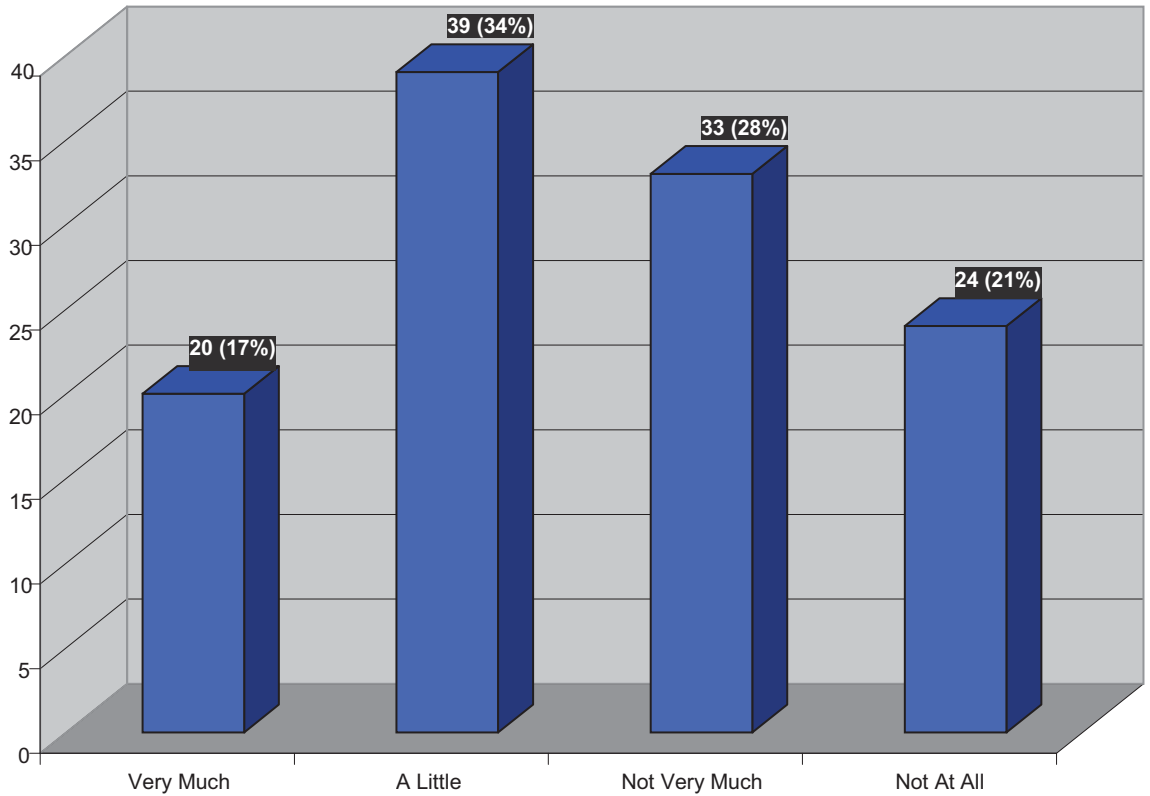
The first issue was to establish from the students in question, whether they considered that their parents influenced their choice. The second issue was to establish which parent, if any, was identified as exerting the stronger influence.

Figure i.11 FATHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=116



The column on the far right is emphatic; a quarter (25%) of students announced that their fathers had no influence on their decision of their course selection and furthermore over another third (34%) felt that their fathers had not very much influence in their decision. The survey did find, however, that 30% of students reported fathers as having „a little“ influence, while 11% of students - 13 in toto - said their fathers had influenced their decision-making significantly. More information about the nature of this influence was divulged in Project 2 and will be elaborated there.

Figure i.12 MOTHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=116



The data regarding mother's influence revealed somewhat different findings from those of father's influence. Just over a fifth of students stated that their mothers had no influence on their course selection at all, with another 28% having minimal input. On the other side of the graph, over a third (34%) reported that their mothers had had a little influence, whereas half that, 17%, claimed that their mothers' influence had been considerable. The following chart (Figure i.13) compares parent influence by gender. The figures cited represent the percentage of students who responded.

Figure i.13 COMPARISON OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE BY GENDER, IN PERCENTAGE TERMS

PARENT	VERY MUCH	A LITTLE or NOT VERY MUCH	NOT AT ALL	TOTAL
FATHER	11%	64%	25%	100%
MOTHER	17%	62%	21%	100%

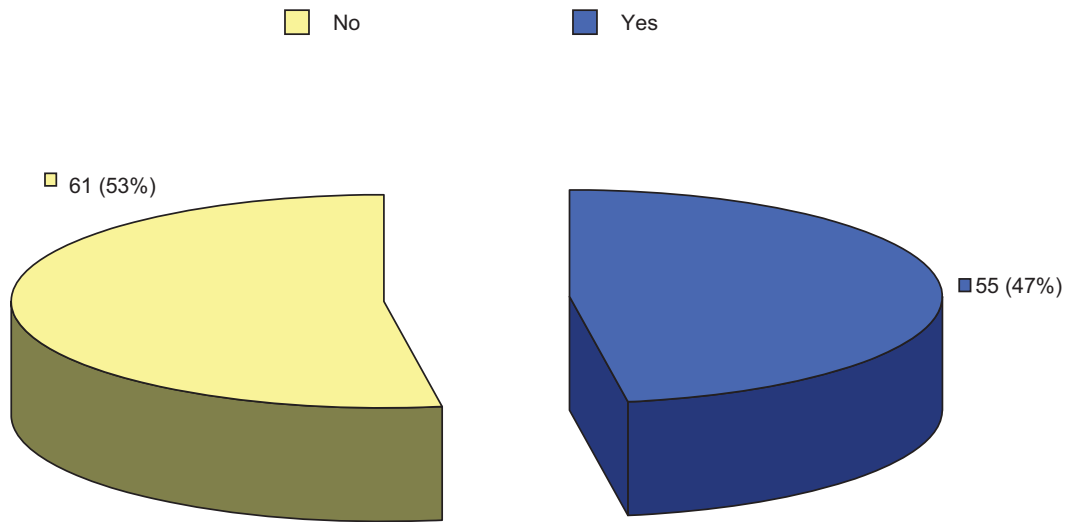
While 11% of students reported that their fathers were strongly influential in their course selection, 17% of students reported being strongly influenced by their mothers. Likewise, if one were to compare the percentage of students who reported being influenced a little or not very much by their parents, the larger percentage 64% is recorded for fathers compared to 62% recorded for mothers' influence. Taking the remaining column into account, the fathers are represented in higher numbers than mothers as having no influence in the decision-making process. In conclusion, though the overall difference was not very great, data collected in this survey supported the claim that mothers exerted more influence in the „very much“ category. An important caveat needs to be acknowledged. A large number of students claimed that neither parent had been influential in their choice of course, while others reported that their parents had had not very much input at all. The only claim that can be justified is that where parents played a large part in the choice of course, mothers exerted stronger influence over fathers in the matter of course choice.

5.3.3 The role of siblings and their advice

Students were asked two questions relating to siblings and their course choice. The first was a basic question as to whether the respondents had any siblings who had completed Year 12 prior to their own anticipated completion. In the event that they answered yes to this question, they were then asked a second question as to the degree

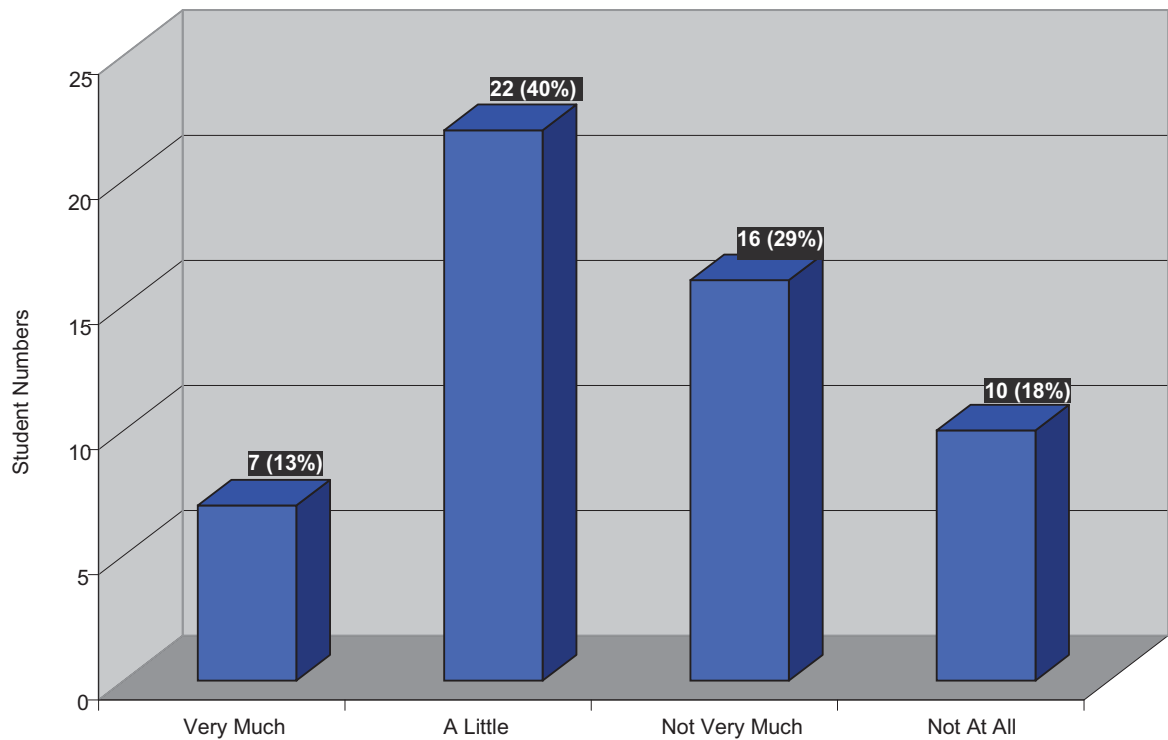
to which this sibling might have influenced their own course selection. From the data, it was found that just fewer than half the students responded yes to the first question.

Figure i.14 SIBLINGS WHO HAVE COMPLETED YEAR 12 n=116



The next figure depicts how the 55 students (whose siblings had completed Year 12) registered their siblings' influence over their choice.

Figure i.15 SIBLING INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=55



It would appear that siblings did play some role in the decision-making process, with 40% having some influence over choice and a further 13% being strongly influenced by the experiences or advice of these siblings. One could argue though, that as 47% of students reported little or no direct influence over the decision-making process, that siblings did not provide a decisive role in the process overall. When considering the actual number of candidates (seven) over the entire 116 sample that identified that they had been markedly influenced by a sibling, this represented only a proportion of around 6%.

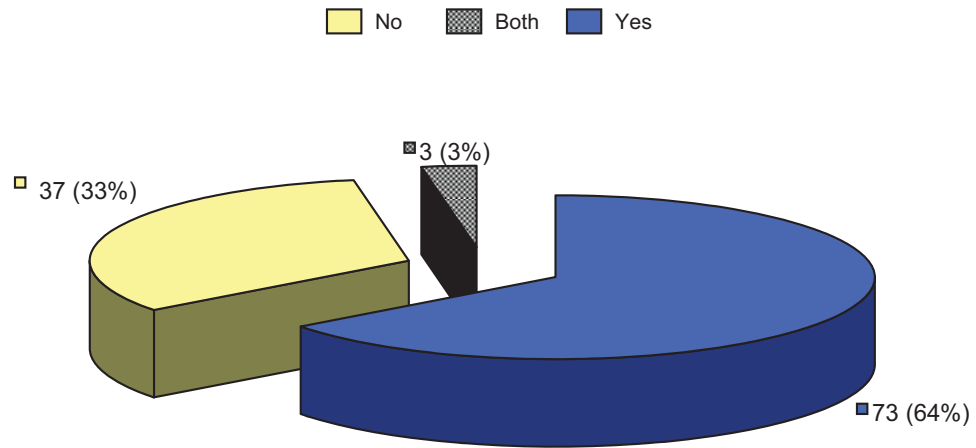
From the qualitative research of Project 2, however, these findings gained another dimension. It became apparent that the nature of this influence was complex. Some revealing explanations of this finding will be discussed in the context of Project 2.

5.3.4 The role of closest friends affecting IB/SACE students

Another area that was thought to affect student choice was the role of the friendship group in any given year level. Anecdotal evidence from students suggested that, when undecided, they had opted for what their friends were doing. One early case documented in the Introduction, described a student who had chosen a particular course but had switched a few weeks into Year 11 to the other course, citing that he wanted to be with his friends. It was decided to investigate whether this was a frequent factor in the decision-making process and to try to evaluate the role of friends more critically. The cohort surveyed was asked two questions. The first was to determine the extent to which they were doing the same course as their friends, while the second question asked them to rate the influence their friends had in affecting that choice.

The first question asked directly „Are your closest friends doing the same course?“ This was designed to be a yes /no answer, and of the 116 students, three opted not to answer the question and another three created a new category on the survey form commenting that their closest friends were doing both courses. Although answering within the given guidelines proved a dilemma for the latter three students, of those remaining (about two-thirds or 64%), reported doing the same course as their closest friends, while a third (33%) noted that their closest friends were not doing the same course. This data is presented in **Figure i.16** following.

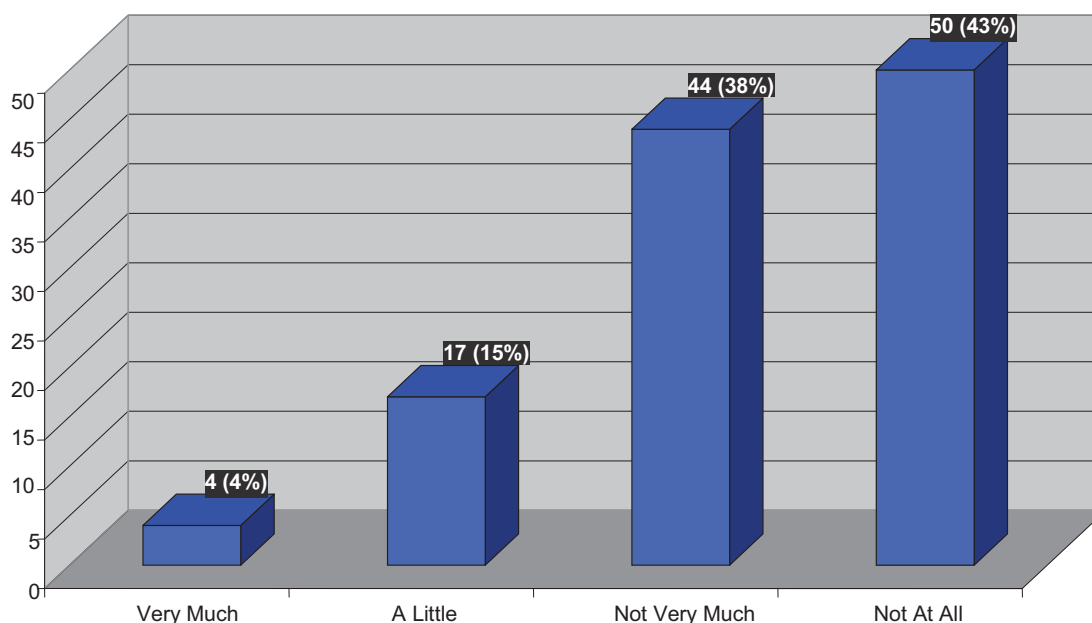
Figure i.16 CLOSEST FRIENDS DOING THE SAME COURSE n=113



These responses also seemed to counter somewhat the notion that there was a clique forming within the IB student cohort. If nearly a third of students reported that their closest friends were doing a different course from themselves, and a further 3% had close friends in both courses, it would seem that existing friendship ties overrode any course selection.

One question still remained, however. If 64% of students were in fact doing the same course as their closest friends, to what extent, if any, were they influenced by their friends to do so?

Figure i.17 FRIENDS' INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=115

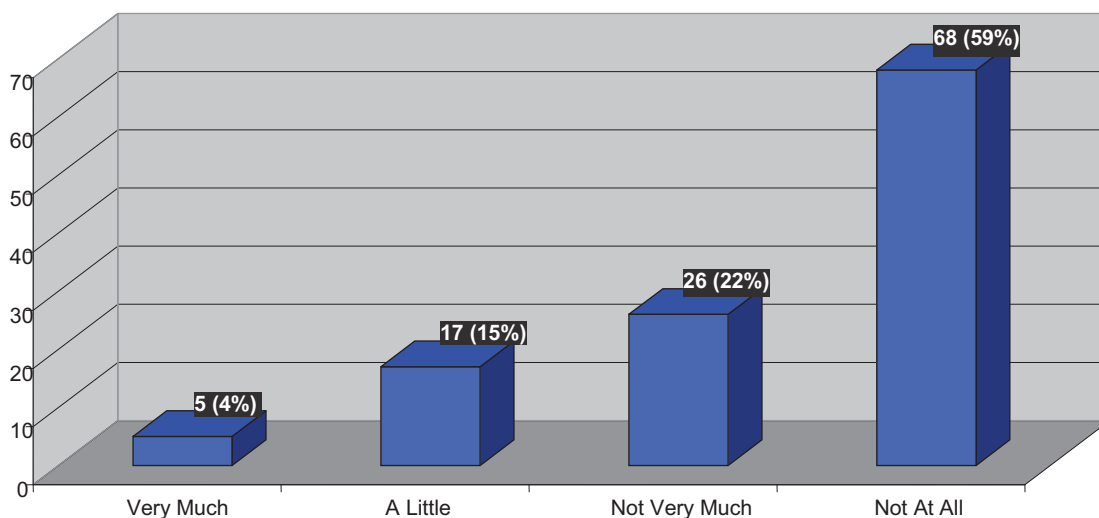


From the figure above it would also suggest that when the decision was finally made, friends did not really have a large influence directly in the decision. The classroom is not the only space that defines friendships within the Focus School and with so many opportunities for mixing with friends on the sporting arena, in music, activities and the House system on a daily basis, there is no imperative to be seated with them in subject classes. Nevertheless, it is still an interesting phenomenon that although the students claim that friends are not directly influential in the decision-making process, almost two thirds of the students still end up choosing courses similar to their friends. An explanation was offered in Project 2.

5.3.5 The role of media reports

As references to both courses were frequently played out in media headlines at the same times each year, it was decided to ask the students to evaluate the level of influence that these media articles had in determining their course choice.

Figure i.18 MEDIA INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=114



The results were emphatic. The majority of students revealed that the media was an insignificant factor in determining subject choice, with 59% of students not being influenced at all and a further 22% of students recording not very much influence. Nevertheless, it is important not to ignore the fact that there were five students who claimed to have been greatly influenced by what they had seen in the media. Interestingly, these five students came from four different pastoral care groups and three had decided to do the SACE course while two the IB course. It would appear that, while the media had had a significant influence on these students, neither course was obviously the preferred option.

5.3.6 The nexus between choice of course and career

Much of the early information about the choice of course was supplied to students in Year 10 by the various means discussed above. It was also seen that the information was delivered hand in hand with information about possible future career paths for students. Hence, students were asked directly whether they considered their choice of

course would help them in their future career. All but five SACE students responded to this question.

Figure i.19a ASSISTANCE OF COURSE CHOICE IN FUTURE CAREER n=111

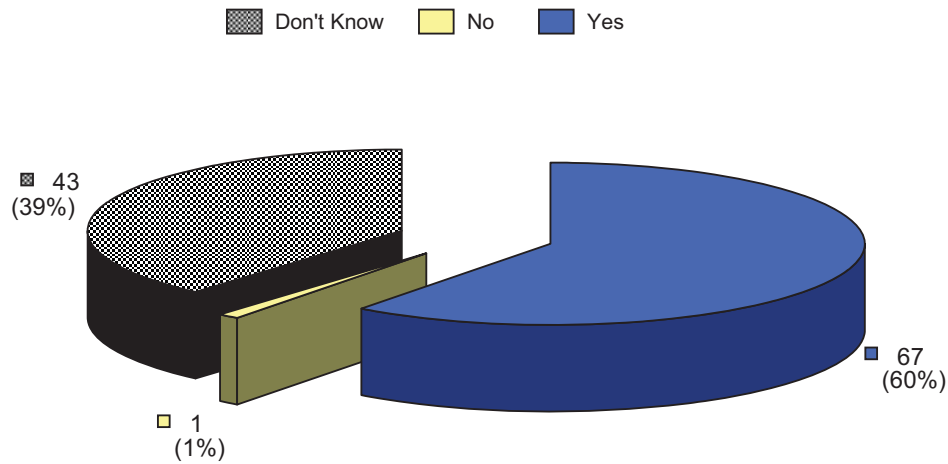


Figure i.19b SACE/IB DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES FROM Figure 19a n=111

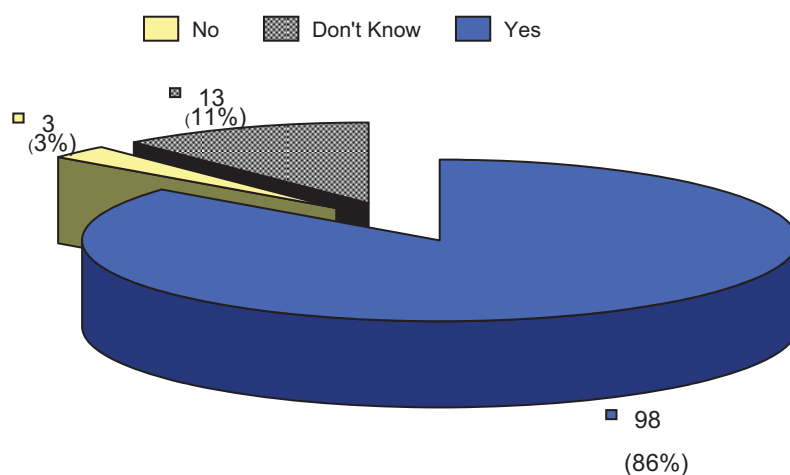
Responses	Don't Know	No	Yes
SACE responses n=89	39 (44%)	1 (1%)	49 (55%)
IB responses n=22	4 (18%)	0 (0%)	18 (82%)

While 60% of all students believed that the course they were undertaking would help them in their future career, only 55% of the group of SACE students were represented in this figure compared to 81% of those students doing the IB. It would appear that the IB candidates were more strongly convinced that their course would in fact assist them in their choice of career. What was also apparent was that nearly two fifths of the students surveyed were uncertain as to whether the course they had chosen would be of assistance in their future career, with the majority of these students enrolled in SACE. Findings in later projects shed some light on this position and an explanation for this phenomenon was offered in Project 2 of this research.

5.3.7 The possibility of tertiary study

As outlined previously in 3.3 of the Literature review, there has been documented evidence of an increase in numbers of students moving from secondary school to some form of tertiary experience in the push to acquire a post-secondary qualification in readiness to meet the employment demands of the changing labour market. Against this focus on and impetus for education at a post-compulsory level, the survey respondents were asked to identify any aspirations for continued study. It was then hoped to discover whether these aspirations were the basis for their decision to pursue one course over another.

Figure i.20 STUDENT INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY n=114



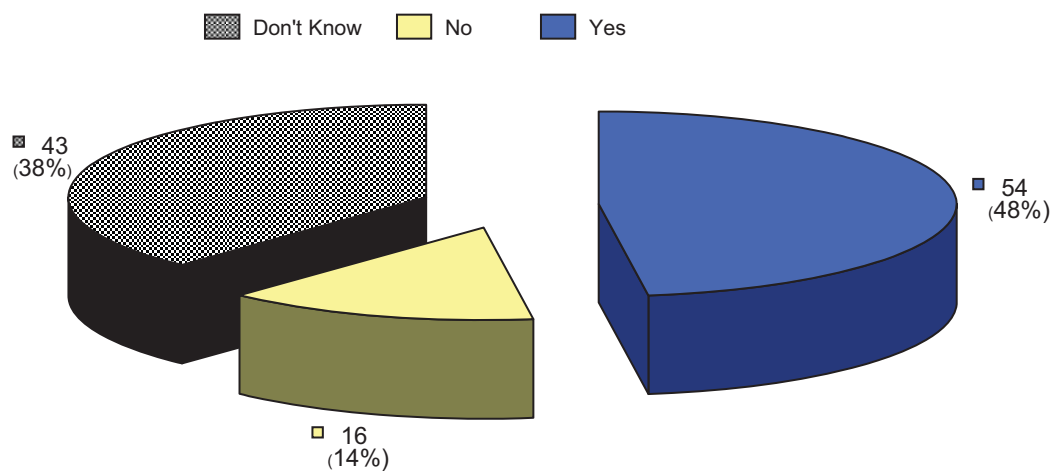
In light of the political imperative advocating further educational qualifications, it is worth noting that three students were not going to embark on tertiary studies and a further thirteen were unsure. Further analysis revealed that all IB students had indicated their intention to commence tertiary study, forcing the conclusion that those

either unsure or not continuing were SACE candidates. It was, however, evident that the great majority of students, at Year 10 level, were thinking in terms of continuing their education after secondary school.

There have been claims that the IB as a credential is viewed as more portable than the SACE certificate (Paris, 2003, p. 241). Others claim that the local marketplace is more comfortable with SACE in providing a broader and more flexible curriculum (Paris, 2003, p 240). The School itself maintains that students with either credential can and have gained entry into many local, interstate and international tertiary institutions albeit meeting the requirements of these places.

As to the portability of the IB, this assumes that the student body will indeed be seeking tertiary qualifications outside the state. The next question of the survey sought to clarify how likely this scenario was to be.

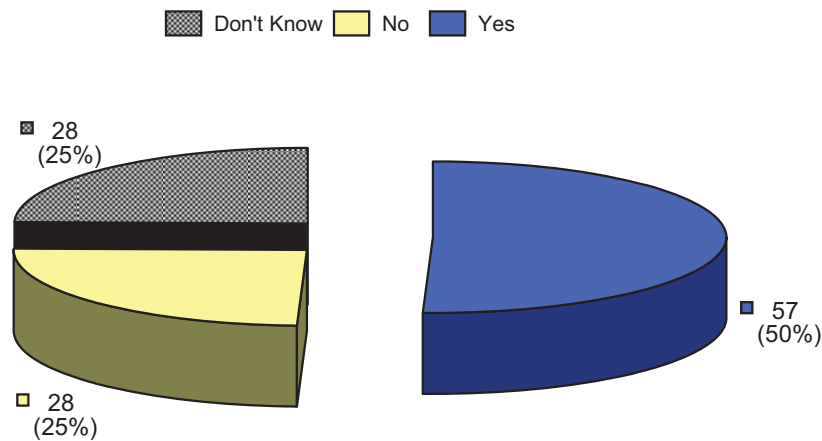
Figure i.21 STUDENT INTENTION FOR FUTURE STUDY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA n=113



The findings indicate that nearly half the respondents did intend to continue their studies locally. Almost two fifths, however, were uncertain as to whether they would or not. The finding that 14% did not intend to study in this state did not include those students who were ceasing studies at secondary level. Respondents who were not intending to do some form of tertiary study (three) were asked to ignore this question in the survey. The figure of 14% equated to 16 students. Of those 16, eleven students had opted for the SACE course, while five for the IB. There may have been an expectation that a student who intended studying outside of the state would have opted for the promoted greater portability of the IB course. These figures do not support this assumption.

The next and final question in this part of the survey specifically asked students whether they had made their choice of course in the expectation of continued tertiary study. While it was apparent that certain subjects were essential prerequisites for further study at tertiary level, these subjects or particular subject combinations could invariably be done within both frameworks. Given that the tertiary sector does place specific entry requirements in certain university faculty areas for admission to courses, it was useful to see if these requirements were having any impact on the desirability of one course over the other.

Figure i.22 COURSE CHOICE RELATED TO FUTURE STUDY NEEDS n=113



Half the respondents reported that their choice of course was associated with their intended future academic needs. As 57 of the current Year 10 cohort had answered in the affirmative, it was apparent then that both the IB and SACE courses were seen as being adequate for meeting their needs. A quarter of the sample was unsure as to the nexus between their choice of course and their future study needs: perhaps largely a reflection of the 11% of students who were unsure as to whether they would be undertaking tertiary studies. A further quarter of students stated that their course choice was not directed by future study needs. From the information in **Figure i.22**, while half the sample was drawn to their course in consideration of future needs the data could also be interpreted that half the sample (25% „don’t know“ plus 25% „no“) were not. The findings did not establish which of either course was more instrumental in underpinning tertiary aspirations.

5.4 Open-ended comments on key factors affecting course choice

5.4.1 Analysis of responses not identifying key factors

The final question of the 2002 Year 10 survey, Question 22, was formulated in the following way:

Have there been any comments or opinions about either the IB or the SACE course that have affected your choice? These may be positive or negative; for example, class sizes, teachers you may have, the work loads, better TER scores. Briefly write them down in the space provided.

The question sought to tease out possible factors that may have determined the choice of students for one course over the other and was framed so as to encourage students to document positive or negative feedback. The question also contained a series of possible prompts, class sizes, teachers et cetera, all of which had been gleaned from views already circulating in the school community.

The survey was administered to the student group while they were being supervised by staff representing most of the pastoral care groups (or Houses) and many of the students had chosen to sit in their pastoral care groupings. Analysis of the responses in this and the section following were structured around pastoral care groups, although one respondent[X] did not indicate his pastoral care group. The use of pastoral care groupings was designed to investigate whether any course selection was particularly popular among a House. Further, in Project 2, the respondents were chosen from one of the groups. Of the 116 respondents, 16 returned question 22 blank, (that is, had not written anything in the space provided, see **Figure i.23** below). These blank responses were distributed throughout the pastoral care groups, so no inference could be made about the diligence or not of the students or their supervisors.

One interesting feature about these blank responses was that all of them were from students who were enrolled in the SACE course. This finding emerged sometime after the survey had been administered, when the data was being scrutinised, and it was not possible to ascertain *post factum* why only potential SACE students had left this question blank. The SACE course was the preferred course option among the total student group at about a 4:1 ratio. Perhaps a more significant question is to look at why all potential IB candidates offered a written response to this question.

Figure i.23 DISTRIBUTION OF BLANK RESPONSES THROUGHOUT PASTORAL CARE GROUPS
n=116

PASTORAL CARE GROUP	NUMBER OF STUDENTS PRESENT IN THAT GROUP	NUMBER OF BLANK RESPONSES	COURSE SELECTION OF THE BLANK RESPONSES
A	12	1	SACE
B	12	3	SACE
C	13	3	SACE
D	13	3	SACE
E	12	0	-
F	10	0	-
G	7	1	SACE
H	9	1	SACE
I	11	1	SACE
J	6	1	SACE
K	10	1	SACE
X*	1	1	SACE
TOTALS	116	16	SACE

* This student did not nominate his pastoral care group.

In the interpretation of the written data, it was important to draw a distinction between types of responses. The wording of question 22 was designed to allow a blank response, a closed response couched in simple yes/no terms or a response that was fully developed or encouraged more reflection from the respondent if he so desired.

Hence, after analysing the blank responses, attention was turned to the closed responses that were given as simple yes/no. There were, in fact, no simple „yes“ responses. Students articulated more fully the issues that had affected their choice. There were simple one-word „no“ or „none“ responses recorded by students. These are represented below.

Figure i.24 DISTRIBUTION OF 'NO/NONE' RESPONSES THROUGHOUT THE PASTORAL CARE GROUPS n=116

PASTORAL CARE GROUP	NUMBER OF STUDENTS PRESENT IN THAT GROUP	NUMBER OF 'NO'/'NONE' RESPONSES	COURSE SELECTION OF THE 'NO'/'NONE' RESPONSES
A	12	2	SACE
B	12	0	-
C	13	1	SACE
D	13	2	1 SACE 1 IB
E	12	1	SACE
F	10	1	SACE
G	7	2	SACE
H	9	1	SACE
I	11	2	SACE
J	6	0	-
K	10	3	2 SACE 1 IB
X*	1	0	-
TOTALS	116	15	10 SACE 2 IB

* This student did not nominate his pastoral care group.

15 students actively reported that they were unaffected by any comments or opinions in regard to their ultimate course selection. Of those 15, 13 had selected the SACE course and two the IB course. This left a further 85 students who offered a more extensive response to question 22. These responses were more difficult to characterise.

As the tables above have been drawn to cater for the responses of students along pastoral care lines, this demarcation drove the following data analysis as well. The identity of students or teachers mentioned in these responses has been obscured.

5.4.2 Analysis of responses identifying key factors

Pastoral Care Group A

In this pastoral care group, there were twelve student responses. Of these, four students had selected the IB course while eight had opted for the SACE course. As indicated in the previous tables, from this pastoral care group, one SACE student had left question 22 blank and two SACE students had replied „no“ to the survey question. This left a total of nine more extensive responses to evaluate. All four IB candidates had chosen to respond and five SACE candidates.

There were no responses from these nine students that could be viewed as being typical, although some students did refer to the themes alluded to in the survey answer-prompts. Certainly there were no responses that could be interpreted as typically supporting „IB“ or „SACE“. The responses revealed that there was still misinformation about the courses and/or course requirements among the boys themselves and still circulating in the wider school community.

The four responses from IB candidates were as follows.

A lot of people say IB is for smart people. It is a very hard course apparently. I really am not that smart and I think everyone can do it.

In IB there is a better TER score. The class sizes are smaller, so the teacher can spend more time with others.

Hopefully better teachers for IB. Smaller more controlled classes. Easier to get a higher TER.

While teacher X insists that SACE is challenging, I believe that the ability to study high-level subjects is far more worthwhile and challenging. I especially enjoy the opportunity to study HL [Higher Level] History. IB gives more international qualifications.

There were several factors mentioned in these extracts which indicated that often the comments or opinions heard in favour of one course or the other did not convince the individual candidate to opt for that course. In the first comment, neither the perceived difficulty nor the professed academic status was going to deter the student from tackling the IB course. The fourth comment accepted that material from SACE could be challenging, as per the advice of a member of staff, but determined that the opportunity of the HL History of the IB afforded him greater enjoyment and a challenge. He was also attracted by the international credential of the IB.

With the middle two comments, the attraction seemed to be the anticipation of smaller classes. These classes „hopefully“ might offer better class management, better teachers and more teacher-student interaction time, but there was no obvious statement that these were factually correct. In fact the School had been quite proactive in trying to dispel false assumptions like these about the courses. Below is an excerpt from a letter sent home by the administration to all families.

The suggestion in some quarters appears to be that the School favours its IB students at the expense of those doing SACE, deliberately allocating teachers and minimising class sizes to ensure that this is so... we have from the start taken the approach that we involve as many teachers as possible in teaching the IB and we have supported our staff extensively with professional development

opportunities to achieve this outcome. Currently we have 31 teachers teaching the IB. Of those 31, 29 also teach SACE at Year 11 or 12. There is no elite hierarchy of teachers involved in the IB only and such a concept is totally at odds with the School's philosophy. With regard to class sizes, it is true that the average IB class size is lower than the average SACE class size. This is brought about, however, predominantly by the size of the respective cohorts. (Headmaster A's letter to parents, see Appendix C)

The final area that impressed candidates was the favourable TER (Tertiary Education Ranking) score. This indeed has been seen as a factor which was quite pervasive in students' thinking as it was the immediate outcome of their courses if they applied for tertiary entry.

The remaining responses, from SACE candidates, are articulated below.

Too much hard work. You have to do 2 languages and one other than English.

Better TER score for IB was the only benefit for me, but too much work and not a lot of social life is the impression I got from past IB students.

Class sizes; TER scores; SACE is only recognized in Aus; IB varies through Aus but is recognized overseas.

I have no desire to study overseas, so I think that the IB is a lot of extra, unnecessary work.

I don't do a language, therefore I can't do IB.

The workload was a strong factor that emerged from the material cited above. Some SACE students reported that they thought the IB curriculum too difficult; others suggested that much was unnecessary or time consuming, eating into time allocated for other activities- in this case, for socialising. Another factor that was intertwined

with workload was the role that various subjects played in course selection. For example, in the IB it is compulsory to study two languages, the usual combination being English and a LOTE (a language other than English). For many students this is a tremendous imposition. In the SACE course, subject selection is not nearly as prescriptive and no language component is an automatic prerequisite at Year 12 level. Many students have dropped their foreign language learning by the time they reach their senior years and mistakenly (as with the last respondent) believed that this precluded them from the IB. This is not the case at the Focus School, where they can for the IB course choose to study a foreign language at *ab initio* level. The reality is that those students who have often not had early success with LOTE and are disinclined to undertake further studies in this area in order merely to satisfy a requirement.

Likewise, the argument for the international credential of the IB did not persuade these students who did not see any immediate future benefit to them in this. Nor was it apparent from these SACE students that comments on favourable IB class sizes and TER scores were sufficient attraction for them to choose the IB over the SACE course.

Pastoral Care Group B

In this pastoral care group, there were also twelve responses, distributed as three IB candidates and nine SACE candidates. After excluding the three SACE students who left question 22 blank, all other students (three IB and six SACE) provided extended written responses.

Again the responses could not be narrowly condensed into a limited array of factors. Factors that were identified as important in the course selection process were often

diverse. Furthermore, where factors emerged that seemed common, often a different weight or interpretation was placed upon their influence in an individual student's deliberations.

The IB respondents wrote the following:

IB-smaller classes, better TER, more work. SACE easier, larger classes.

Class sizes smaller+ better TER scores+ Recognition of Achievement+.

General comments are that IB is a little more work but a lot more independence and that attracted me.

Again the discussion focused on the perceived favourable attributes of small class sizes and good TER conversion scores. These features were often seen as „trade-offs“ for the anticipated greater workloads and difficulty of work. The second contributor reported that, by doing the IB, he felt there was greater recognition of achievement. This was an interesting observation in that it was not recorded in any other student documentation. The third comment also highlighted the nature of a trade-off when contemplating the course selection. While acknowledging the increase of workload („a little more work“), this student saw the IB course as offering a degree of independence that he found attractive.

The SACE responses were as follows:

Teacher Y spammed me with a lot of Economics information; I read the subject courses handbook.

Advantage of small classes in IB, greater TER with IB. Didn't do the IB due to a language and English for IB in Yrs 11 and 12. Don't enjoy it and not very good.

Don't like the idea of CAS [The compulsory Creativity, Action and Service component, see Glossary] in IB. Conversion rates interstate for IB are very difficult. Opportunity to do Stage 2 subjects in Year 11 for SACE. Streamed classes in SACE.

Wasn't good at languages, so IB was cut, SACE the option.

IB involves a compulsory language, so I couldn't do it because I dropped languages. No community service in SACE.

I believe it depends very much on your view of the course. My brother worked extremely hard on IB and I didn't believe I was able to do the same.

In the second comment, the familiar factors of small class sizes and better TER were seen as an advantage, but were not sufficient to persuade the candidate to do the IB. The compulsory subject choices of English and a LOTE for the two year course were a greater disincentive. Comments 4 and 5 also specifically mentioned the subject difficulties regarding languages. Again what was apparent (comment 5) was the false assumption that if a student dropped a language in his earlier years of secondary schooling, then this precluded him from doing the IB in Years 11 and 12.

What several of the comments did reinforce was that students, while selecting the IB or SACE course, were very much focussing on the role that individual subjects played in course selection. This is exemplified in the first comment, where the student received advice from a staff member about Economics and had also spent time reading the subject course handbook. Comment 3 contained another dimension to the issue of subjects. This student was in the position to finish off a Year 12 SACE subject in Year 11. The possibility to accelerate SACE subjects a year ahead is an attractive feature for some students.

This flexibility, plus the fact that the student was looking forward to being placed in the top set in other of his Year 11 SACE subjects, was decisive in his planning. It should be noted that some IB students also may sit an exam earlier. This practice is not encouraged by the School but occurs occasionally when the IB examines some subjects only in the May exam session instead of the usual November session.

One further negative aspect that was reflected in both comments 3 and 5 was the role of CAS in the IB. This compulsory feature was seen by many students as further impinging on their time.

Pastoral Care Group C

This pastoral care group had thirteen respondents, none of whom had selected the IB course. Three SACE students had left question 22 blank, while another SACE student had answered „no“ to this question in his survey response to the same question. The fact that none of the students had chosen the IB course from this pastoral care group suggests that there may have been some influence at work in their decision-making. No direct evidence could be found for this within the data, although the first comment cited below reflects disapproval for the IB course. The extended responses to the remaining nine SACE candidates are documented in the following:

„The IB has become a bastardized form of education.“

This statement was couched in quotation marks, indicating that it was a comment that had been overheard but it was not attributed to anyone in particular. The student was recorded as a candidate for SACE and the vehemence of the statement, uncharacteristic of most others, suggested a high degree of negativity towards the IB

course. Whether the sentiment was sincere or was written for effect could also not be established.

IB better TER. IB more challenging, more work. IB- smaller classes. SACE easier, less time consuming.

IB has smaller classes. IB is over 2 years. Fewer subjects required for SACE.

The possibility of smaller class sizes was recorded again, but not as a serious incentive for choosing IB. Both students had selected the SACE course. Likewise the positive mention of a good TER did not prove a decisive factor.

Those features that proved more compelling were the issues of workload, allocation of time and subject offerings.

The workload is higher in IB. IB is more difficult. IB is not as popular.

IB's too hard and a waste of time if you only want to go to TAFE.

These students were well aware that the IB course demanded more formal elements and they were simply not prepared to select a course that they saw as imposing on them in many ways. There was a degree of short-term pragmatism evident in their arguments. Why do a course that was deemed harder, when a perfectly appropriate „easier“ and „less time-consuming“ course was available? Why bother doing a challenging course that did not better meet future study/career needs? Why do a course that was locked in for „2 years“, where another had greater flexibility? Why do a course that was obviously less popular? Why choose a course where subject choices did not appeal or work to an individual's strengths?

IB involves a compulsory language; languages are one of my weak areas. Keen to do Legal Studies, not offered in IB. SACE has fewer subjects, can focus more

and put more effort into them. I am time poor, community work would be hard to fit in. Theory of Knowledge is appealing, if this was offered in SACE, I would do it.

SACE easier, no language. IB demanding, language.

SACE less work, languages are not needed.

Too much work in IB. Also have to do a language and not many people are doing IB. SACE isn't much work and my friends are doing it.

The lack of enthusiasm for the time needed for the CAS component in the IB course became apparent once again, as did the perceived problem of a compulsory LOTE. The final comment was about course choice and friendship group. In the case of this student, the qualitative investigation uncovered that what his friends were doing was obviously significant for him. Other survey findings, in quantitative terms, indicated that the course choice of friends did not prove a decisive factor to the student cohort as a whole.

Pastoral Care Group D

There were thirteen respondents in this group. Two had opted for the IB course, while eleven had chosen SACE. Further, as three SACE students had left question 22 blank and two students (one IB and one SACE) had replied that they were unaffected by any comments, there remained eight students (one IB and seven SACE) who had given more extended responses.

The comment below was from the IB candidate.

IB-better class sizes mean more comprehensive teaching. IB will compel me to work harder than I would have done with SACE and so get a better result. TER is better with IB.

This student mentioned a number of factors which to him were relevant for his decision. The attraction of smaller class sizes, allowing for more comprehensive teaching was important as was the favourable TER. It was however his reference to the resulting atmosphere in the IB classroom that was idiosyncratic. He confidently asserted that the IB course structure and class size would „compel“ him to work harder. The doubt about his own self-motivation was refreshingly honest. One other student (pastoral care group F) also dwelt on the need to ensure his focus by external agency. The following seven statements are from SACE students.

Better teachers for IB but much harder.

While the School would challenge the accuracy of the initial comment, it was obvious that this held belief of the student was insufficient to persuade him to study the IB. For this student, the perceived difficulty of the IB was the factor which inclined him towards SACE.

IB is hard work, a lot of work. Community service, extended essay. SACE gives a lot of options for example PE.

This student was of a similar frame of mind. In his case he documented which parts of the IB course he saw as hard and time-consuming. These referred to the curriculum requirements beyond the core subject areas, the community service and extended essay elements. Against these negatives, he was attracted to the flexibility within the SACE framework as well as the opportunity to do subjects not offered at the School for IB.

Class sizes, cost, extra work, less time to do social things.

While class sizes may be a positive or negative, this student identified cost as a factor in the decision-making. The IB course has operational costs to the School which make

it more expensive than the SACE course to administer. These costs are offset to some extent by charging the IB students a surcharge over their routine expenses. While this cost is kept to a minimum, it can be viewed as a burden by some. After highlighting the problem of cost, the student was realistic about his course choice. The IB would require „extra work“ which would restrict his socializing time.

Don't have any spare time with IB. IB is harder. SACE classes larger. Not as much personal teaching in SACE.

The issue of time allocation was paramount too for this student. He was convinced that the greater time commitment and the difficulty of the curriculum in IB meant that he preferred the SACE course, despite the possible detracting factors of large class sizes and less „personal“ teaching.

IB-heavy work load compared to SACE. SACE has Graphic Products which is my main interest.

The statement of the student above was in keeping with many other students. Any decision about course selection often came down not to one factor in isolation, but rather the weighing of competing features. This student was dissuaded from the IB by the onerous workload but was also attracted to the SACE course by the opportunity to do a subject that he was interested in that was unavailable at the School in the IB.

I hear that IB has a higher workload but it is easier to achieve a high TER.

The competing characteristics here were the familiar issue of high workload, which was seen as a major disincentive, set against the potential for high reward (TER) at the end of the course. Despite these competing IB elements, this student chose SACE.

Music only available in SACE.

The subject „music“ is on the curriculum in both IB and SACE courses elsewhere, but under the current subject offerings at the School in question, music was not available in the IB course. IB students could choose to study SACE music as an extra, occasionally accelerating their studies to complete Stage 2 SACE Music while in Year 11. Many IB students continued with their band and orchestra participation as central to their CAS program, though not as a formal subject.

Pastoral Care Group E

This group comprised twelve students, all of whom responded to this question in the survey, albeit with one SACE student recording that there were „no“ comments that had affected his choice. Of the remaining comments, there were two IB candidates and nine SACE candidates.

The following students had chosen the IB course and these were their comments.

Average class sizes for IB generally smaller. High TER. Higher workload. Subject choices for IB groups less broad than SACE.

Teachers I may have. Even though the school released statistics showing that IB teachers also teach SACE, I still believe that I might have „bæter“ teachers in IB. TER translation was also important. Smaller IB classes seemed more appealing. I like the whole idea of the IB course (Extended essay, TOK).

These students had found attractive the smaller class sizes, favourable TER scores. The second student still firmly believed that he would be treated preferentially in terms of teachers, though the School had contradicted this suggestion. The first student recognised two apparent negatives. He saw the course as demanding greater

work while at the same time offering less choice regarding subjects. Neither feature was a significant deterrent. In the case of the second respondent, he saw the added requirements of the IB as an attraction.

Many of the SACE responses dealt in some way with the issue of workload.

IB too much work, no music as a subject as in SACE.

Bigger workload for IB but better teachers. Easier to get better TER in IB.

Again, there was a sense that students were weighing up possibilities. The first comment highlighted the demands of IB workload against the benefits of being able to study music in SACE. The second comment listed „better“ teachers and the good TER for IB, but again has opted for SACE, the IB workload being the obvious deterrent.

Being involved in many extra curricular activities, many of which I would be unhappy to give up, I thought, because of the IB's large workload, that SACE was a better option. While class size (small) was an appealing element of the IB, I feel I will not have a problem working in a larger class.

Higher workload and the extra subject needed in IB, made me choose SACE as I felt I wouldn't be able to handle that as I have a lot of sporting commitments.

The reactions of the two students above served to illustrate that the decision about course wasn't simply about the curriculum that would be done inside the classroom. These students identified that their extra curricular commitments, for example sport, were very important to them. These they did not wish to compromise or sacrifice. Regardless of how attractive other features of the IB course may have seemed (for

example, small class sizes) both students had selected SACE courses as they were a better option regarding their allocation of time.

Some indication the IB may have more work for a similar outcome. Workload for the IB suggested as being greater. Also strikes me that the IB often does have more competent teachers for important classes.

SACE: less extreme effort for basically same gain. Good for my career choices. I believe it to be just as good as the IB as far as knowledge gained. IB: mostly frivolous effort. A lot more effort for not much more gained. The CAS program and extended essays were put off due to the extra time needed over and above the extra study.

The two students above have taken a very practical approach to their course selection. Echoes of this pragmatism are found elsewhere in the decision-making. Both students have selected the SACE course, with neither convinced that the IB course offered any better knowledge, better content, career outcomes or significantly better results for the expected extra workloads („mostly frivolous effort“). The thought from the first of the above students that there were „more competent“ teachers in some areas of the IB runs counter to the school’s position, though ultimately was not decisive in his course choice.

I maybe would have done it (IB) but you have to be good at a language and I struggled at the languages I learnt.

Community service in IB.

These were two comments from students who reasoned from the point of view of a single issue. The disincentive of the compulsory LOTE featured once again and so too the community service element.

The final comment came from another student who struggled with the LOTE requirement, and as such selected the SACE course. He did, however, present a counter argument to the workload issue, one which was found mentioned in other Project findings.

SACE is supposed to be „easier“: I think if you put in the work you get marks whatever you do. Also I did not want to do a language.

In his second sentence, there was recognition that final results were likely to be the outcome of the effort that was expended regardless of the course selected.

Pastoral Care Group F

Ten students were recorded from this group. No student had left his survey form blank and all candidates had developed extended responses to Question 22, divided into four IB and six SACE respondents. The IB responses were as follows.

IB has better TER scores, smaller class sizes, more challenging, good way to end 12 years of study. Possibility of scholarships to overseas unis if you achieve a high enough score. CAS forces you to be more rounded and aware of the outside world instead of locking yourself in a room just studying.

There were two major influences that influenced my final decision. The first is that IB has international recognition which I see as a major advantage as I intend to study at a UK university. The second is the quality of courses, for example I feel that the IB history course provides students with a far greater knowledge of the subject as opposed to the SACE course which is rather simplistic.

IB „valid“ both in SA and overseas, while SACE is more restrictive. IB better recognised in overseas countries. Apparently good conversion to TER.

IB because it is a broad subject range, it tests you for further years and gives you more opportunities for studying out of SA. Also class sizes are smaller and I will concentrate more.

For all four candidates there was a common thread of the international dimension as being attractive and having an important status in the decision-making process. This fundamental element was not the only feature, however, that was contributing to the final selection.

The first student cited many reasons for the choice of IB, some more commonplace, others more abstract. The attraction of small classes and a favourable TER have featured before. The idea of IB as presenting a challenge has also been reported. The notion of the acceptance of the IB challenge as „a good way“ of ending one’s juvenile schooling was novel, together with the idea that CAS was a positive force in developing the individual on a personal and global level. These concepts had not been articulated in such a fashion by any other student, nor had they been so presented in any publicity or literature surrounding the IB course.

The second student, while attracted to the international flavour of the IB course, had been furthered impressed by the quality of the history syllabus, as one example. The student was stimulated by the material to be covered and was engaged by the potential challenge.

The third student was impressed by the international status coupled with the academic status that a favourable TER would provide.

The final student also alluded to the challenges and future opportunities that he saw the IB providing. This was juxtaposed with the more immediate concerns for the present, where he was convinced that the small classes would provide him with an environment where he would concentrate more.

The responses from the six SACE students are recorded below.

SACE needs more self-motivation + more of a challenge. There is no IB music.

Initially, this SACE student identified two features that he saw as fundamental in his decision; reliance upon oneself for motivation and the opportunity to be challenged. Interestingly, these same elements have been cited by IB students as fundamental attractions for their course. The last important factor was the availability of music as a subject in SACE, but not IB.

*IB costs extra. IB unnecessary-can achieve what you want doing either course.
IB has a larger workload-more in depth than SACE.*

This student has identified the cost as being an issue for IB, as well as the workload. While he suggested that the depth of material was greater in IB, he asserted that the extra was unnecessary. Why impose IB upon yourself if you „can achieve what you want doing either course“?

IB better TER scores. SACE if you work hard enough you will get the same mark. IB more work. SACE more free time.

A similar line of argument was mounted by this student, but the student still saw the SACE course as granting him more free time.

There has been nothing that"s influenced me.

This student was most emphatic in his assertion that in spite of all the information given to help him in making his decision, he had not been swayed by any of it.

IB has small class size- positive. IB heavier workload was the main factor in choosing. I felt there wouldn't be enough time to satisfactorily complete the IB course. Factors which take up time: living considerable distance from school, many sports outside & inside school+ practices, matches, possible interstate trips.

I would have preferred to do the IB, however a language is a compulsory and I do not wish to do one. From what I have heard, if you work hard in Yr 11 and Yr 12 you are going to get a very high mark in Year 12, in IB.

Both these students identified a number of positives about the IB course, yet each still decided to do SACE. The dichotomy between the need to balance time spent on academic work and time allocated elsewhere was the significant factor for the first candidate. He had obviously weighed up the necessary and the desirable features of his anticipated routine against the potential IB demands and decided in favour of SACE.

While interested in the IB as a course, the second candidate was dissuaded from it due to the compulsory language requirement.

Pastoral Care Group G

This small group of seven students all had opted for SACE. One student had left question 22 blank while two others had not offered extended responses, answering the question in a simple negative. Of the remaining four students, their responses fell into two distinct groups; those who were not interested in doing a language,

Don't do a language.

Don't like the language side of IB.

and those who thought the coursework too difficult.

Amount of workload in IB. The scaling system of PES, PAS subjects.

IB seems too hard. Do not intend to study overseas.

These two responses also cast light on other issues. The first student referred to PES and PAS subjects and scaling. In the IB course, core subjects are, in the main examined externally. The SACE course offers a variety of assessment models where public examination is not the only practice. For some students, this greater flexibility is more suited to their personal academic needs.

The second student saw no benefit in the international status of the IB, given his intentions for future study.

Pastoral Care Group H

In this group of nine students, two had opted for IB and seven for the SACE course. One student had left question 22 blank while one other had answered „no“ to the question. The final tally of extended responses included two IB candidates and five SACE candidates.

Class sizes, better TER scores, IB known internationally.

IB results are generally better, the course is a challenge. The diploma gives all pre-requisites, recognised nationally, regarded highly, small classes, higher standards.

The first student had included a number of previously cited positives. The second student had also alluded to many of these perceived positives, but differed from the

other student in linking the higher TER scores/results to the challenge of the course and its „higher standards“.

IB better TER + *IB smaller classes +*
IB more work – *IB more effort –*

Higher choice of courses in SACE. The fact that IB focuses on more than just theory work. IB workload very high. No need to study overseas.

Both these SACE students had taken a similar approach to their decision. They had recorded a series of pros and cons for the courses. While the former student looked at the decision purely in terms of IB, the big deterrent for him would appear to be the workload. The latter student also emphasised that as a negative for IB, regardless of his praise of the IB's international status and the wider focus of the course. He was also impressed with the wider subject choices in SACE.

Workload of IB too much, can't fit in all my sporting commitments. You can do just as well in SACE as IB and Teacher Z ruined languages. Student X said IB was for worms.

The workload of IB seemed to be higher; however, I thought if I worked hard a good mark would be achieved by doing either course. The main reason I chose SACE, or rather I didn't choose IB was because I had no interest in any language.

Despite the first student's „colourful“ comments, both students were making very similar points. The antipathy towards language study was most evident again as well as the imposition of the workload. A further point which was echoed throughout the Projects was summed up in these two statements, „you can do just as well in SACE as IB“ and „I thought if I worked hard a good mark would be achieved by doing either course“.

The final comment from a SACE student was that he was obviously content with the local credential.

Job places in Australia, no need to move, happy to study here.

Pastoral Care Group I

Of the ten SACE responses there was one student who had left this question blank and two others who had replied „no“: The only IB candidate in this group of eleven responded to question 22 as follows:

(IB) May not live in Australia for rest of my life. Wider opportunities after leaving school/uni, more of a challenge.

(SACE) Does not seem much of a challenge, structure of SACE seems complicated.

This form of weighing up prevailing ideas has emerged as a strong feature in the evaluation process of many students. This particular student presented arguments concerning his immediate future, that is, he preferred the challenge of the IB and was not impressed by the structure of SACE, but also he evaluated the courses in terms of his longer term future needs. Having such a temporal perspective, while not common, has characterised the thinking of some students.

The seven other SACE comments are discussed below.

The careers sessions were poorly scheduled, not enough time, concentrated on people with a major idea on their future career too much.

The student chose not to comment on the course of choice but was pre-occupied with the careers session that was available for students. It was apparent that, without a clear

idea of a career pathway, any course choice would be difficult. This was the only comment of its type recorded.

I chose SACE instead of IB because I'm not studying a language at the moment, so therefore I would find it very hard to do IB because it requires a language. I would have thought about IB a lot more if IB didn't require a language.

Chose SACE less workload and have more time to myself. Don't have to do a language, because I don't like them very much.

The issue of the compulsory language was featured in these comments. There was also a passing reference in the second comment about the respective workloads. This was taken up in the following material by three other SACE students.

IB is supposed to be a lot more work and time-consuming.

The community service and the lack of spare time for the IB students and having to spend more time on more subjects and having to do a foreign language and some teachers in IB, workloads and difficulty of some subjects. Having to do 3 high level subjects.

SACE- Greater freedom of choice. Option of early completion of some subjects. IB workload.

The first comment highlighted the time-consuming nature of the IB, with which the second student was concerned. The latter also suggested that with the high level subjects, the work might be difficult. The imposition of the community service aspect was also stressed. The third comment while listing the workload issue, by contrast, tended to focus on some of the positive aspects of SACE, for example, the freedom of choice and the possibility of acceleration in some subjects.

The final comment served to reinforce the level of reflection that some students underwent when making their course selection.

Originally I had chosen to do IB instead of SACE. From research and information that I had received about the two courses, I made a final decision and I chose to do SACE. I feel that the SACE course is very beneficial for my own personal needs. There were advantages for both SACE and IB that I thought were necessary for my decision. I quite like the fact that IB had smaller classes than SACE and that it was a two year course. By being a two year course it gives you great time to understand the subject and you can really get to know your teacher. I chose SACE though as it was a good choice for me and my future. I can really relate to SACE well and I believe it will benefit me strongly for the future.

This student, like others before, decided the course on what he believed served his long-term future needs, and was completely able to articulate the competing attractions of both IB and SACE. The decision also demonstrated the highly individualised and personal remarks by students.

Pastoral Care Group J

This group of six students also had a single IB candidate whose response reflected a choice that was influenced by the international dimension and subject availability.

I thought there would be better options in career, specifically overseas. I also wished to study history which (with the timetable) I could not do with SACE.

Of the five SACE students, one student had left the question blank, while four had indicated factors that they found relevant.

IB too much work.

IB- hard.

IB larger workload.

It is obvious from these reactions that the IB workload is the single most important issue. For the remaining student, the flexibility of the SACE course is attractive.

Keep your options open.

Pastoral Care Group K

With ten students in this group, the divide between IB and SACE fell at three for the former course, seven for the latter. One SACE student had left the question blank, while two SACE students and one IB student had written „no“ or „none“ as a response. The two IB students demonstrated that multiple factors were in play when they decided their courses.

Class sizes are overall smaller in IB. SACE course is said to be much too narrow. Showing that you did the more difficult course is a good thing on your CV.

All the factors listed above [the prompts that were provided] have affected my choice. The teachers that teach the IB have certainly influenced my choice- not only do they recommend the IB. I believe that better teachers are offered by the IB in comparison with SACE.

The first student noted favourably the challenging content and class sizes of the IB, but was unique in seeing its merit as a CV item. The second student was indicating a familiar theme when asserting that the better teachers were present in IB.

The remaining four SACE students responded as follows:

Shouldn't have to do a language in IB.

IB means more work, in other words no time for sport and you have to do a language. Student Z said that IB was for losers.

Work loads. Difficulty : I can achieve more in SACE.

The conversion rate of IB scores to TER rankings is not as generous as it used to be.

These students were concerned once again with IB workloads and the language issue and an overall negative perception of the IB „for losers“. On the other hand, there was a wholehearted optimism in the statement „I can achieve more in SACE.“

6. Conclusions

The primary aim of this project was to establish what factors were affecting Year 10 students in their deliberations over which course they were going to choose to finish the final two years of their education. This investigation would also allow an evaluation of the formal mechanisms that the Focus School provided to guide student course choice, an examination of the pervasion of misinformation about courses at the Focus School and the extent that any clique of IB or SACE candidates was forming.

A secondary aim was to probe the risk-taking and its management apparent in the students' course selections.

The conclusions that follow are analysed in two sections; the first section relates to data collected from closed questions (1-21) of the 2002 survey, while the second section relates to data from open-ended question 22. Primary and secondary aims will be addressed throughout the discussion of the sections that follow.

6.1 Conclusions based on the findings from closed questions

Figure i.2 (page 60) contained a breakdown of the 2002 cohort by course selection. One purpose for this was to try to identify any peculiar student distribution that could have been indicative of the IB students being seen, and seeing themselves „as some elite group“. This issue was discussed by the school Headmaster (see full quotation, p 58). The fact that numbers for the course selection had remained fairly constant over the years, together with subsequent findings on friendship groups, other possible influences about course selection and personal anecdotes from students, (all of which are to be reported on later) found the argument of the presence of a clique difficult to sustain. The SACE /IB divide appeared to be an artificial construct used by the students to cajole each other, rather than a perfidious point of demarcation among the senior students.

Another aspect of the research had been to evaluate the official mechanisms that the Focus School had developed in order to support and inform student decision-making related to Year 11 and 12 courses. The data received shed light on a number of features of this formal process. First, it confirmed that the Year 10 Course Information Night was well attended by both the students (71%) and parents (69%). Second, there was confirmation that course booklets containing material on both courses were widely read by students (75%). Third, it suggested that the Heads of House had been extensively consulted (78%), but that this consultation was later determined to be, for the large part, more administrative and not advisory (See Figure i.7). For a small percentage of students, however, the influence from this source was instrumental in the decision of course. Last, it was recorded that nearly two-thirds of students (63%) had consulted the Career Counsellor.

Another focus of the research was to evaluate the impact family and or friends had on course selection. In terms of the overall numbers neither mothers (17%) nor fathers (11%) were recorded as having „very much“ influence over their son“s course selection, although of the two, the mother“s influence was somewhat stronger. The finding for siblings in the area of „very much“ influence fell between the two parental figures at 13%. Analysis of these findings should not underestimate the very strong influence reported by some students of the role their family members played in their decision. It simply shows that this familial influence was more individual and personal, not a widespread phenomenon.

A similar finding was also revealed when the focus was on the influence that friends played in choice. Although 64% of students reported that their closest friends were doing the same course, only 4% of students confirmed that these friends had had „very much“ influence over their choice, while 82% had reported the influence as „not very much“ or „not at all“. From the same data it was recognised that almost a third of students were not doing the same course as their friends. This fact was deemed important in mitigating against the formation of any powerful clique within the two course cohorts. No evidence was found that such a clique had formed.

The findings supported the conclusion that overall media headlines were unlikely to determine course choice. Furthermore, in the small number of cases (five: three SACE and two IB candidates) where students were greatly influenced by the media neither course was preferred.

As 86% of all students intended to undertake some tertiary study, neither course appeared to prevail as the better option for this purpose. This was endorsed when 50% of students reported that their course choice was not related to their future study needs. All IB candidates, however, did specify tertiary study of some sort, as well as 83% of the SACE students. The perceived greater portability of the IB credential for post secondary study outside the state was not evident from the survey findings. Eleven of the sixteen candidates who indicated that they intended to study outside South Australia had opted for the SACE course.

In **Figure i.10** it emerged that just over 80% of the students had consulted with current IB/SACE students. This appeal, though informal in nature, from aspiring students to current students for course information presented as an important part in the decision-making process. References to advice from older students were also found, scattered throughout the material documented in section **5.4.** to support this occurrence. It was decided to examine more closely the nature of this peer network of advice and the role that these significant others played in such decisions when the research for Projects 2 and 3 was carried out.

6.2 Conclusions based on the findings from the open-ended question

From the responses to this question, it became apparent that while some students reported a single overriding factor that had persuaded them to adopt a particular course, the majority of students mentioned several factors that had influenced their thinking and that they had weighed up these with, at times, considerable deliberation. It was also apparent that the responses tended to reflect the needs and interests of the students as individuals. Moreover, their method of thinking through the issues was

often evident in the way they wrote their comments. The listing of influential factors and then the analytical acceptance or rejection of these, when matched against their own criteria, was the approach many students took in working out what course they would choose to study. There were very few examples of the decision being simple; rather, many rationales for the decision were quite complex.

The following figures provide an overview of the factors at play in the students' thinking and indicate the weighing up of the factors involved in the process. The first table contains a summary of responses by students in pastoral care groups who did not divulge specific factors that affected their course choice. This is a compilation of the data in section 5.4.1.

Figure i.25 SUMMARY OF THE BLANK AND 'NO'/'NONE' RESPONSES n=31

RESPONSES		PASTORAL CARE GROUPS												Totals
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	X*	
BLANK	SACE	~	~	~	~			~	~	~	~	~	~	16
	IB													-
'NO' or 'NONE'	SACE	~		~	~	~	~	~	~	~		~		13
	IB				~							~		2
* X is not a pastoral care group but a student who did not nominate his group.												TOTAL	31	

Removing these 31 responses from the total of 116, the remaining 85 were placed into two categories, those candidates who reported a single factor driving their course choice (20) and those who reported various factors (65). **Figure i.26** following, summarises the responses of the 20 students who listed a single factor that affected course choice. **Figure i.27** summarises the comments of the 65 respondents who listed multiple factors contributing to their decision. As with the previous material, data are presented in pastoral care groups (or PCG). Further, a – (negative) or a + (positive)

sign in front of a course in the figures below indicates how the respondent interpreted the influence of the factor for that course.

Figure i.26 RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFIED A SINGLE FACTOR AFFECTING CHOICE n=20

PASTORAL CARE GROUP	RESPONSES RELATED TO SURVEY PROMPTS					COURSE CHOICE
	Class size	Teachers	Workload	TER		
B			-IB			SACE
J			-IB			SACE
			-IB			SACE
			-IB			SACE
K			-IB			SACE
				-IB		SACE
STUDENT INITIATED RESPONSES						
	IB for all	Subjects	Option	CAS	Local study	
A	+IB					IB
		-IB (language)				SACE
B		+SACE				SACE
		-IB (language)				SACE
C			-IB			SACE
D		+SACE (music)				SACE
E		-IB (language)				SACE
				-IB		SACE
G		-IB (language)				SACE
		-IB (language)				SACE
H					+SACE	SACE
I		-IB (language)				SACE
J			+ SACE			SACE
K		-IB (language)				SACE
- indicates a negative evaluation of course			+ indicates a positive evaluation of course			

All but one of these students had opted for the SACE course. Most of the discussion of these factors focused on negative issues that had resulted in the students deciding against selecting the IB. The prompts that had been provided to the students in the survey had been largely ignored and they tended to identify their own individual factors that determined their course selection. Of the prompts, however, the negative attitude towards the perceived higher workload of the IB course was the most acknowledged disincentive. The other factor that affected choice was the issue of subject offerings in both courses. The compulsory language component of the IB was a big deterrent to students, while those wanting to do music were only offered this subject in SACE at the Focus School.

Figure i.27 RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFIED MULTIPLE FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE n=65

P C G	IB or SACE	SURVEY PROMPTS				STUDENT INITIATED RESPONSES					
		Class size	Teachers	Work- loads	TER	Subjects <i>*language</i>	Inter- national dimension	Time	\$	Quality of course	Recog- nition
A	SACE			-IB		-IB*					
	IB	+IB			+IB						
	IB	+IB	+IB		+IB						
	IB					+IB	+IB			+IB Challenge	
	SACE			-IB	+IB			-IB			
	SACE	+IB			+IB					-SACE	
	SACE			-IB						+IB	
B	IB	+IB		+SACE	+IB						
	SACE	+IB			+IB	-IB*					
	IB	+IB			+IB						+IB
	SACE					-IB(CAS)				+SACE Sets, Accelerated	
	IB			+IB						+IB Independence	
	SACE					-IB* (CAS)					
C	SACE	+IB		-IB	+IB			+SACE			
	SACE	+IB				+SACE				-IB 2years	
	SACE					-IB* +SACE		-IB			
	SACE			-IB						-IB Unpopular	
	SACE			-IB				-IB			
	SACE			-IB		-IB*					
	SACE			+SACE		-IB*					
	SACE			-IB		-IB*					+SACE Friends
D	SACE		+IB	-IB							
	SACE			-IB		-IB (CAS) +SACE					
	SACE	+IB		-IB				-IB	-IB		
	SACE	+IB		-IB				-IB			
	IB	+IB			+IB						
	SACE			-IB		+SACE					
E	SACE			-IB	+IB						
	IB	+IB		-IB	+IB	-IB					
	SACE	+IB		-IB							
	SACE			-IB		-IB					
	SACE		+IB	-IB	+IB						
	SACE			+SACE		-IB*					
	SACE		+IB	-IB							
	IB	+IB	+IB		+IB	+IB					
	SACE			-IB		-IB (CAS)		-IB			
SACE			-IB		-IB		-IB				
F	SACE			-IB					-IB		
	SACE			-IB	+IB			+SACE			
	IB	+IB			+IB	+IB (CAS)				+IB Challenge	
	IB					+IB	+IB			+IB	
	IB				+IB		+IB				
	SACE	+IB		-IB				-IB			
	SACE					-IB				+SACE Challenge, Self- Motivation	
	SACE				+IB	-IB*					
	IB	+IB				+IB	+IB				
G	SACE			-IB	-SACE						
	SACE			-IB				-IB			

P C G	IB or SACE	SURVEY PROMPTS				STUDENT INITIATED RESPONSES					
		Class size	Teachers	Work- loads	TER	Subjects *language	Inter- national dimension	Time	\$	Quality of course	Recog nition
H	SACE	+IB		-IB	+IB						
	SACE			-IB		+SACE	-IB				
	IB	+IB			+IB		+IB				
	SACE			-IB		-IB*		-IB			
	IB	+IB			+IB		+IB			+IB Challenge	+IB
	SACE			-IB		-IB*					
I	SACE							-IB		-IB career	
	SACE		-IB	-IB		-IB*(CAS)		-IB			
	IB						+IB			+IB Challenge	
	SACE			+SACE		-IB*		+SACE			
	SACE			-IB						+ SACE Freedom, Acceleration	
	SACE			-IB				-IB			
	SACE	+IB								+IB 2 years	
J	IB					+IB	+IB				
K	IB	+IB								-SACE narrow	+IB
	SACE			-IB		-IB*		-IB			
	IB	+IB	+IB	+IB	+IB						
TOTALS		23 +IB	6+IB 1-IB	34 -IB 4+SACE 2 +IB	21+IB 1-SACE	21-IB 6+IB 5 +SACE	9+IB 2-IB 1-SACE	13-IB 3+SACE	2 -IB	7+IB 4+SACE 3-IB 1-SACE	3+IB
		23	7	40	22	32	12	16	2	15	3
- indicates a negative evaluation of course						+ indicates a positive evaluation of course					

In the original survey, at question 22, certain prompts had been presented to the students that had been identified from anecdotal sources from within the school community as possible factors affecting choice:

for example, class sizes, teachers you may have, the work loads, better TER scores.

In any discussion of the findings the from both **Figure i.26** and **Figure i.27**, the first issue was to resolve how influential the prompt items from the survey had been in determining course choice.

What of the role of „class sizes“? As number one item on the list of prompts, it had been presented along with the issues of „teachers“ (number two on the prompt list) as two critical areas that, in writing to the larger community, the School administration insisted were not specifically being enhanced in the IB course at the expense of the

SACE course. There were 23 respondents in all who nominated class size as a factor in their decision-making, but not necessarily as a determining factor. This was evident in the comments summarized in **Figure i.27**, but did not occur in the data for **Figure i.26**. Thirteen IB students highlighted it as a positive feature of their course. By contrast, ten SACE students also acknowledged that class sizes were likely to be smaller in IB, but as they chose the SACE course, this could not be interpreted as a persuasive element in their course selection. In reality, most students in their early secondary schooling at the Focus School experienced class sizes on average around the 25-27 mark. In Years 11 and 12, most class sizes are smaller than these earlier experiences, with the IB being marginally smaller than SACE. The following contrasting opinions from two students, the first IB, the second SACE, epitomize the way that the issue of class size is played out against the individual personalities/needs of the students themselves.

IB: IB-better class sizes mean more comprehensive teaching. IB will compel me to work harder than I would have done with SACE and so get a better result.

SACE: SACE was a better option. While class size (small) was an appealing element of the IB, I feel I will not have a problem working in a larger class.

In their understanding of themselves and their own behaviours, the factor of class size is accepted rather than being seen as a prime motivation for opting to do a particular course.

Another of the prompts referred to teachers. No students mentioned this in the data summarized in **Figure i.26**. Only seven students referred to this in **Figure i.27** as a factor in the decision process. All but one of these recorded that they perceived that the

teachers were preferable in the IB course. Three IB students also suggested that, as class sizes were smaller, there would be more time spent with individual students or others simply stated that the teachers in IB were better, easier to get to know over the two year course or that the delivery of content would be more comprehensive. One IB student even registered his opinion of „better teachers“ in IB even though he acknowledged that the School had released evidence contradicting this assertion. As with all examples of misinformation, no matter what evidence the Focus School had presented to dispel such material, this persisted as part of the community folk lore.

Four SACE students also referred to teachers. One SACE student had said that he didn't like some of the IB teachers, while the remaining three reiterated the thinking of their IB counterparts, citing the teachers as „better“⁷/ „more competent“⁸ in IB. That given, it is interesting that of the six students who wrote that the IB teachers were „better“, three opted to study IB but three chose SACE. The issue of teachers did not seem that persuasive when set against issues like workload and subject offerings.

Workloads, although down the prompt list, had proved influential, with it being the most pervasive issue so listed. Of the 85 responses indicating key factors to this question, there were 45 explicit references to the work involved in the two courses. For five SACE students (see **Figure i.26**), their summation that the IB workload was not only onerous, but likely to be „hard“ as well was the single factor that determined their choice of course. The remaining reports in **Figures i.26 & i.27** all recorded the difficult nature of the workload, but these references were couched in language that covered a

⁷ See Pastoral Care Group D, page 99 and E, pp. 101-102.

⁸ See Pastoral Care Group E, page 103.

variety of dimensions. Some (34) claimed that the IB was too much work, extra work, hard/difficult, more of a challenge or else stated that SACE had fewer subjects, was easier or required less effort. There were four IB candidates in total who did not see the workload as such a disadvantageous issue as they chose this course. One claimed that the workload was only a „little more“ than the SACE course, while others viewed the work as a positive challenge. All other references came from SACE students. The common thread was that the perceived higher workload of the IB was a disincentive. Further oblique references were to such specific issues as the difficulty of the content, the demand for three subjects to be studied at higher level and the responsibilities of their other commitments. This meant that the SACE course provided a better model, one more suited to their various needs.

The nature of workloads must be seen in tandem with the nature of course content. Subject choice had not been in the original prompt list, but emerged as a significant factor for many students. As the IB required the study of a language other than English at the Focus School, this was seen by students as a major restriction to potential IB candidates. 11 students from **Figure i.26**, all SACE, listed this as the significant impediment to choosing the IB course. Some wrongly claimed that as they had ceased their language learning earlier they could not undertake the IB course; while others acknowledged that they had found their previous language experiences difficult or unrewarding and they were simply not prepared to commit to such a requirement.

As shown in **Figure i.27**, there were a further 32 mentions of subject related concerns, which equated with Subject choice (particularly the role of languages), the availability

or not of certain subjects within either course or extra work requirements to be fulfilled. The issues raised in this area were cited as instrumental in guiding choice. In addition to languages, the choice/availability of other subjects also seriously affected a number of students both positively and negatively. Three IB students were looking forward to studying the History course. A further six SACE students espoused a keen interest in other subject areas for example Music, Graphic Products, Legal Studies, PE, (all subjects not offered in IB at the Focus School) or they did not want to study English (an IB expectation at the Focus School).

Students of the IBDP are required to write a 4000 word extended essay on a topic of their choosing, study a course called Theory of Knowledge and then complete 150 hours, documented, of CAS. These elements of the IB course were explained more fully in the Introduction (see 3.2) The IB students tended to see this as a positive element, but six students, all SACE, saw this in negative terms. In fact, the majority of these students were uncomplimentary towards the community service feature and it was listed as a single factor affecting choice as shown in **Figure i.26** with the student choosing SACE.

The final survey prompt related to TER (see Glossary). One SACE student (see **Figure i.26**) had considered this as important as a single issue. This student had correctly acknowledged that the TER scores for some IB results had in fact been reduced by the South Australian tertiary admissions centre. Twenty-two further students commented about conversion of their course marks into TER scores. Thirteen IB students cited the „better“, „higher“, „greater“ TER scores, good „score translation“ or „conversion“ as an

attraction of the IB course. By contrast, eight SACE students also described this same positive outcome for IB but still chose the SACE course.

While nearly all respondents agreed that the IB TER was potentially an attractive outcome, just under half of those who listed this were not persuaded to do the IB. There were often more elements at play in the overall picture. Stated one SACE student,

Better TER score for IB was the only benefit for me, but too much work and not a lot of social life is the impression I got from past IB students.

This SACE student has identified the TER as a positive, but the issue of workload combined with an important priority in his socialising, informed his decision. The fact that he had spoken to past IB candidates to assess this underscores the deliberation behind his decision and exemplifies the „trade-off“ pattern or the weighing of competing interests that so often was identified by candidates. Further, three more SACE students have recorded these summations.

IB costs extra. IB unnecessary-can achieve what you want doing either course. IB has a larger workload-more in depth than SACE.

IB better, TER scores. SACE if you work hard enough you will get the same mark. IB more work. SACE more free time.

The workload of IB seemed to be higher, however, I thought if I worked hard a good mark would be achieved by doing either course. The main reason I chose SACE, or rather I didn't choose IB was because I had no interest in any language.

While the weighing of options is evident and the individual preferences apparent, these students provide a pragmatic response to the question of which course to do:

they endorse the position of the student as the agent of success in the process, regardless of the course.

The first quotation above referred to the issue of cost. Again, this feature was not included on the lists of prompts affecting choice. In fact, there were only two students of the total 116 who raised this issue at all. As these two students, however, did opt for the SACE option, this may have been a compelling factor in their choice of course. The IB surcharge in addition to regular school fees could indeed mean that the IB course was financially prohibitive for some.

The terms „a challenge“ and „challenging“ figured in five of the student initiated responses. These references were interpreted as a response to the quality of the course on offer. Such words were recorded throughout this research as used by staff, students and in various course literature, for example, the SACE list of candidate attributes and the IB diploma website. When students identified that they had chosen the course that would be challenging, however, it wasn't immediately clear which course it was. Below are recorded the responses from an IB and a SACE student.

While Teacher X insists that SACE is challenging, I believe that the ability to study high-level subjects is far more worthwhile and challenging. I especially enjoy the opportunity to study HL History. IB gives more international qualifications.

SACE needs more self-motivation + more of a challenge.

The evidence would suggest that these students were attracted to the notion of a course that presents a challenge, but each considered that concept could be fulfilled by his chosen course.

There were other references to issues that could be termed „quality of course“. Students saw that their course offered an opportunity for growing independence, a sense of freedom, self-motivation, to be intellectually accelerated or in the company of friends, or to have the benefit or not of a two-year program. Again, these intangible features of a course were ascribed sometimes to SACE and sometimes to IB.

A further attribute alluded to in student responses was the international credential of the IB course. In a contemporary student population, constantly presented with the notion of globalisation, it was perhaps not unusual for this to emerge as an issue. One SACE student, as shown in **Figure i.26**, affirmed that he intended to study locally and therefore deemed the IB international credential irrelevant. Twelve students referred to this „international“ factor as shown in **Figure i.27**. It was most notably cited by the eight IB candidates, many of whom had already declared an intention to either study abroad, or to apply for scholarships to do so or to pursue a career overseas. Three SACE students were dismissive of this feature, commenting that they had no aspirations to study overseas. Another SACE student acknowledged that the IB was a better option for international study, but was not persuaded to opt for the IB. Earlier analysis had suggested that SACE students were quite likely to opt to study outside the state and did not see their SACE credential as limiting this.

In evaluating the responses above, another facet in the decision-making also became apparent in the course selection process. This was the criterion of a time factor that students used to provide the context for their selection, one that differed markedly from student to student. At its most pragmatic level, the greater time commitment to

IB was referred to in negative terms by 16 students. All these students had selected SACE.

On a more conceptual level, two students, as mentioned previously, structured their decision based on the actual two year duration of the SACE or IB courses; in that their course selection appeared to be driven by the way they could most successfully cope with the next two years at school.

Many other students looked to their future tertiary requirements, hoping to do a course that would see them enter their chosen tertiary route with the appropriate qualifications. A small group of students extended their perspective to include possible post tertiary career paths, but, in these cases, no inference could be made that one particular course option was more preferable to the other.

In summary, the provision of prompts in the original survey produced an array of factors which, while alluded to as possible influences on choice, generally did not prove so decisive on further investigation. The exception was the issue of the perceived workloads for each course. Workloads and subject choice were the most pervasive factors impinging on choice.

Figure i.26 and **Figure i.27** above graphically represent the complexity of the decision-making process. The plethora of material is proof that the open-ended question was important in providing insights into this process. The presence of a raft of key factors, other than the prescribed prompts students were using to evaluate their selection, serves to underline the highly individual, intricate and multifaceted dimensions to

their decision-making. Furthermore, it highlights the deliberations of these students as they weighed up the risks involved and indicates how they negotiated this risk as they shopped around.

**COPING WITH THE PRESENT DECISION:
YEAR 11 AND 12 STUDIES**

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PROJECT TWO
COPING WITH THE PRESENT DECISION:
YEAR 11 AND 12 STUDIES

CONTENTS

1. Preamble	134
2. Aims	136
3. Main themes	137
4. Method	139
5. Data analysis	142
5.1 Year 11 Study: Summary of responses.....	142
5.1.1 Case 1: (IB Candidate).....	142
5.1.2 Case 2: (IB candidate).....	144
5.1.3 Case 3: (SACE candidate)	145
5.1.4 Case 4: (SACE candidate)	145
5.1.5 Case 5: (SACE candidate)	146
5.1.6 Case 6: (SACE candidate)	147
5.1.7 Case 7: (SACE candidate)	148
5.1.8 Case 8: (SACE candidate)	149
5.2 Year 11 Study: Data analysis by theme	151
5.2.1 Elaboration of 2002 survey responses	151
5.2.2 Evaluative comments on the chosen course.....	154
5.2.2.1 General expectations	154
5.2.2.2 Specific expectations – subjects.....	155
5.2.2.3 Specific expectations – careers	156
5.2.2.4 Specific expectations – exams	157
5.2.2.5 Specific expectations – friendships.....	158
5.2.2.6 Specific expectations – workloads.....	161
5.2.3 Views of the alternative course.....	162
5.2.4 Effectiveness of course advice.....	164

5.3	Year 12 Study: Summary of Responses.....	166
5.3.1	Case 1: (IB Candidate).....	166
5.3.2	Case 3: (IB Candidate).....	167
5.3.3	Case 3: (IB Candidate).....	168
5.3.4	Case 4: (IB Candidate).....	168
5.3.5	Case 5: (SACE Candidate).....	169
5.3.6	Case 6: (SACE Candidate).....	170
5.3.7	Case 7: (SACE Candidate).....	170
5.3.8	Case 8: (SACE Candidate).....	171
5.3.9	Case 9: (SACE Candidate).....	172
5.4	Year 12 Study: Data analysis by theme	172
5.4.1	Year 12 course assessment.....	172
5.4.2	Self-assessment of academic progress	174
5.4.3	Extra-curricular activities.....	176
5.4.4	Future aspirations.....	178
5.4.5	Older students as advisors.....	179
6.	Concluding remarks	181
6.1	Transition between Years 10, 11 and 12.....	181
6.2	Subject selection	183
6.3	Career aspirations.....	183
6.4	Group differences, taken collectively at Year 12.....	184

PROJECT TWO

COPING WITH THE PRESENT DECISION:

YEAR 11 & 12 STUDIES

1. Preamble

The Australian author John Marsden has been an influential writer of young adult fiction for many years as well as having a strong background in education. His poem, *The Journey*, was chosen as a metaphor for the students who formed the basis of this longitudinal study which was investigating their educational experiences of the IB and SACE courses in the final two years of their secondary education.

*i. He walked with his feet on a roadway, iv. The further one walks, the more crossroads,
A path that was clearly defined. And the harder the choices become.
But the journey that really had meaning In country that's strange or unfriendly
Was the one that took place in his mind. The ignorant soon will succumb.*

*ii. Whenever he came to a crossroad v. And there's four different paths to be taken
He had his choices to make. None can be safely ignored.
But his legs played no part in choosing Even the one that's been travelled
Which of the roads he must take. Needs to be further explored.*

*iii. Wisdom lay not in his muscles vi. For there's always a road to friendship
Nor in the soles of his feet. And there's always a road to fame
It came from the light of achievement, And there's always a road to danger
It came from the mud of defeat. --And a road that wants walking again.*

(Marsden, 1988, pp.182-3)

In 2002, a large survey was carried out at the Focus School of all current Year 10 students, designed to gather data about the students' future course selection. The analysis of the responses helped staff to understand better how these students decided their academic choices at Years 11 and 12, and what factors could be identified as significant in this process (see Project 1). The responses to that survey indicated that the process was intricate and individual. It pointed clearly to the fact that, for each student,

..the journey that really had meaning

Was the one that took place in his mind (Marsden, 1988, pp.182-3).

To understand the complexities in the decision-making process, it was deemed beneficial to follow a smaller group of these 2002 students over their two senior years, in order to tease out further the immediate consequences of their course choices. For these students, was their journey, in Marsden's words (1988, pp. 182-3), „clearly defined“ or did they have to make choices at a „crossroad“?

Their views were ascertained in two in-depth follow up studies, the Year 11 Study (2003) and the Year 12 Study (2004). As all students were distributed into one of ten comparable pastoral care groups at the Focus School, it was convenient to select the students from one of these groups to research over their last two years of schooling.

2. Aims

The Year 11 Study was designed to provide the student respondents with an opportunity to evaluate and reflect upon the first year of their chosen course, whether IB or SACE. It was also used to provide some explanatory feedback to students about the findings of the survey completed in 2002 by their peers and themselves. The Year 12 Study was given to the same group of students when they were now part way through their second year of a two year senior secondary education program.

The need for a further in-depth investigation of this type was prompted, primarily, by the construct identified in the Introduction of this portfolio which examined issues surrounding the reshaping of self in a global context (see Introduction, **2.1**). The aim was to explore the processes at play and their progress in the undertaking of their chosen course. It was hoped that analysis of the responses from these students over their two years of study would highlight their own awareness of their evolving concept of self in terms of course selection and academic development. As Marsden (1988, pp. 182-3) put it,

*Even the [path] that's bæn travelled
Needs to be further explored.*

Driving the questions in both studies was an endeavour to discover how students interpreted their development within their chosen course, to articulate any perspectives they might have about the alternative course, and to identify any useful advice about the courses and the origin of that advice. The latter imperative emerged from the findings in Project 1 about the role of peer networks (See Project 1, **3.2**). This project also aimed to investigate the extent to which students considered that their decisions had been justified, and their judgement on whether any risk they had taken was worth it.

3. Main themes

The nature of the questions in the Year 11 Study fell into four thematic areas. These echoed the discussion in the Introduction (see Introduction 2.1) around the concept of the student as „customer“. These themes could be interpreted in metaphorical terms as carrying out a form of market research.

- a) The first theme in this Year 11 survey could be viewed as the undertaking of some preliminary market research based upon the findings from the previous Project. These were presented to the group to encourage students to clarify and/or to elaborate on any of the findings. This part was deliberately non-specific, ensuring that the responses given by the students were weighted according to their own priorities.
- b) The second theme had both a general and a specific target. As a „consumer“ of a particular course „product“, questions of a general nature tried to extract a response by the candidate as to how he viewed his course now and whether this course was necessary for his future career. Specific questions asked the student to respond to issues relating to subject choices, the role of exams and workloads. Gauging individual „customer“ behaviour and satisfaction were key features.
- c) The third theme provided the candidate with the opportunity to respond with information concerning his views about the alternative course, the other „product“ on offer. He was to draw from observations of his fellow students and the comments that he had heard from them. It was hoped that such personal views shared between peers would elicit more relevant, compelling and contemporary information. One of the problems associated with the gathering of data on choice selection was that by the time information became „mainstream“ it did not necessarily „fit“ with any current curricular changes.

- d) The fourth theme was linked to advice about the course. It was aimed to assess the strength (or not) of advice given to students from other previous „customers“ and whether it had some impact upon their decision-making regarding their courses.

The Year 12 study focused on issues that were deemed pertinent to respondents who were nearing completion of their chosen course. The results of Project 1 had shown that as Year 10 students, they were often concerned about the nature of each course with particular reference to such „product lines“ as subject choices, workloads and extra-curricular commitments undertaken during the courses. These aspects were raised again in the Year 12 Study. There was also a series of questions designed to elicit their evaluation of their Year 12 progress. In summary, the questions in this study were centred on five specific themes.

- a) The first theme concentrated on academic material. Students were asked to provide information about general observations on their Year 12 course. All questions were open-ended but prompts such as workloads and subject choices were suggested topics for discussion.
- b) This theme focused on a self-evaluation of their progress. They were asked to explain how they viewed their current progress, how they had found their second year of the course compared with their first year and if they had any specific comments to make concerning their own workloads, subject choices or academic results (as judged from recent trial exams).
- c) The third theme looked at extra-curricular activities. There was a series of questions concerning both the students“ friendship groups and their extra commitments outside the academic domain.

d) The focus of this theme was on their future aspirations when they had left school.

It was anticipated that these students would be leaving school at the end of the year, so some of their reflection was aimed at evaluating their future prospects.

Questions in this area were trying to establish if they were intending (or not intending) to continue to study in the future and how firm these plans were.

e) This final theme related to the specific finding that emerged in Project 1, highlighting the role of peer networks in the decision-making process. Had, in fact, those being surveyed as Year 12 students, been approached for information or not by younger students, and what was the nature of the approach?

4. Method

The pastoral care group selected for this research project provided a respondent set of twelve students, roughly 10% of the year's cohort. The administrator of this pastoral care group and the students themselves were supportive of the research. Furthermore, the researcher had duties in this pastoral care group and therefore the opportunity for data collection could be arranged and administered without major disruption to the school routine. This group became the focus for the next two sets of questionnaires (the Year 11 Study and the Year 12 Study); it contained four students studying IB and eight students studying SACE.

It was established that all students in this group had persisted with their chosen course. There had been occasions where students had switched course, from IB to SACE or vice versa, part way through Year 11 and this situation could have affected survey responses, but this was not the situation in this case. It is important to recognise that the structure of the SACE course allows for former IB students to transfer to it relatively easily

throughout their Year 11. Their academic progress is not usually compromised and any administrative requirements can be addressed when they fulfil their Year 12. This degree of flexibility is not as apparent in the IB course. As the IB course is essentially a two-year module, where subjects are to be studied over the entire two years and much of the assessment is carried out at the end of the course, former SACE students wishing to transfer to the IB course must ideally do this within the first few weeks of the course.

The Year 11 questionnaire was completed when the students were at the end of their first year. It was carried out in the final weeks of term 4, 2003, at the Focus School. Before students were given the written questions, there was a preliminary group interview and discussion. On this occasion, students were presented with some of the findings from the survey they had participated in the year before, and invited to comment. From this process, for example, one student offered a practical explanation for the more influential role played by some mothers in course decision; he and many of his friends lived predominantly with their mothers rather than their fathers.

They were then encouraged to write down these and other personal observations in the first part of their questionnaire (see Appendix D). Of the total of twelve respondents, eight responses were returned, two from IB candidates and six from SACE students. Not all of the intended respondents had been present on the day designated for collection (for example, an IB student was away on a sporting trip and there was an absentee through illness) and several had requested extra time to finish their questionnaires. Hence, although the material was made available to all, four students failed to submit.

The Year 12 questionnaire was completed in Term 3 of 2004 (see Appendix E). This time was preferred, as the focus of the respondents' Term 4 studies was to be on their final exam preparations, where many students could choose to study off campus. Identical to the experience of the previous year, not all students were present on the day designated for data collection. Those absent were sent the relevant material. In the final breakdown, nine students responded to this survey and of the nine responses, four were studying the IB course and five were studying the SACE course.

Some questions were designed to elicit responses involving specific factual detail. Others, requiring introspection and personal reflection, were open-ended in structure. As many of the questions required evaluations or judgements to be made by the students, the data was analysed by a qualitative approach.

The following sections record the findings from these two studies.

5. Data Analysis

The table below presents a compilation of the elements that comprise the data of this longitudinal study.

Table ii.1 ELEMENTS THAT COMPRISE THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY

YEAR	STUDY	IB/ SACE	THEMES	TOTAL Respondents
11 (2003)	YEAR 11	2 IB 6 SACE	a) Elaboration of 2002 survey responses b) Evaluative comments on the chosen course c) Views of the alternative course d) Effectiveness of course advice	8
12 (2004)	YEAR 12	4 IB 5 SACE	a) Year 12 Course assessment b) Self-assessment of academic progress c) Extra-curricular activities d) Future aspirations e) Older students as advisors	9

In general terms, the data analysis for each study was undertaken in two stages. The first summarised the responses of each individual respondent against the themes mentioned above. The second analysed the data in a more holistic way across the group of respondents and identified the elements or trends that were of interest or significance.

Summaries of the responses from both studies were documented in a series of figures, from which observations and conclusions were then drawn. For convenience, IB respondents were listed before SACE respondents.

5.1 Year 11 Study: Summary of responses

5.1.1 Case 1: (IB Candidate)

- a) *On 2002 survey results.* This student was initially surprised that mothers had had an influence on their son's decisions. He then continued by confirming he had indeed sought advice from older students. He rated it as a significant feature in his decision-making; „these are the people who are exactly like us but a year ahead, it's one of the first things I did.“ He did not seek advice from his family as he had always wanted to do the IB.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- This student found the year demanding academically, particularly in the later stages of the year. It meant therefore giving up two of his previous commitments so that he could focus on his study. The student did point out that there was a difference between how hard the course was and how much time it took to do work. He explained that the IB did not seem as hard as he was told „as long as you are not afraid to work“. While the content was not too difficult, it would appear that the requirements were more time consuming.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- He had found that History was more demanding particularly in the area of detail than at Year 10. He did not change this subject selection though he contemplated that Economics might have been a better choice.
- Neither SACE nor IB were essential to his career prospects but he commented, „I like the hard road to help my learning and organisational skills.“ The perception for this student was that the IB course was offering more than simply content that he was interested in but was providing him with a particular approach that he saw as beneficial to his development.
- The prospect of exams helped this student to realise how much work had actually been covered in a relatively short period of time. From this he predicted that next year’s pace would be harder still and there was not much time left.
- Although his friendship group had changed a little, it was the need to curtail his socialising time for study that had brought about that particular change. He commented that he always intended to see his friends out of the classroom, so that the maintenance of a friendship group was not going to be dependent on course choice. He had accepted that „time changes many things; you’ve got to learn to go with it.“
- While there was an acceptance that the nature of the course was „demanding“ there was an advantage in having relatively small classes, „you attain a much higher level of understanding of the subjects“.

c) *On alternative course.* When commenting on the workload of the SACE students, several points were made. In his opinion, this student believed that the SACE course was less work. It is significant that he did not claim it was easier and furthermore he stated „how much work the SACE boys do varies, it depends how well they want to do.“ He did ruefully suggest that sometimes he even wished that he had done SACE as he thought that from a „practical“ point of view a high TER could possibly still be achieved „with the least effort.“ He based this on the fact that his SACE friends did not appear to be doing much work, had chosen subjects where the formal demands were not as prescriptive and also appeared to have „a lot of leisure time, stress the „a lot“.“ He stated that he was more secure in his knowledge about the IB and what happened in the course. He could not make a judgement about the SACE course. He concluded, „I guess the final exams will tell the tale.“

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
If you get mostly As and Bs in Year 10, do IB.	None. It's just something you have to stumble through yourself.
If you aren't afraid to work, do the IB.	
You will not get as much time to socialise as in Year 10.	

5.1.2 Case 2: (IB candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* This student was not at all surprised by the conclusions of any of the 2002 survey findings. He didn't really consider that they affected him in any way.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- The student judged that overall the expectations of the course were generally met, although individual subject demands had tended to be greater than anticipated.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- The subject choices the student made for this course were on the whole good and he was pleased with the course's contents, although the observation was made that Maths was much harder and the level of analysis of English textual study was too deep. There was no mention as to whether this was a result owing to a difference between the Higher or Standard Level of subject, though at Year 11, this would not likely to be so marked. It may reflect the difference between the move from Year 10 to Year 11.
- There were no factors of this course having a direct impact on a career choice for this student.
- The student viewed the prospect of the upcoming exams as a good indication of the work level required to succeed in this course. He summed this up in a single word „more!“.
- He saw the move to the IB course as presenting the opportunity of making additional friends in the new mix of IB classes.
- The workload he maintained had its phases. At times the load wasn't „too much“ but then the work could „pile up“. Also there was the additional requirement of the extra curricula activities that the IB demanded.

c) *On alternative course.* There was recognition from this student that the alternative SACE course also had its phases with regards workloads, but it was assumed that SACE „wasn't quite as much“. This view was gained from talking to friends and comparing what was being done. Further, the extra compulsory elements of the IB course were cited again as placing other demands on the IB candidates.

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
Be prepared for change and the added work.	Be prepared to spend more time doing the work.
It's do-able but keep up with the work.	Late nights might be required.

5.1.3 Case 3: (SACE candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* The student found the findings helpful and suggested that they should be discussed during pastoral care time or be presented to all Year 10 students. He confirmed that the findings were relevant to his situation.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- The workload had been reasonable and as expected.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- The student was happy with his subject choices, particularly Legal Studies which, while chosen without prior knowledge, he had found the content interesting and practical.
- There were no career aspects affecting his choice.
- He viewed the exams as „a good yardstick for next year“, although did not explain whether this meant that the results were indicative of his potential marks or a guide to the level of study he had done.
- There had been no real change in his friendship group. He simply saw many of his SACE friends in class, but saw his IB friends outside the classroom.
- The workload was assessed as reasonable.

c) *On alternative course.* The student declared that the IB course workload was probably more and this was ascertained from talking to older boys who had been most helpful with their advice.

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
Do Legal Studies - it is worthwhile.	Gain as much specific information about each subject.

5.1.4 Case 4: (SACE candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* This student reported that the findings were generally as expected although he was of the opinion that friends would have an effect on the choice of subjects students might select. He also added that as he knew what course he wanted to do early, the information about course choice hadn't been representative of his circumstances.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- The student found that the course was largely what he had expected but that it was more difficult to combine his sporting commitment with the academic demands.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- Maths was found to be harder than expected and he found that it was a mistake to continue with French. He intended to change to Accounting. He was pleasantly surprised with his History results.
- As this student knew what he wanted to do there were no further details relevant to his career this year.
- The exams were seen by this student of how his study went during the year and further as a guide to anticipate how next year might unfold.
- Friendships groups had not greatly changed. However this statement was qualified. The level of respect that he had for individual friends had changed, in that he had observed that various individuals were maturing.
- His workload was assessed as „fairly easy“ except during the time prior to exams.

c) *On alternative course.* His impressions of the alternative IB course indicated that he saw that IB students work „incredibly hard and deserve the marks they get“. The evidence for this was derived by observing older siblings who had done the IB, and from talking to all siblings in the family where both IB and SACE were done.

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
The most useful advice came from older siblings who had done one or the other of the courses.	N/A
The advice was not simply about the academic side of each course, but about managing such things as sport.	N/A

5.1.5 Case 5: (SACE candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* The student was not really surprised at the numbers who attended the course information nights and so on, but was surprised by some of the influences affecting choice. No specific details were given, however. The student was neither directly influenced by all the material presented in Year 10 nor by his friends or family, as he simply chose the subjects that he liked and was good at. These fell in the SACE area.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- SACE was chosen because the student did not want to do any language. Some of his coursework was better than he had anticipated.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- On the whole, the subject choices were good but the student intended changing one of them the following year.
- The student was still unsure about the nature of his career, so subjects were chosen to maximise his chances of a good score.
- The exams were seen to have a variety of purposes. They were to be used to measure what had been done, to be used to „see if I will cope next year“ and finally to be used to direct his learning toward the subjects that he wants to pursue next year.
- On the issue of friendships, the following quotation sums up the situation succinctly, „Because we are friends, subjects does [sic] not have an effect on our groups and friends.“
- The workload was viewed overall as „pretty high and demanding“. Furthermore there was clarification. Mention was made that the level of work depended on the nature of individual subjects and varied in subjects regarding the time.

c) *On alternative course.* There were no comments upon the workload of the alternative course.

d) *On course advice.* There were no comments made on the issue of advice.

5.1.6 Case 6: (SACE candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* This student was very surprised at how many IB candidates there were. He was not at all surprised that students did not necessarily opt for the same course as their friends. As he put it, „Less boys follow their friends“ choices these days“.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- SACE was chosen because this student wanted „more free time to continue music, sport and [a] social life“. The first year of the course was seen as a relatively easy year with the work not being too demanding. There was, however, the admission by the student that „[I] have had to be much more organised than last year [Year 10] to keep up with subjects“.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- It was also observed that the opportunity to do Stage 2 subjects early was a positive factor.* This student was doing this and was confident that he would score well. He was pleased that in the past his subject strengths were in Science and Maths and that he had „excelled“ in these subjects in the current year. This comment was expressed to suggest that his past academic history seemed to have translated well into his current year and course. This had inspired in him a degree of confidence that he had made some good choices. Further, he had identified that his weakest subject area was English. He had

obviously worked very hard in this area and reported that this was his „biggest turnaround“.

- With compulsory work experience completed, this had „cemented“ his decision to pursue medicine as a career.
- With exams looming the student felt that the exams would really test how effective his revision program had been.
- This student reported that he had spent less time with his old friends who were doing the IB course, but he had much better friendships with the SACE students in his subject choice. Overall he felt that the friends in his pastoral care group were still very close regardless of the IB/SACE arrangement.
- His workload was assessed as small to medium and he commented that he averaged 1.25 hours homework a night.

c) *On alternative course.* He reported being told that the IB boys were behind in their work and had too much homework. This was further verified by his personal experiences. He also reported that the first year doing the SACE course had proved easier than described by the older students.

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
That he could choose to accelerate a number of SACE courses, for example, music and languages and complete these Stage 2 subjects early.	He has found that university entry into interstate universities have differing models throughout Australia. That subject choice in SACE is critical. IB subject requirements seem to fit entry standards better.

*Researcher’s comment: Traditionally SACE has been divided into two years of study, the first year’s coursework subjects are referred to as Stage 1 subjects, while the second year’s subjects are referred to as Stage 2. It is possible at the Focus School to accelerate students allowing them to complete their course requirement earlier. This has long been a working practicality, and there is a history of successful acceleration in SACE. To some degree there is also an expectation each year that a number of SACE students will take their SACE exams a year early. In the IB course, the School does not have the same history with regard to acceleration. The IBO has two exam periods each year, (May and November). Students have taken exams earlier in their final year but this has often been forced because of a student’s subject choices or the fact that the number of candidates was so few in a particular subject that that subject was only examined in May, when there was a higher number of candidates in the Northern hemisphere.

5.1.7 Case 7: (SACE candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* This student was surprised by a particular finding relating to parental influence. He felt that fathers would have „even less of a role“ than recorded in the large survey. Upon investigation it was revealed that this student’s father was not living in the household and that discussions relating to subjects and courses were carried out with his mother.

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- The student felt that the expectations for the year had been met and he was convinced that the experience of Year 11 was a good preparation not only for Year 12 but also beyond.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- While happy with the subject choice, the workload had been more demanding in Geography and therefore this had put pressure on other subjects. This was balanced however by the comment that because he was enjoying the subject, the material was „easy“.
- The student was intending to pursue a career in the hospitality industry, but admitted that no subjects he was studying were directly applicable to his career path in any specific or practical way.
- The exams were important for this student as he was focused on doing well. The exams were also valued by this student as laying a good foundation for his Year 12 studies. The student admitted that the obligation to succeed or fail was on himself. „I personally feel if I fail I only fail myself.“
- There was no report of friendship groups being changed in any way. In fact there was an admission that the friends were more actively involved in supporting „the struggles all friends go through during this time“.
- The workload was assessed as being „a little harder than last year“. This however was not blamed on the increasing demands of the course subjects but on the fact that the student „didn't study last year“, something he now regrets.

c) *On alternative course.* There was no opinion formed by this student regarding the alternative course as he simply did not know about what was involved to comment.

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
Nothing specific.	The subject choice is very important. The choice should be made based upon what you prefer to do.

5.1.8 Case 8: (SACE candidate)

a) *On 2002 survey results.* This student reported that many of the findings were relevant to his situation and that he could „associate with them“. The particular finding which resonated with him was, as he described it, „my Mum was more of an influence on my subjects than my Dad.“

b) *On chosen course*

General expectations:

- The student reported that the subjects he had chosen met expectations, but that this was not surprising as „course summaries [and] friends told me what to expect.“ One reference was added concerning the expectation of workloads. The student had expected a higher level of work overall but acknowledged that „this fluctuated throughout the year“.

Specific expectations: Subjects, career, exams, friendships, workloads.

- There was a statement that the subjects now being undertaken were simply a continuation of Year 10 material and that substantially there was no real change in workload.
- There was an element of dissatisfaction registered by this student. He could not „see what I learn being used in many areas later in life.“ There was no evidence of him having settled on any specific career path.
- The student again responded with an air of disillusionment. While stating that there was often a strong correlation between term grades and exam results, he admitted that the looming exams were not likely to produce good results as his term grades had not been as high as he would have liked. He was therefore not going to use his exams as an indicator/predictor of the following year’s progress.
- His choice of course had produced a change in friendship group. This was not viewed at all in a negative way. In fact he was clear in stating that he hadn’t „swapped groups“. The reality was that he now knew more people, that the group had become larger. The different people in his classes meant that he had interacted with other people, too.
- The issue of workloads produced a series of quite detailed responses. Initially the student had reported that he had expected the workload to be higher. Then he mentioned that fluctuations in the level of workload were evident, somewhat frustratingly so. Finally he admitted that the fluctuations were drastic and occurred „for no apparent reason“. Work varied from assignments required in a single subject to multiple test/assignments expected to be completed within the week.

- c) *On alternative course.* For all these frustrations though, he reported that in the IB program not only were there „harder standards on the same subjects“ but there was a „higher workload“ too. He had reached this conclusion by listening to people talking about their courses and „looking at some of their tests/assignments“.

d) *On course advice*

Useful advice prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
No matter how hard the chosen course may be, „good time-management“ will help you.	Many of the subjects done at Year 11 and 12 assume knowledge from previous years, particularly in the Sciences.
„If you break large tasks down into smaller ones they become a lot more achievable“.	„It is important to do well from the beginning because it makes it much easier.“

5.2 Year 11 Study: Data analysis by theme

5.2.1 Elaboration of 2002 survey responses

In this section of the survey, students were asked to respond to a variety of findings that had emerged from the 2002 survey. They were presented with a series of graphs from Project 1. They were firstly asked to describe their reaction to the findings and then to evaluate how these matched their own situation. The questions were entirely open-ended and no prompts were provided in order to leave students free to respond to material which they felt important to them. As such, the responses in this area were of a very general nature, though highly personal in judgement. There were no obvious differences in the substance of the responses between the IB and SACE students. Each student tended to interpret the information in a way peculiar to his own situation.

Figure ii. 1 OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES TO 2002 RESULTS n=8

CASE	Reaction to Project 1 findings.	Accuracy to own situation.
1 IB	Older student input was significant.	Some accuracy though overall not that relevant as always for IB.
2 IB	No surprise with data.	Some accuracy though overall not that relevant.
3 SACE	Useful to be presented to Year 10.	Relevant.
4 SACE	Surprised that friends hadn't more influence.	Some accuracy though overall not that relevant as always for SACE.
5 SACE	Some surprises, no specifics given.	Family/friends had little influence. Played to his likes and strengths.
6 SACE	Surprised at how many chose IB Agreed that friends had less influence.	Did SACE for greater free time to pursue other interests. Could accelerate Stage 2 SACE subjects.
7 SACE	Surprised that fathers were not less influential.	Commented that his father did not live with him.
8 SACE	Many of the findings resonated.	His mother was the greater influence on subject choice.

When the 2002 survey findings were presented to the focus group, students' responses ranged from those who totally agreed with the findings and found them relevant to their situation to those who found the findings were generally as expected though they had thrown up some surprises. These surprises tended to revolve around the extent to which others had influenced student's decision-making.

One factor which permeated the responses was the authoritative tone used by many of the respondents to assert that, regardless of the process, they had essentially chosen their own course. Three such examples are as follows; „My friends didn’t really have an influence, neither did Mum nor Dad, I did what I liked and [was] good at“ and „I was very set on what I was doing from an early stage“ and finally, „My parents had no involvement, I always wanted to do the IB“. Furthermore, no evidence was gained from the responses to suggest that the decision-making was in any way arbitrary or token, unlike the student quoted in the Introduction (Example 2, p.4) who had tossed a coin when the deliberations proved too difficult. In the limited area designated for the response to theme a, it was usual to find that consideration and reflection had been given to the responses.

While **Figure ii. 1** recorded the written responses to the survey findings, during this data collection opportunity, the students also responded orally to the findings during the introductory discussion before they completed the questionnaire. Some of their anecdotal observations shed further light on the overall responses from Project 1. These general comments or statements were made about the roles of family and friends in the decision-making process or the place of potential career choice.

When shown the graphs about family influence on course choice, students announced, occasionally vehemently, that they had been the ones who had made the course choice. After being asked to offer their explanation why mothers might have a larger influence over fathers, if there were a record of any parental influence, one student explained that since a number of his peers lived primarily with their mothers, as he did himself, it was with the primary residential parent that this type of conversation tended to take place.

While it was confirmed in the data analysis of Project 1 that siblings did have some influence over course selection (seven students reported that this was very strong), the nature of this influence was not specified. One of the students of this pastoral care group had three older brothers and articulated some of the thinking behind sibling influence which was also echoed by other respondents. His comments revealed that the influence could be direct or indirect, through observation or actually communicated advice. Some students had seen the workloads of their siblings in one or the other course and as a result were persuaded either for or against the same course. Thus the influence also could act in a positive or a negative direction, varying from a casual recommendation to an emphatic advisement. While some students were told bluntly by their sibling/s not to do a particular course, others were positively encouraged to do the same course. The remarks of a number of students recognised that their siblings had different interests, work habits and innate intelligence and that no real comparisons could be drawn.

Another area that provoked a deal of commentary was the role of friends and their influence, particularly since there seemed to be a mismatch between the high incidence of friends selecting a similar course and the lack of reporting of any recognised influence from friends over that course choice. This phenomenon was teased out further when it was observed by one student that he and his friends tended to share similar interests and therefore, by association, groups of friends were more likely to choose similar courses; their interest in the content of subjects was similar.

The final issue was related to the link between course choice and career. These Year 11 students seemed to view their course as a means to the next stage of their lives, that is, they held a short term view of the opportunity afforded by their course results. Many

had still to select definitively a particular career option so that their main priority seemed simply to keep their tertiary options open.

5.2.2 Evaluative comments on the chosen course

5.2.2.1 General expectations

In the survey itself, several questions were designed so that students could evaluate the first year of their chosen course. Their general responses are catalogued below.

Figure ii.2 EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: GENERAL EXPECTATIONS n=9

CASE	General expectations of the first year and any implications.
1 IB	Academically demanding, particularly towards the end of year. Not that hard, rather time-consuming. Given up two previous commitments to concentrate on study.
2 IB	Overall expectations of the course were met, though individual subject demands tended to be greater than anticipated.
3 SACE	Workload both reasonable and as expected.
4 SACE	Workload largely as expected, though difficult to combine sporting commitment with academic demands.
5 SACE	SACE was the choice as the student did not want to study a language, Some coursework better than expected.
6 SACE	SACE was chosen as student wanted more time. The first year was relatively easy, though the next year would need greater organisation.
7 SACE	Course expectations had been met and the Year 11 experience was seen as good preparation for Year 12 and beyond.
8 SACE	The subjects chosen had met expectations from course summaries and friends. There was an expectation that the workload would have been more but this fluctuated during the year.

The comments on **general expectations** revealed a difference between the IB and SACE candidates. Both IB respondents reported that their course was demanding academically. This was then qualified. The course curriculum was not necessarily hard but the workload was more time consuming, particularly the subject demands. For one student this had meant him giving up other commitments.

Most SACE respondents reported that their course had met or exceeded their expectations. One candidate did report that the balance between sport and study was

difficult, but unlike the IB counterpart, he had not resorted to giving anything up. Another candidate reported that he had more free time to pursue his other interests via the SACE option but admitted that his organisation skills needed honing.

5.2.2.2 Specific expectations - Subjects

Figure ii.3 EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: SUBJECT EXPECTATIONS n=8

CASE	Specific expectations of the first year re Subjects
1 IB	History was more demanding in detail from Year 10. No subject change occurred but it was hinted that Economics may have been a better choice
2 IB	Good choices made overall, although Maths was much harder and English textual analysis too deep.
3 SACE	Happy with subject choices, particularly Legal Studies. Though there was no prior knowledge the material was practical and interesting.
4 SACE	Maths harder than expected and to continue French was a mistake. He was going to change to Accounting. Pleased with History results.
5 SACE	On the whole, good subject choices for example Chemistry, though intended changing Resistant Materials next year.
6 SACE	Relatively easy year. In SACE there was an opportunity to accelerate Stage 2 subjects. Excelled in Maths and Science subjects in the current year. Confident as he had done well in his weakest subject-English.
7 SACE	Happy with subject choice, although workload demanding in Geography. Felt the pressure in other subjects but was enjoying the subject so the material was 'easy'.
8 SACE	All SACE subjects (Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Maths and English) were a continuation from Year 10. No real change in workload.

Of the **specific expectations** regarding **subjects**, the two IB candidates remarked that some subjects were more demanding than anticipated. There was specific mention made about the course content being harder in terms of „level of analysis“ and „in the area of detail“.

Throughout the comments made by the SACE students, the degree of flexibility offered in their course was obvious. There was recognition of a certain element of still experimenting with subject choices in these SACE year 11 students. One student had opted for a subject of which he had no prior knowledge and was happy with the choice. Another had persisted with a foreign language but had decided to switch this choice

later. A third student also recorded intending to change his subject combination, while a fourth was pleased that he could accelerate his study and sit some of his exams a year in advance. This could be done at Year 11 level easily within the structure of the SACE course without unduly compromising final Year 12 results. This degree of flexibility was not apparent in the responses for the IB students.

While both IB candidates inferred an increase in their workload from Year 10, this was not the scenario reported by the SACE students. In fact, one student claimed that subjects „were simply a continuation of Year 10 and that there was no real change in workload“.

5.2.2.3 Specific expectations - Careers

Figure ii.4 EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: CAREER EXPECTATIONS n=8

CASE	Specific expectations of the first year re Careers
1 IB	Neither course essential for career, in fact SACE would have been easier. IB course offering more than content. 'I like the hard road to help my learning and organisation skills'.
2 IB	No factors of this course directly affecting career choice.
3 SACE	No career aspects affecting choice.
4 SACE	Has decided on career, not obviously linked to course choice.
5 SACE	The student is unsure about career, so subject choice planned to maximise chances of a good TER score.
6 SACE	Work experience had cemented career choice in Medicine.
7 SACE	Student intended career in hospitality industry, no subjects directly applicable to career path.
8 SACE	Student registered dissatisfaction about relevance of subject material in general. No evidence of a career decision.

Two students were unsure as to their **career** aspirations, so their course choice was not contingent upon this. Two more students registered the fact that few/none of the subjects they were studying had any direct link to later life as they saw it. All remaining students reported that their choice of course was not directly relevant to their career path. In fact there was an observation made by one candidate that neither IB nor SACE were

essential to his career prospects. While the question in this part of the survey was designed to elicit information of a practical nature, one observation was quite instructive in its wider evaluation. The comment was made that while the choice of course was not critical for any future pathway, for this student, „the IB course was offering more than simply a content“, it was providing him with a particular approach.

The thread of the discussion in this area seemed to suggest that these Year 11 students did not see any clear link between course choice and career but rather the link was between subject choice and good results, leaving specific career options open.

5.2.2.4 Specific expectations - Exams

Figure ii.5 EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: EXAM EXPECTATIONS n=8

CASE	Specific expectations of the first year re Exams
1 IB	Prospect of exams assisted in an evaluation of how much work had been done and informed the student about potential work for the next year.
2 IB	Prospect of exams a good indication of work level ('more!') required to succeed in the course.
3 SACE	Exams seen as 'good yardstick for next year'.
4 SACE	Exams seen as review of past study and guide for next year's study.
5 SACE	Variety of purposes, to measure what had been done, to see if the student could cope next year and to direct his subject choice for Year 12.
6 SACE	Test the effectiveness of the student's revision program.
7 SACE	Exams were seen as part of the student's focus on doing well and would lay the foundations for Year 12.
8 SACE	Disillusioned about approaching exam term grades were disappointing. Not using his exams as indicator for following year's progress.

Seven out of the eight respondents viewed the approaching **exams** in a positive light. This had very little to do with any „enjoyment“ in the process, but rather with the recognition that the exams would reveal something about the students“ progress. Mentions were made that the exams provided an opportunity to evaluate the amount of work that had been covered, to indicate the level of work required to succeed, to give

guidance about potential marks for the following year, to assess how effective a student's study/revision was and to direct more keenly a student's learning.

The eighth student admitted that, as he had not performed well throughout the term anyway, he was not going to use his exam results as an accurate indicator of future success. As SACE students usually reduced their subject load from six to five subjects and often had different teachers as they moved from Year 11 to Year 12, these new variables could have an impact upon student progress.

There was no evidence that either course was seen as more advantageous over the other, in the readiness for or the process of completing the exams. Generally the opinions of students from both courses were very similar. They reflected, in reality, a school group which was used to being assessed formally by exams and had learned from this to reflect constructively on such performance measures.

5.2.2.5 Specific expectations - Friendships

Figure ii.6 EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: FRIENDSHIP EXPECTATIONS n=8

CASE	Specific expectations of the first year re Friendships.
1 IB	The friendship group had changed a little due to a decrease in socialising time. This student had tended to see his friends outside the classroom; therefore this was not course dependent.
2 IB	The move to the IB was an opportunity to make additional friends.
3 SACE	No real change in friendship group. Saw SACE friends in class, IB friends outside the classroom.
4 SACE	No real change in the friendship group; however, respect for individuals within that group had changed. This was related to maturity levels.
5 SACE	'Because we are friends, subjects does[sic] not have an effect on our groups and friends.'
6 SACE	This student spent less time with his IB friends, better friendships with SACE students. The friends in his pastoral care group were still very close regardless of the IB/SACE split.
7 SACE	No report on change to friendship group. Commented that friends were more active in offering support.
8 SACE	There was a change to the friendship group. He hadn't ' <i>swapped groups</i> ' but he now knew more people and the friendship group had become larger.

As a consequence of an earlier case history of a student who cited his desire to remain with his **friendship** group as the reason for switching from the course he initially chose to the alternate course, it was decided to investigate the weight that friendship ties had on the decision-making process. Only 4% of students in the 2002 Year 10 survey stated that their friends had had a strong influence over their course choice, yet many students also reported doing the same course as their friends. As reported earlier (5.2.1), one student had a simple explanation for this; he and his friends were doing the same course simply because, as friends, they tended to like the same things.

The comments of this Year 11 pastoral care group supported the conclusion that a particular friendship group was not a significant element in choosing a particular course. Of the eight students, five reported that the course options introduced at Year 11 level had brought little or no change to their friendship groups, while the remaining three students reported some change. The nature of this change was quite varied, however, and the students' reflections on this issue revealed a level of discernment and introspection that was not anticipated. No student seemed disappointed or concerned about his current circumstances regarding friendship groups. As these students were in the final years of their secondary schooling it appeared that their friendship groups were quite well-established and secure already. The fact that the friendship groups were reported in this group as relatively stable, inclusive and cohesive mitigated the fear of such course factions developing.

Five students (Case 1, IB and Cases 3,4,5,7, all SACE) reported little or no change in their friendship group. There was evidence, however, in their comments of awareness that the Year 11 study demands were having some effect on the pattern of activities

among friends. The need to curtail socialising because of study commitments; seeing friends from the same course in class and from the other course out of class; changes in the nature of the relationship with greater respect and/or more support for one another, were all aspects of friendship which were mentioned.

Of the three students who reported change, two students (Case 2, IB and Case 8, SACE) said that their friendship group had widened with the addition of new friends, which was viewed as a positive outcome. The final student (Case 6, SACE) reported that although he saw his IB friends less than his SACE friends, he was still very close to all his friends, both IB and SACE, in his pastoral care group.

Although the views expressed by the respondents provided little evidence of friends being a decisive factor in course choice, the range and thoughtfulness of these students' responses clearly exemplified how important to them were the friendships which they had built up over their school years. The high value of school friendships was a key finding in the study of senior students in a co-educational boarding school in another Australian state (White, 2004).

5.2.2.6 Specific expectations - Workloads

Figure ii.7 EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS n=8

CASE	Specific expectations of the first year re Workloads.
1 IB	There was a trade-off between the demanding workload and small classes.
2 IB	Workload had phases. There were more additional requirements.
3 SACE	Reasonable.
4 SACE	'Fairly easy' except prior to exams.
5 SACE	'Pretty high and demanding', though the level of work and time spent depended on the nature of individual subjects.
6 SACE	Small to medium workload with homework averaging about 1.25 hours per night.
7 SACE	'A little harder than last year'. Not because of the year's demands but the fact that the student didn't study last year.
8 SACE	Expectation of a higher workload though the level fluctuated. These fluctuations could be frustrating.

Both IB candidates were quite clear that their **workload** was demanding, particularly as it involved coursework as well as other requirements (TOK, CAS and EE) but this judgement was qualified. One student appreciated that his relatively small classes compensated for the demands as he felt his comprehension of subject matter was better. The second student said that the demands were cyclical.

The SACE responses were more definite in their comments about their workload. These ranged from fairly easy to excessively high, with more at the easy, reasonable end of the continuum. As these students were doing a markedly different range of subjects and were being assessed in a variety of different ways, this probably says more about individual students and their subjects than it does about the nature of the two courses.

Mention of the fluctuating nature of workloads was common to students of both courses and the experience of the pressures of their course workload was tied to their ability to manage these fluctuations.

5.2.3 Views on the alternative course

The purpose of this theme was to explore a student's response to the course he had not chosen, with particular regard to the workload. He was encouraged to document any observations he had made about his peers who had opted for the alternative course.

Figure ii.8 VIEWS ON THE ALTERNATIVE COURSE n=8

CASE	Views of the alternative course.
1 IB	SACE course less work, though 'how much work the SACE boys do varies, it depends how well they want to do.' Perhaps more practical to do SACE, could achieve a high TER 'with the least effort'. SACE students seem to have more leisure time.
2 IB	While SACE workload has its phases, the student regards it still as less. Has discussed this with friends. Extra compulsory IB elements made further demands.
3 SACE	IB workload probably more after talking to older boys when seeking advice.
4 SACE	IB students work incredibly hard and deserve their results. Had observed this from older siblings who had done both IB and SACE.
5 SACE	No comments
6 SACE	IB had pressure to keep up with their work and they had too much homework. Learnt this from personal experience. Found that the first year of SACE had been easier than suggested by older students.
7 SACE	Did not feel in a position to comment on the other course.
8 SACE	Saw the IB as being harder in content as well as higher in workload. Learnt this from listening to others and also from comparing test and assignment material.

Of the eight students surveyed, two SACE students chose not to make any response, but this was qualified by one student who reported that he simply did not know enough to comment about the nature of the alternate course. One IB candidate judged the SACE course as requiring less work, though he was at pains to point out that this did not mean the course content was any easier. This conclusion was reached as he observed his SACE friends appearing to have more leisure time and less formal work demands. The second IB candidate inferred that any comparison was difficult as the workloads in both courses had different phases. He assessed the SACE workload as being somewhat less after talking to friends, comparing content and evaluating that the IB compulsory elements were more demanding.

The four remaining students, all SACE candidates, responded that they felt the IB workload was harder. That they had arrived at the same conclusion was of interest, but what was more noteworthy was the variety of sources from which evidence for this was derived. These included details supplied by older students, observations of older siblings, the overhearing of IB students complaining about their level of homework and the pressures to keep up with the work, and gleaning this from a scrutiny of IB test and assignment contents. The diversity in the ways they collected their information, the import these carried and the judgements so made, reflected their sophisticated discernment as consumers.

In theory, the IB requirements with an extra subject and a demanding suite of other compulsory components placed demands on IB candidates that might not have been experienced by SACE students, who in Year 12 were generally studying five subjects. In practice, the cautionary words of the IB candidate who maintained that „how much work the SACE boys do varies, it depends how well they want to do“ should be seen as significant. Furthermore, while the discussion of workloads was an important factor in assisting students to select a course, this related only to academic requirements. Course workloads needed to be balanced with extra and co-curricular demands for each student. One trend that emerged from the research was that while a number referred to the idea that a student needed to have the capacity to handle the IB workload, the ability for any student to manage and organise his time was going to have a significant impact on his success, regardless of the course choice.

5.2.4 Effectiveness of course advice

This theme was introduced to evaluate the advice students received or would have found useful as they embarked on their IB or SACE courses. This section of the survey was non-directional and designed to elicit responses that were relevant to each individual student. The material presented by each student in this section varied greatly in a number of areas. Some of the advice was general, other advice detailed and specific. The table below pools all the comments from each of the eight cases surveyed in Year 11 Study.

Figure ii.9 COMMENTS ON ADVICE ON CHOSEN COURSE n=8

CASE	Useful advice gained prior to course	Advice that would have been useful
1 IB	If you get mostly As and Bs in Year 10, do IB. If you aren't afraid to work, do the IB. You will not get as much time to socialise as in Year 10.	None. It's just something you have to stumble through yourself.
2 IB	Be prepared for change and the added work. It's do-able but keep up with the work.	Be prepared to spend more time doing the work. Late nights might be required.
3 SACE	Do Legal Studies it is worthwhile.	Gain as much specific information about each subject.
4 SACE	The most useful advice came from older siblings who had done one or the other of the courses. The advice was not simply about the academic side of each course, but about managing such things as sport.	N/A
5 SACE	No Comments.	
6 SACE	That he could choose to accelerate a number of SACE courses, for example, music and languages and complete these Stage 2 subjects early.	He has found that university entry into interstate universities have differing models throughout Australia. That subject choice in SACE is critical. IB subject requirements seem to fit entry standards better.
7 SACE	Nothing specific.	The subject choice is very important. The choice should be made based upon what you prefer to do.
8 SACE	No matter how hard the chosen course may be, 'good time-management' will help you. 'If you break large tasks down into smaller ones they become a lot more achievable'.	Many of the subjects done at Year 11 and 12 assume knowledge from previous years, particularly in the Sciences. 'It is important to do well from the beginning because it makes it much easier.'

One focus of the comments here revolved around subject choice. Some students advocated particular subjects, for example Legal Studies, or the chance to accelerate in certain subjects, while others mentioned advice on being well informed about each subject first, or basing choice on personal preferences. Another warned that it was essential to choose subjects that were compatible with tertiary entrance requirements. Not many students referred directly to the IB/SACE choice, but were more preoccupied with the very practical and real processes at work within their chosen course.

Another focus was on the management of the coursework. It was apparent that the advice given or received in this area applied equally to IB or SACE candidates. Students reported the need to face added workloads, to be prepared for late nights, decreased time for socialising, and managing not only the academic side but sporting commitments and such. Students also offered, or were offered, a variety of coping strategies, for example, breaking down large tasks into smaller ones, the importance of starting well, and keeping on top of the work. It was clear that this information was derived from a variety of sources, students *in situ*, siblings, and school and university course handbooks, teacher and subject counselling advice. Again, the responses from this section of the questionnaire revealed little difference between the SACE or IB courses. The ideas presented could have been relevant to candidates of either course.

Thus, with the descriptions of how they found their Year 11 coursework and reflections on how they coped with their year in general as a backdrop, these students were surveyed again during their final year, as Year 12 IB or SACE students.

5.3 Year 12 Study: Summary of responses

For the Year 12 Study, there were four IB respondents and five SACE respondents, all drawn from the same pastoral care group as the Year 11 Study. This was the third successive year these students had been surveyed and this final, mainly open-ended questionnaire, revealed that they had developed the capacity to answer in more idiosyncratic ways. Each of the nine responses has been summarised on a case by case basis, with a subsequent collective analysis and discussion of the responses. The discussion of both has been organised under the five themes elaborated in 3:

- a) Assessment of the Year 12 course
- b) Self-assessment of academic progress
- c) Extra-curricular activities
- d) Future aspirations
- e) Older students as advisors

As each respondent was anonymous, there was no correlation between the numbering of the cases in the Year 11 or Year 12 Studies. Respondents were again clustered under IB or SACE categories for ease of identifying any emerging trends.

5.3.1 Case 1: (IB Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* When comparing the current year with the previous one, the student felt comfortable that the expectations of his course were being met. He felt that the level of work was not as demanding as the previous year, but he reported greater pressure on him to succeed. There was also an acknowledgement that his social life was good. He stated that IB was demanding but that time management was the key. He was of the opinion that a „20“ (the top mark for an individual subject) in SACE was harder to achieve than a „7“ (the top mark for an individual subject) in IB.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* The student had maintained his subject choices from the previous year and had no specific comments to make in this regard. He was satisfied with his progress and was now, at this stage of the course, well aware of how much work was to be done and what areas he should focus on.

- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- His friendship group had not changed during this final year. The continual work made it harder to socialise „with anyone but my existing friends“.
 - This student had played sport all year for the school and had also taken flying lessons outside of school. These demands had had an impact upon his academic workload. He did equate less time with his performances being lower than he had hoped but there was no suggestion that he forgo these activities.
- d) *Future aspirations*. He was intending to apply to the University of Adelaide to undertake a double degree in Aero-engineering and Physics.
- e) *Older students as advisors*. This student had been asked about his course. This had been done informally by a few younger students.

5.3.2 Case 2: (IB Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment*. The student was reasonably pleased how the year was progressing although he explained that there were some occasions which were „somewhat tough“. The workload had increased particularly with regard to the number of final assessments due but this was considered „not too bad“. His conclusion was „IB isn“t that hard as people say... some patches of large work, otherwise not too bad and wrapped up by the end of term 3.“
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress*. The student felt that in hindsight he would have changed some subjects, switching to „easier“ ones. He had identified some of his own weak areas earlier and found that his recent results supported his conclusions. He was confident that his results would allow him entry into his preferred tertiary course.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- This student“s friendship group had remained fairly constant, although he did report getting to know a few other students more, simply because they shared classes.
 - His commitment outside the classroom in his final year was very similar to the previous year. In fact he had taken up another interest and felt that none of this had had any impact upon his academic workload.
- d) *Future aspirations*. He was quite specific about his future aspirations and was intending to apply to the University of Adelaide to study a double degree in Maths/Computer Science and Engineering.
- e) *Older students as advisors*. This student reported that he had not been asked for any course advice.

5.3.3 Case 3: (IB Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* The amount of work needed to succeed had met this student's expectations. He also wrote that while the work was demanding it was „do-able“. One observation about the year was that it was more enjoyable than first anticipated „because all of your friends are also working towards the same goal and share the same ups and downs“. He also reported that „The IB is very rewarding if the effort is put into it“. He also felt the TER was favourable for IB candidates.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* The student shrewdly observed that he was not prepared to be satisfied with anything during the year- „until his goals were reached“. The trial exams that he had undertaken had revealed areas that needed more work and had provoked an admission that he wasn't afraid of the work he still had to do.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- While extra-curricular activities had kept him in contact with his existing friends, he had made unexpected friendships as well.
 - He had maintained his regular sporting commitments and this included the additional responsibility of being involved in an overseas sporting trip. These demands did have an impact upon his work, but as they were planned activities, „I had to make sure I caught up on the work I missed“.
- d) *Future aspirations.* The student intended to study a double degree in Law/Commerce at the University of Adelaide. He was aware that he needed a high TER to achieve this but had also decided on a contingency plan (a different degree course-Finance and Economics- at the same university) if he did not gain entry to his first preference.
- e) *Older students as advisors.* The student had been approached for information concerning his IB course. These approaches were intermittent, informal and centred predominantly on the demands of the IB course.

5.3.4 Case 4: (IB Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* The student reported that Year 12 had met his expectations even though there was much more hard work than in the previous year. While accepting that the work was harder, it was also recorded as being „enjoyable“.

- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* Although satisfied that all subjects were going well, there were some specific issues relating to exam preparation. The student was not confident about his ability to pace himself within the time limits of the exams. He had learnt much from his recent trial exams about the format of the exams and the styles of questions that he was likely to meet. His overwhelming concern, however, was a time management issue. The short term anxiety was that he would run short of revision time.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- The friendships of this student had not changed in Year 12 and as his friends were doing the same course, he had continued to mix with them throughout the IB program.
 - He did not pursue any extra commitments in his final year.
- d) *Future aspirations.* He was hoping to continue studying at tertiary level either at a local university or one interstate. He was interested in a double degree in Commerce/Engineering.
- e) *Older students as advisors.* This student had not advised any student about his course.

5.3.5 Case 5: (SACE Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* The student commented that Year 12 was „very hard and stressful work“, with particular reference to „trying to complete work by deadlines and moderation“. At the same time he stated that this had indeed been his expectation.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* The workload had changed from the previous year, in that it was deemed a „step up“, being „heavy and demanding“, though overall the student was satisfied with his progress. He felt that some of his subject choices could have been better but others he was really enjoying.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- There had only been a slight change in his friendship group this year when he had found that in Year 12 he had a wider range of people to talk to.
 - The student did not offer any further information on his extra commitments.
- d) *Future aspirations.* The student had decided that he would be taking the next year off, away from further study.
- e) *Older students as advisors.* This student had not been involved in any mentoring of younger students regarding course selection advice.

5.3.6 Case 6: (SACE Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* While meeting the year's expectations, the student reported that there was „lots of work all year, it was „very hard“ and he was „tired“. He further explained that although there was „not much more work than heavy parts in Year 11, this year is „heavy“ all year. [The] workload is high every night and weekend, you can always do more.“ Furthermore, he registered his concern that insufficient study time had been allocated for each subject.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress*
- He recognised that after his trial exams, although generally satisfied, he was „slightly behind if anything“.
 - He felt that the SACE course result, as a combination of test results accrued throughout the year plus an exam result, made „the year feel very long“. Overall he was satisfied with certain subjects but acknowledged that in his case „different levels of satisfaction came with different teachers“.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- His friendship group had not changed in any way throughout the year as he didn't have the time to meet any new people.
 - This student had not undertaken extra commitments at school because he had a job.
- d) *Future aspirations.* He was hoping to go to the University of South Australia, the following year, for his first preference (a course in Mechanical and Manufacturing engineering) or to do a TAFE course in this area.
- e) *Older students as advisors.* This student had been approached by a small number of students for advice on courses. The inquirers wanted to know what material „subjects encompass“ and how much work there was in each subject. They also wanted an assessment of how „hard“ each subject was.

5.3.7 Case 7: (SACE Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* The student was satisfied with the expectations for his course. He was confident in his level of achievement and reported that the achievement had occurred constantly through the year. He had found the workload „very, very, very light, „much less than expected“ and „less than last year“.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* He was relatively satisfied with his progress but after the recent trial exams had realised that he needed to do more work in a couple of subjects. He was at the pains to point out that „SACE is easy compared to IB. However, it requires more consistency“.

- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- His friendship group had not really changed as more time was spent on study and so there was less time to socialise.
 - He had been appointed a school leader and had participated in numerous music ensembles which were commitments above those undertaken in the previous year. He felt that these had had no impact on his academic workload.
- d) *Future aspirations.* He intended to study at tertiary level the following year but did not know whether this would be at a local university or one of three he was considering interstate.
- e) *Older students as advisors.* He had been approached by „100+“ students over the course of his studies to offer advice about his course choices. The conversations had tended to be general and informal.

5.3.8 Case 8: (SACE Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* The student reported that the current year’s workload was as expected and he was „happy overall“. While the number of subjects was technically less, he noticed that the work per remaining subject had increased. Although the workload met expectations, he mentioned that there were „lots of extra-curricular activities“.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* He was satisfied with his progress and his recent experience with the trial exams had informed him specifically about exam pressure and how to study for his exams. He was pleased with his subject choices, with Maths rated good and English being as expected.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- There was no obvious information regarding the composition of his friendship group but comments referring to the fact that „classes are more specific“ and there were „smaller groups“ inferred that there was some impact registered.
 - He identified an increase in his extra-curricular activities. These involved the commitments entailed by becoming a school leader and his undertaking School Formal painting (that is, he was involved with the committee who undertook the decorations for the school dance, an occasion that marks a highlight on the Year 12 social calendar). He did not report that these had any negative impact upon his academic workload but did explain that these added commitments had „taught him time management“.
- c) *Future aspirations.* He intended to study Commerce at the University of Adelaide next year.
- d) *Older students as advisors.* He had not been approached by any younger students to give advice on course choice.

5.3.9 Case 9: (SACE Candidate)

- a) *Year 12 course assessment.* While the student reported that the year had met his expectations, he further added that the second part of the year had helped him „get a better edge on my studies“. He had found that there had been a change in the workload and he termed this as „sudden“.
- b) *Self-assessment of academic progress.* The increased workload was offset by the fact that this year „has allowed me to choose what subjects I wanted to do“. He also reported that he had increased his knowledge of core subjects but also in areas of his personal interest and that while he „found some subjects a challenge“ he saw this as a benefit. His progress was recorded as satisfactory, though he was aware that his study needed to be more effective. He accepted that the extra work required for his subjects had decreased the „amount of time left for study“.
- c) *Extra-curricular activities*
- His friendship group had not been redefined. He mentioned that they had „lived and worked as a group“ throughout.
 - He did not identify any extra commitments undertaken during this final year of schooling and consequently had acknowledged that there was no impact upon his academic workload.
- d) *Future aspirations.* He had chosen to do a degree in Early Childhood education at a local university next year.
- e) *Older students as advisors.* He indicated that he had not been approached for course advice by any younger students.

5.4 Year 12 Study: Data analysis by theme

5.4.1 Year 12 Course assessment

Figure ii.10 COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ON YEAR 12 COURSE ASSESSMENT n=9

CASE	Responses on Year 12 Course Assessment
1 IB	Workload high and demanding, though slightly less than Year 11, but manageable (time management the key). More pressure to succeed. Social life good.
2 IB	Reasonably pleased, but could be tough. Workload had increased but not too bad. 'IB isn't that hard as people say'.
3 IB	Workload as expected, demanding but 'do-able'. IB more enjoyable than expected and rewarding.
4 IB	Year 12 had met expectations though there was much more hard work, but still was enjoyable. Time management an ongoing concern.
5 SACE	Year 12 'hard and stressful', trying to make deadlines, though this was as expected.
6 SACE	'Lots of work <u>all</u> year', 'very hard' and student 'tired'. Insufficient time allocated for this work.
7 SACE	Satisfied with course. Confident with his level of achievement. Found workload 'very, very, very, light'.
8 SACE	'Happy overall'. Number of subjects less than Year 11, but workload had increased. Student had lots of extra-curricular activities
9 SACE	Expectations for Year 12 met, though latter part of the year prepared him better. Sudden change in workload found.

Of the nine responses to this aspect there were certain features that emerged that could be delineated along IB or SACE lines, though an exception existed in each category.

Of the four IB candidates all reported that their workloads were much as expected. They were comfortable with their coursework overall, recent trial exams had not produced any surprises and all were confident with their progress. Three out of the four reported that this final year was not too difficult regarding workload. Statements suggesting that „Year 11 was harder“, that „the workload was not too hard“ and that although „demanding“ this final year was „do-able“ support this position. Only one candidate reported Year 12 as being harder than Year 11, but he also added that this was as he had expected.

These IB students revealed a high degree of introspection on their course when they reported a variety of more personal intangible features. One student said that while comfortable with the work he had felt „greater pressure to succeed“. Another said that while the work was demanding he had found the year „more enjoyable“ and the „IB very rewarding“. Another candidate who had stated his frustrations had also recorded the year as being „enjoyable“.

Of the five SACE candidates, all but one reported an increase in work demands. One student had sensed that as the work became very hard, he had found himself quite stressed. Another reported that the workload was not only harder but that efforts needed to be more sustained for longer periods of time and as a result he felt quite tired. One student who had thought that the reduction from six subjects in Year 11 to five subjects in Year 12 may have brought some decrease in work load, admitted that the work had simply not diminished. Another student reported that the second part of the year had

brought about a change in workload and this had been sudden in intensity. Comments from the majority of these SACE students about their course tended to concentrate on the issue of workloads, and unlike their IB counterparts, there were no comments on the enjoyment of their course.

5.4.2 Self-assessment of academic progress

**Figure ii.11 COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ON SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS
n=9**

CASE	Responses on self-assessment of academic progress
1 IB	Subject choices maintained from previous year. Satisfied with progress. Learnt from recent exams how much work was still to be done. Sees a SACE score of 20 harder than an IB 7.
2 IB	In hindsight, would have swapped a second science to Art (easier). His recent exams had identified some weaknesses, but results as expected.
3 IB	Satisfaction for the year would be when 'goals were reached'. Exams had uncovered areas for extra work that he didn't fear. TER more favourable for IB.
4 IB	Preparation for recent exams had been an issue, for example, working to the time limits, understanding the format and style of questions.
5 SACE	Workload had stepped up, though progress satisfactory. Some subject choices could have been better, though others were enjoyable.
6 SACE	After recent exams, slightly behind. Overall satisfied with subjects but that this was tied to the teachers he had. The continuous assessment in his SACE subjects meant that the year seemed 'very long'.
7 SACE	Satisfied with progress, though could do more work in some subjects. 'SACE is easy compared to IB. However, it requires more consistency.'
8 SACE	Satisfied with progress. Recent exams informed him about pressure and effective study. Pleased with subject choices.
9 SACE	Increased workload offset by desirable subject choice. Benefitted from challenges. Study needed to be more effective, time issues.

There was no serious dissatisfaction mentioned by any of the students regarding their subject choices. There was a statement made that in hindsight „some subject choices could have been better“ but this was offset against the fact that other subjects were really enjoyed by this student. One student reported being particularly satisfied with two of his subjects while another recalled that, in Year 12 SACE, one could choose the subjects which catered for one's personal interests.

Another student equated the level of satisfaction he derived from his subjects as being linked to his teacher. This was the only mention made in this survey to the role of the teacher in this process. Anecdotal evidence had suggested that students might choose a particular course depending on what teachers were being allocated to each course. The Focus School had advertised repeatedly to its clientele that most Year 11 and 12 teachers taught both IB and SACE classes. The lack of reporting on teachers at any stage during this Project suggested that the role of teachers, for most students, was not instrumental in determining the level of satisfaction with their chosen course.

There was not any obvious dissatisfaction with IB subject choice, though one student mentioned that in hindsight he may have chosen „easier“ subjects, but no switch was made. Only one student reported frustrations with the trial exam period, including problems pacing himself within the time limits, dealing effectively with the format and style of questions. The remaining IB candidates either had no comments on this directly or registered their confidence in their progress.

The survey did highlight that SACE students tended to dwell more on the workloads associated with recent trial exams and assessment tasks than the IB students. Many SACE subjects require a battery of internal assessment tasks together with formal testing times. Those subjects that are publicly examined in SACE usually have three hour papers. With the IB students less formally assessed and their exams sat usually in blocks of no more than two hours, the IB students did not seem to be as preoccupied with the process as the SACE students. Although one SACE student said „SACE is easy compared to IB, however, it requires more consistency“, one IB candidate stated that „a

20 in SACE was harder to achieve than a 7 in IB“ while another reflected that he felt „the TER was favourable for IB candidates“.

Amongst the practical comments, the SACE students also reflected on more subtle reactions, revealing greater introspection. The admissions of stress and fatigue did much to portray the difficulties of the year, although there were counter-balancing positive reports that subjects were challenging or satisfying.

5.4.3 Extra-curricular activities

Figure ii.12 COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES n=9

CASE	Responses about extra-curricular activities.
1 IB	Friendship group had not changed in Year 12. The workload made it difficult to socialise outside his immediate friends. Played sport all year. Taken flying lessons. Less time spent on school work and slight reduction in results though not forgoing these activities.
2 IB	Friendship group constant, though knew a few others as he shared their classes. Commitments outside the classroom similar to previous year, though added one more.
3 IB	Extra activities kept him in contact with existing friends, though he had made unexpected friends too. Sport had included an extended overseas tour, but made sure that missed work was covered.
4 IB	Friendships had not changed and his friends were doing the same course.
5 SACE	Slight change in friendship group in Year 12, in that it was wider.
6 SACE	Friendship group had not changed over the year and he did not have any time to meet new people. He had not taken extra commitments at school as he had a job.
7 SACE	Friendship group had not really changed and there was less time to socialise. Held school leadership position and had a large music program, though this had no impact on his study.
8 SACE	No explicit information of friendship group, though a reference to ‘smaller groups’. School leader and painting backdrops were extra commitments that year, though no impact on work was mentioned. Time management had improved.
9 SACE	Friendship group close and constant. No impact on his workload from extra commitments.

It was obvious from both the IB and the SACE students that their core friendship groups had not really changed. Mention was made by members of both groups that their time to socialise had been reduced with the increase of time needed to study. If there had been a

change acknowledged, it was to say that students had broadened their friendship group most commonly by coming into contact with other students through their classes or extra-curricular activities. No respondent reported any diminution of friendship numbers. Furthermore, there was still no evidence of any IB or SACE cliques emerging, even though Year 12 IB and SACE priorities were to the fore.

Of the four IB candidates, three reported taking on new/extra activities. These ranged from assuming school leadership positions, overseas sporting trips and flying lessons. While admitting that these activities were time consuming, students were either unwilling to forgo these or worked harder to compensate for lost time or took on the activity because they had the time. The fourth student reported that he had maintained his commitments from the previous year. It must be noted that part of their IB programme required each student to document 50 hours each of CAS; that is, activities that revolve around Creativity, Action and Service. Being part of the music program, playing sport or assuming a leadership position tended to fulfil this formal requirement easily for most students. It is noteworthy that these IB students chose to take on extra activities in their final year.

Of the five SACE students, two reported assuming extra commitments; both students had school leadership positions, while one had involvements also in music and painting. It was a SACE student who said that extra curricular activities were not compatible with his work commitments.

5.4.4 Future aspirations

Figure ii.13 COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT FUTURE ASPIRATIONS n=9

CASE	Responses related to future aspirations.
1 IB	Applying to the University of Adelaide next year to study a double degree in aero- engineering/physics.
2 IB	Applying to the University of Adelaide next year to study Maths/Computing Science/Engineering.
3 IB	Applying to University of Adelaide to study Law/Commerce. Finance/Commerce degree second option.
4 IB	Applying to study Commerce/Engineering either in Adelaide or Melbourne.
5 SACE	Taking a year off.
6 SACE	Applying to University of South Australia to study Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering or similar TAFE course.
7 SACE	Applying to University of Adelaide, Melbourne, Monash or University of NSW to study next year. No indication of course.
8 SACE	Applying to study Commerce at University of Adelaide next year.
9 SACE	Applying to study Early Childhood Education at the University of South Australia.

With regards to their future career prospects, all four IB candidates had decided upon tertiary study the following year, three at a local university, while one candidate was still deciding between a local or interstate university. All four were applying for double degree courses. This feature of IB students' tertiary aspirations is taken up again in Project 3.

The future studies of the SACE candidates were more varied than the IB students. One student had decided to take a year off. Another student, while considering a university option (University of South Australia), was also investigating a local TAFE college. Two others were intending to study at a local university, the University of Adelaide and the University of South Australia, a third was also looking at multiple options interstate.

Although a prominent mark of the IB was its supposed portability to gain entry readily to interstate or international tertiary institutions, the majority of the IB students intended

to study at the University of Adelaide, a local institution, and only one was contemplating a possible move to Melbourne. It was one of the SACE students who was applying more widely to South Australian, Victorian and New South Wales institutions.

Overall, in contrast to the previous year's responses, most students had identified a future pathway, although they were not yet aware of the possibility of subsequent changes as became evident in the Project 3 responses.

5.4.5 Older students as advisors

In 2002, many Year 10 students reported that they had sought advice from older students about the nature of their IB or SACE courses. It wasn't apparent, however, which students were being asked for information or what the nature of the questions were, as this information gathering was being done outside the formal services provided by the school. The following material documents the number and nature of these inquiries to these Year 12 students.

Figure ii.14 COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT OLDER STUDENTS AS ADVISORS n=9

CASE	Responses about older students as advisors
1 IB	This student had been asked about the course, informally, by a few younger students.
2 IB	This student had not been approached by any students seeking his advice.
3 IB	This student had been approached informally and intermittently, about the demands of the IB course.
4 IB	This student had not advised any younger student.
5 SACE	This student had not advised any younger student.
6 SACE	This student had been approached by small numbers of students. They wanted to know about subject content, workload and how <i>'hard'</i> each subject was.
7 *	This student had been approached by '100+' students over the two years of his course. The advice was general and informal.
SACE	
8 *	This student had not advised any younger student.
SACE	
9 SACE	This student had not advised any younger student.
*	Student indicated that he was a student leader.

From the answers to this question in the survey, some Year 12 students, both IB and SACE candidates, were being approached by younger students for advice. While only two students chose to report being school leaders, this did not appear to be a determining factor behind students' approaches. It was obvious that some students were being deliberately selected. Only two of the four IB students, as well as two of the five SACE students, had been approached. These four students reported that the approaches were done on an informal basis and usually by a small number of students at any one time. One, however, said that he had probably been asked by over a hundred students throughout his entire course. Interestingly, this SACE student had a leadership role at the school and had a heavy commitment (in both time and seniority) to the Focus School's music programme, as well as his sporting teams and chess club. His profile was high at the Focus School and he would have had a broad, loose peer network, features which emerged as important in a discussion about the role of significant others in education decision-making in Project 1 (3.2).

While the conversations were reported to be of a general nature, the main issues tended to revolve around workloads, subject choice and how „hard“ these subjects were assessed to be. This reinforced the conclusion established in Project 1 that students intending to take a course were seeking advice from current older students about course related issues relating that were important to their decision-making. It was not surprising to see that questions about workloads and specific subjects rated high on the list of topics explored with these students. These two elements had emerged fairly high in Project 1 as factors influencing student choice.

6. Concluding remarks

Much of the discussion has been presented in the main body of this Project as it emerged from the detailed findings of both studies. In general terms, the findings suggest that the students were either satisfied customers or had re-negotiated a more customised package to better fit their reshaping of self. Their responses indicated that their course decisions had reasoned justifications and that they had shrewdly negotiated the risks involved. Each response gave evidence of how

Wisdom lay not in his muscles

Nor in the soles of his feet.

It came from the light of achievement,

It came from the mud of defeat (Marsden, 1988, pp182-3).

There are, however, four strands of information that have been identified as worthy of further discussion, as they do differentiate the IB and SACE students, though not all students experienced these to the same degree. The first relates to the transition of students from Year 10 to Year 11 and to Year 12. The second alludes to the flexibility of subject selection and subject change. The third strand refers to career aspirations, while the final strand considers some of the differences in the responses of each group, taken collectively at Year 12.

6.1 Transition between Years 10, 11 and 12

When the IB students reported their course expectations for each year of the survey, they described that the first year in particular had been very demanding (**Figure ii.2**). This was as they had expected but the level of work, while not especially hard, had been greater. History, Maths and English had all been cited as subjects that had greater detail or required more analysis (**Figure ii. 3**). The Year 12 IB comments (**Figure ii. 10**) tended to

describe a year that while still demanding had become more enjoyable, with some of these students even taking on extra activities. The transition between Year 10 and Year 11 was appraised as generally being harder than that between Year 11 and Year 12 by this small group of students.

On the other hand, the SACE students were more confident on the whole about their first year studies (**Figures ii.2 and ii.3**). Their course expectations were in the main accurate and they had found the workload better than expected. They were either satisfied with their subject choices or else they had already decided what changes were to be made for the following year. There was an optimistic tone to their comments, anticipating that they were well set up with their subjects for Year 12. There was only one indication that combining sporting and academic demands could be a challenge. In Year 12, the tone of their comments (**Figure ii.10**) had changed generally. Most (bar case 7) talked about feeling tired and stressed and that there was a large increase in the workloads, despite being one subject less; furthermore time management was becoming an issue. From their discussion of this small SACE group, it would appear that the transition between Year 11 and 12 was harder than from Year 10 to Year 11.

While these experiences did not have an effect on course selection, it could be useful for the Focus School to have an awareness, albeit general, of the incremental (that is year by year) demands on students and the different nature of these demands they are likely to experience when choosing one course or the other.

6.2 Subject selection

The findings in Project 1 of this research highlighted subject selection as one of the major factors affecting course choice. One assumption that could be made is that once students have an idea of the subjects they want to study and lock in a particular course that suits this, then the decision-making is largely finished. For the IB students, this did appear to be the case in this survey. In every case, even though some IB students raised concerns about the subjects they studied, not one student documented any subject changes, although these concerns could have influenced IB students in selecting their Higher or Standard Level subjects.

For the SACE students, the subject selection was still being played out through Year 11. SACE students under the current model usually study six subjects in Year 11 and then take five subjects at Year 12. In this small group, one student had accelerated one SACE subject and several others dropped or changed their subjects during Year 11 for Year 12. This degree of flexibility, exercised by the SACE students was not available or perhaps unnecessary for the IB students.

6.3 Career Aspirations

When examining the future career aspirations of this group of IB and SACE students, it was significant that neither group mentioned that they chose their course to serve a career aim. Reference was made by one student that to apply for various tertiary courses it was important to make correct subject selection if pre-requisites were involved, but this was not course specific. As one IB student and one SACE student reported that they might move interstate to study, preference for the portability of one course credential over another was not a factor affecting choice.

Student career intentions were reported in **Figure ii.13**. All IB students intended to undertake double degrees the following year, three at the University of Adelaide and another either locally or in Melbourne. The faculties of choice seemed weighted towards Commerce and Engineering.

Of the five SACE students, other than one student who had decided to take a year off, the remaining four were all to embark on tertiary studies. Their courses showed a greater degree of variance from their IB counterparts in both in the nature of their intended courses and the Institutions to which they were applying. These contrasting findings, although from a small group, would be further examined in light of the data collected from respondents from Project 3.

6.4 Group differences, taken collectively at Year 12.

With a greater selection of subjects on offer in the SACE course at the Focus School, it is perhaps not surprising that the experiences of the SACE students in this group vary more than those of the IB candidates. The evidence from the IB responses leads to the conclusion that they were more homogenous as a group. They appeared reasonably comfortable and positively challenged by their academic workloads, not overly concerned with the content of recent trial exams, happy in their friendship groups, prepared to take on extra commitments and all set on tertiary pathways that included double degrees. Allowing for individual differences, the experiences of these four IB students did convey a considerable commonality.

By contrast, the SACE responses revealed a greater gradation in several of the examined themes. The SACE students experienced wider variations in workload, from

the „hard“ to the „very, very, very light“. Their reactions, both positive and negative, to particular subjects were more extreme. Their anticipated career pathways were certainly more diverse.

While the respondent size was small, in the homogeneity of their academic experience, it can be argued that the IB was catering for and delivering to a niche market. The flexibility and diversity of the SACE academic experience equated with catering for and delivering rather to the mass market.

**EVALUATING THE PAST DECISION:
A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY OF 1999 ALUMNI**

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PROJECT THREE
EVALUATING THE PAST DECISION;
A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY OF 1999 ALUMNI

CONTENTS

1. Preamble	189
2. Aims	191
3. Method	192
4. Findings on the 1997 decision-making process	196
4.1 Official dissemination of course details.....	196
4.1.1 The Information Night	196
4.1.2 Course syllabi	198
4.1.3 Consultation with the Head of House	199
4.1.4 Consultation with a Career Adviser.....	200
4.2 Unofficial dissemination of course details.....	201
4.2.1 Parents and their advice	201
4.2.2 Siblings and their advice.....	203
4.2.3 Consultation with other students.....	205
4.2.4 The influence of closest friends	206
4.2.5 The role of the media	208
4.3 The nexus between course choice and post-secondary options	208
4.4 The influence of commonly held opinions	212
4.4.1 IB students' responses	212
4.4.2 SACE students' responses	218
4.5 Comparing the 1997 and 2002 decision-making	219
4.6 Reflections on advice.....	220

5. Outcomes of the 1997 choice	224
5.1 Choice of subjects within the chosen course	225
5.2 Transition to tertiary study.....	227
5.3 Study and occupation pathways.....	232
5.4 Skills gained from the respective courses.....	237
6. Reflective evaluations	241
6.1 Likes and dislikes of the chosen course.....	241
6.2 Comments on quotations	247
6.2.1 Evaluating SACE	248
6.2.2 Evaluating IB	254
7. Conclusions	263

PROJECT THREE
EVALUATING THE PAST DECISION:
A RETROSPECTIVE STUDY OF 1999 ALUMNI

1. Preamble

NOTE:
This image is included on page 189
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

PAUL GAUGUIN'S *D'où venons nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous?*

Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

1897–98 Paul Gauguin, French, 1848–1903 Oil on canvas

Inscription: Upper left: D'ou Venons Nous / Que Sommes Nous / OÙ Allons Nous.

Gauguin... considered this work—created in 1897, at a time of great personal crisis—to be his masterpiece and the summation of his ideas. Gauguin's letters suggest that the fresco-like painting should be read from right to left, beginning with the sleeping infant. He describes the various figures as pondering the questions of human existence given in the title; the blue idol represents "the Beyond" (Gauguin, MFA, 2009).

Throughout the latter half of 2007 and the early part of 2008, a survey was conducted among former students of the Focus School, who were alumni from the Year 12 class of 1999. These students had made history at the school as the first candidates who had been offered a choice of course to complete their secondary education over 1998 and 1999. There had been much deliberation, excitement and interest as the Focus School had established the alternative pathway (the IBDP). It was apparent that the school community at large was highly sensitive to the 1998 innovations to course structure, waiting with interest the outcomes of this new direction taken by the School. There had been ongoing discussions and communications within the School community as to which course students would prefer to take. The information about course selection, the process of making the decision to do SACE or IB and the successful delivery of the two courses became the template for future years, a rite of passage replicated by every middle school student moving into his final two years of secondary schooling and beyond.

Gauguin's painting is used here as a metaphor to represent this rite of passage and to elucidate the stages of development that students undergo between their secondary schooling, their entry into possible tertiary education and their eventual participation in the workforce and community at large; „Where do we come from?... What are we? ... Where are we going?“. In this way too, it captures the concept espoused earlier by Slattery (1991, p. 276):

[Individuals] have to learn how to evaluate and manage risk and to take responsibility for their own actions if they are to survive and thrive...

In the open and opportunistic societies of today it is individual decision making, decision making about lifestyles, about personal habits and personal mores, that will determine the future.

2. Aims

The design of the research for Project 3 required these students to be graduates from the year 1999, that is, those who had started their senior secondary schooling (i.e. Year 11) in 1998 and had therefore decided upon their course in the previous year. The survey set out to invite former students to answer a series of questions; the first set (PART A) relating to the decision-making process as to whether they selected the IB or SACE course for Years 11 and 12, while the second set of questions (PART B) focused on a variety of other outcomes from the decision. These included details of the actual subjects they chose, comments about skills they acquired and facets of the course they had enjoyed or not. Questions were also asked about their post-secondary activities, what had they gone on to do and what the transition had been like. Finally, the respondents were asked to reflect on their last two years of schooling against the backdrop of the past decade of their lives as adults.

The content design of the survey was structured to address three specific aims. The first was to compare the decision-making process of the 1997 students with those of 2002. The second aim was to discover the long term outcomes for these former students. The final aim was to gather evaluations of the courses from those who had completed them ten years earlier.

It was considered important by the researcher to explore in depth the recollections of a small group of former students as to their motivations for course selection at the time and to glean their perspectives on their selections a decade after the event. It was thus hoped that factors affecting student decision-making would have made quite an

impression on students at the time, and that the gap of ten years would have further provided them with mature insights on the process.

Much of the course decision-making revolved around students, families and the School trying to look to the students' future. To have an idea of what former students had done and where they had actually found themselves professionally, particularly from this history-making first group, would provide current students, families and the School with valuable background understanding for their own considerations.

From the point of view of the longitudinal approach which this part of the portfolio aimed to adopt, it was important to determine whether the decision-making process of 1997 was comparable to that used in later years. If this could be shown to be the case, it would justify using this group of respondents to fulfil the chronological dimensions of the study, rather than waiting another five years (2014) to follow up the 2002 cohort. PART A of the survey was instrumental in ascertaining this. It is important to note that, from the perspective of the researcher, the environment of the Focus School was largely unchanged in that the teachers, subjects, classrooms and core course components remained relatively stable over the period 1997 to 2002.

3. Method

Two important practical challenges had to be overcome for this Research Project. Both depended on the goodwill of the Focus School and practical assistance from the administrative staff. It was first necessary to decide who would make up the respondent group for the survey. Then the challenge was to contact them and invite their

participation. As it turned out, the size of the respondent group was determined by the availability of contact information.

Although the Focus School was very happy to be of assistance in contacting the former students, the logistics proved difficult for the administrative staff, due to the time lapse of a decade. Initially, the school endeavoured to trace its first cohort of 27 IB students from its list of 1999 graduates. Very few of the students had provided current contact details with the school, so every effort was made to trace these students through their parental contact details (both local and international). The school had the names and addresses of 25 families from the IB cohort. This became the size of the respondent group drawn from the former IB students.

The same number of students (25) was then selected to form the SACE student group. As the total number of SACE students for that year had been larger, every third student from an end of year SACE list was selected for the survey. The school was able to come up with twenty-five parental contact details from that generated list of names. The number of respondents for this research project was confirmed at 50 students, 25 IB and 25 SACE students who had graduated in 1999. It is acknowledged that the size of the group is small and quantitative findings are in no way generalisable, merely indicative of this particular group of respondents.

The data collection for this project was to be obtained by survey. The survey was constructed such that one section of it mirrored the survey distributed in Project 1 (see Appendix B). The Project 3 survey, as alluded to earlier, had two distinct components, Part A and Part B. Part A contained nineteen questions which were designed to establish

some of the procedures and processes that these former students went through in deciding their course, although the responses allowed for a „do not remember“ option to cater for the intervening years between the respondents“ secondary schooling and their present situation. There was no differentiation in these initial questions between the SACE and IB candidates.

Part B, however, targeted IB and SACE candidates separately. A series of eight general questions [Part B: section 1] asked respondents for preliminary information, requiring each to identify the subjects he studied in his final year, to document in brief what he had been doing since leaving school, and then to reflect on any skills that he acquired during his chosen course and to describe his likes and dislikes about his chosen course. He was also asked to highlight any advice that he had or would have like to have had when making his course choice.

The last section in Part B [Part B: section 2], question 28, was structured around a series of quotations drawn from a variety of sources from student, media and research commentary about the particular course the student had chosen. These quotations focused on different elements of the course and asked the respondents first to indicate how accurately the extracts reflected their own experiences and then to describe any further observations that they might have with regard to the cited claims.

The surveys themselves, nine page documents, were mailed to the intended respondents“ parental addresses. It was anticipated that the material then would be forwarded to the candidates. Two further mechanisms were added to assist the distribution and progress of the survey. Each survey dispatched included details

describing the context and content of the research, together with the researcher's e-mail address as the survey, for convenience, could be received and completed electronically. Second, the opportunity for all respondents to remain anonymous was also built into the survey. Nowhere on the actual survey form was the identity of the respondent required.

Both these mechanisms had an impact on the process of the survey. While the survey was intended to be distributed by traditional post, eight of the twenty responses were returned directly by e-mail, while another student and two parents made subsequent electronic contact to provide further subsidiary information. The speed of return after the first wave of traditional mail responses slowed markedly. There was a second wave of activity, however, when former students took an active role in the dissemination of the survey. After a first and subsequent final reminder had been circulated, the researcher had specific offers from a numbers of respondents to „chase up“ other candidates. The respondents' interconnections with each other had remained current and the electronic communication particularly suited those who were time poor or had left South Australia.

It was considered that maintaining the respondents' anonymity throughout the survey would be a key factor in encouraging the return of the documentation. There was potential for some of the information to be sensitive. References to likes and dislikes with regards to courses, subjects and teachers might prove confronting. It was therefore most surprising to find that nineteen of the twenty respondents identified themselves and that some had added personalised messages to their formal responses.

As the survey had been sent to fifty former students via parental addresses that were a decade old, it was anticipated that given those circumstances, a 5-10% return rate would be reasonable. Since the material was to be evaluated largely along qualitative lines, it was not dependent on the quantity of returns. To receive a 40% return rate was very satisfying, not only in numerical terms, but also in the sense that there would be potential for greater diversity and richness in the data - data that was fortuitously split nearly evenly along IB and SACE lines (eleven and nine respectively).

4. Findings on the 1997 Decision-making Process

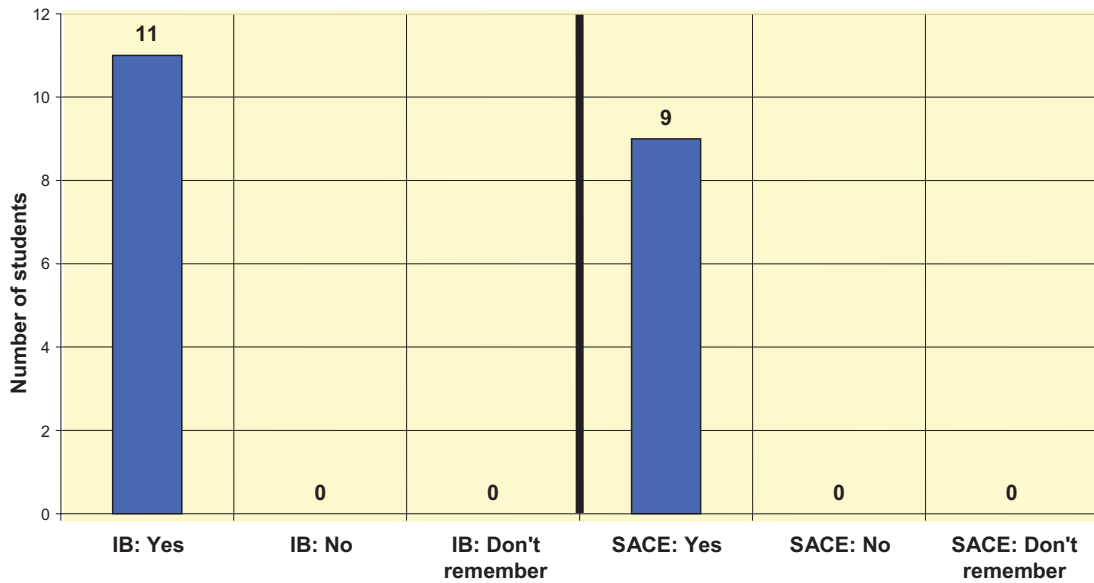
The first group of findings relate to the initial eighteen questions posed in the survey (PART A). These involved the issues and factors affecting the course decision; in the cases of these former students, it was hoped that they would be able to identify and elucidate their thought processes despite the interim of ten years. Their decision-making year was 1997 when the group was in Year 10.

4.1 Official dissemination of course details

4.1.1 The Information Night

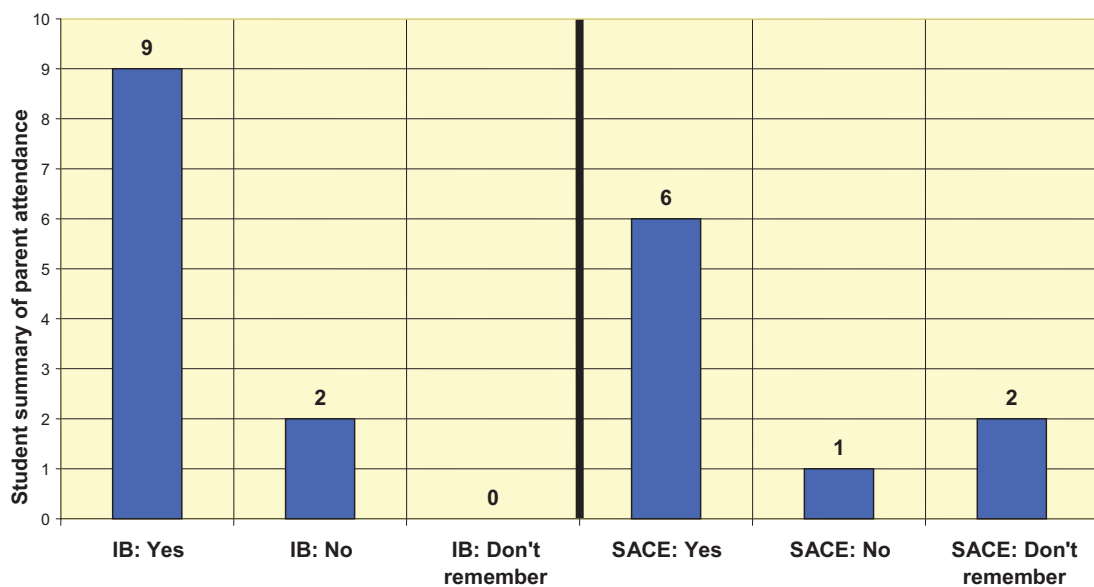
The following two graphs record the attendance at the 1997 course information night from the point of view of the students (**Table iii.1a**) and then their recollection of parental attendance (**Table iii.1b**). These graphs, as with the others following, depict responses for the IB students and SACE students separately.

Table iii.1a STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE 1997 COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT n=20



Given that this cohort of students were the first to have to make a course selection of this kind, opting for either the IB or SACE programmes, it perhaps was not surprising that all students attended the course information night. That all students remembered this fact was encouraging for responses to later questions.

Table iii.1b PARENT ATTENDANCE AT THE 1997 COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT n=20

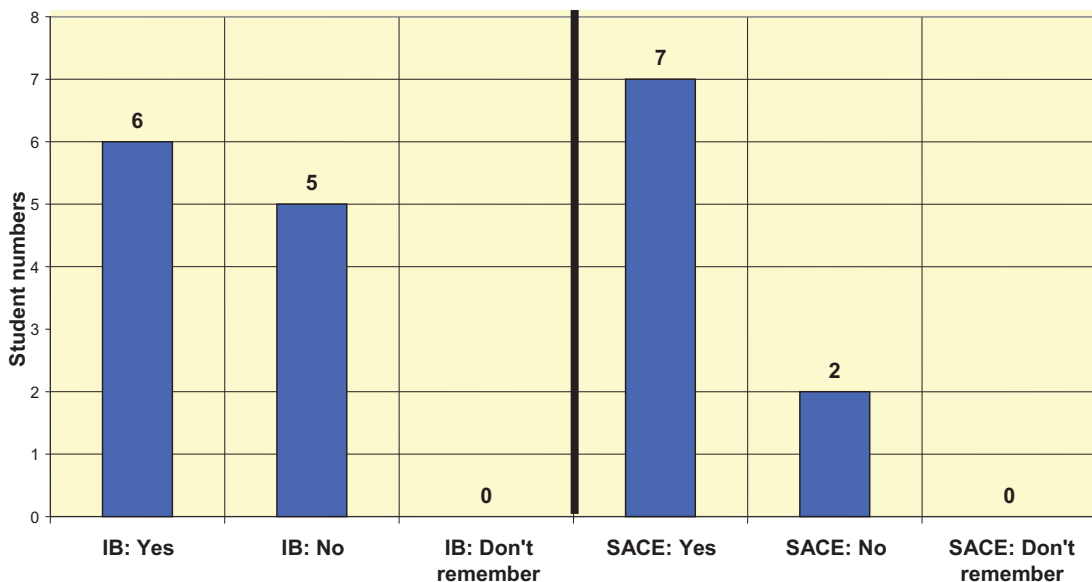


The IB students were quite clear about the presence or not of their parents at the course information night. All indicated that they remembered whether or not this was the case. Reasons for the non-attendance of parents were not stipulated. In the case of the SACE students, the majority of parents attended the session likewise, with two candidates unsure of this circumstance. These findings recall those from Project 1, where a slightly higher attendance was also recorded by students over parents at these nights, although overall, attendance was strong.

4.1.2 Course syllabi

In 1997, there was material available officially about both courses, though it was not as fully documented as in the more comprehensive course handbooks that have been later developed at the school. It was therefore interesting to examine whether students availed themselves of this material prior to choosing their programmes.

Table iii.2 1997 STUDENTS WHO HAD READ COURSE SYLLABI n=20

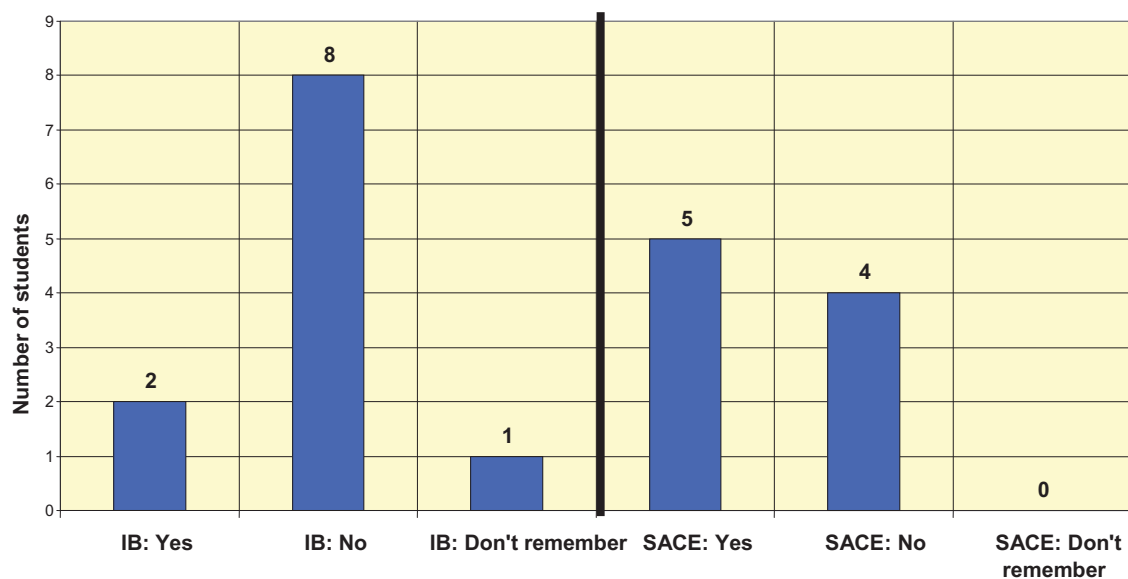


While the trend was for the students to familiarise themselves with the course syllabi, it was not the case for all respondents. In fact, it was surprising that in the first year of the

IB, as many as five of the IB respondents had reported not reading course syllabi. This is in contrast to the 2002 finding. One reason for this may be a simple practical administrative one. From that larger, more representative 2002 group, about two-thirds of all students surveyed had read about their course, and, unlike the 1997 group, nearly all the 2002 IB candidates had read the material. It must be acknowledged that in 1997, SACE syllabus material was more widely available in published local curriculum handbooks. IB material was not as accessible. With the increased profile of electronic technologies, this discrepancy is no longer apparent. The Focus School has also developed its own syllabi information booklets over the years.

4.1.3 Consultation with the Head of House

Table iii.3 1997 CONSULTATION WITH THE HEAD OF HOUSE n=20

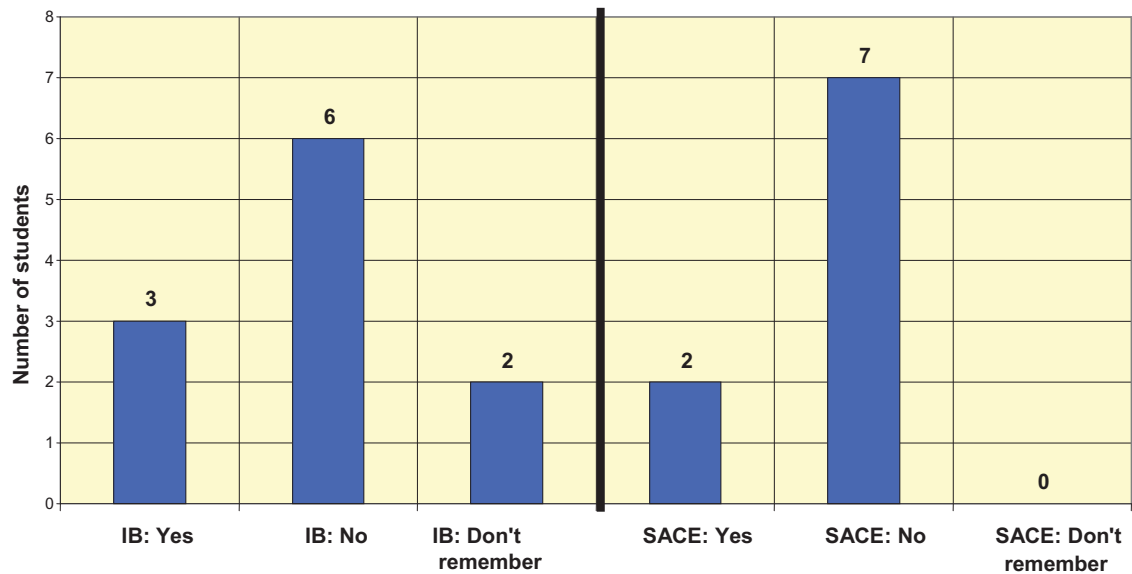


The material in this graph indicates that, apart from the single student who no longer remembers, the majority of students did not consult with their Head of House. Two reasons have been suggested for this from members of the school community. The first is that, unlike in 2002, where Heads of House had to sign an official approval form after a briefing, this practice had not formally been established to the same degree in 1997.

Secondly, as the school had just introduced the IB as an alternative programme, the Heads of House were still inexperienced in assessing the likely outcome of a student opting for one course over another.

4.1.4 Consultation with a career adviser

Table iii.4 1997 CONSULTATION WITH A CAREER ADVISER n=20



It is evident from the data above that the majority of students had no consultations with a career adviser. The school's career advisory practice in 1997 (as mentioned in Project 1) was in its infancy and has since evolved into a more formal process with a staff member allocated particularly for this task. It was probable that, in 1997, the advice sought in this area would largely have been provided externally. This is supported from correspondence with a parent whose son was in this group; he highlighted this as an issue for his family. The family had sought professional advice outside the school to assist their son in identifying possible career paths. This finding in **Table iii.4** contrasts with the cohort of 2002, where the majority of students had sought advice. In their case, this would have been supplied internally by the school's career counsellor.

4.2 Unofficial dissemination of course details

4.2.1 Parents and their advice

The following two tables refer to the influence that parents played in the decision-making for the IB or SACE programmes. Table iii.5 plots the role of fathers, while Table iii.6 indicates the role of mothers.

Table iii.5 1997 FATHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=20

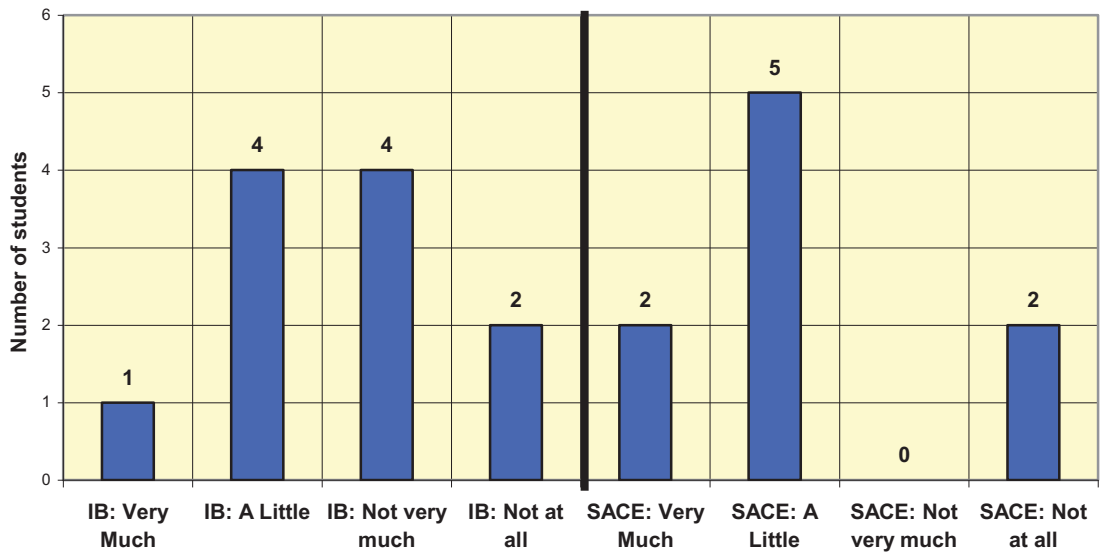
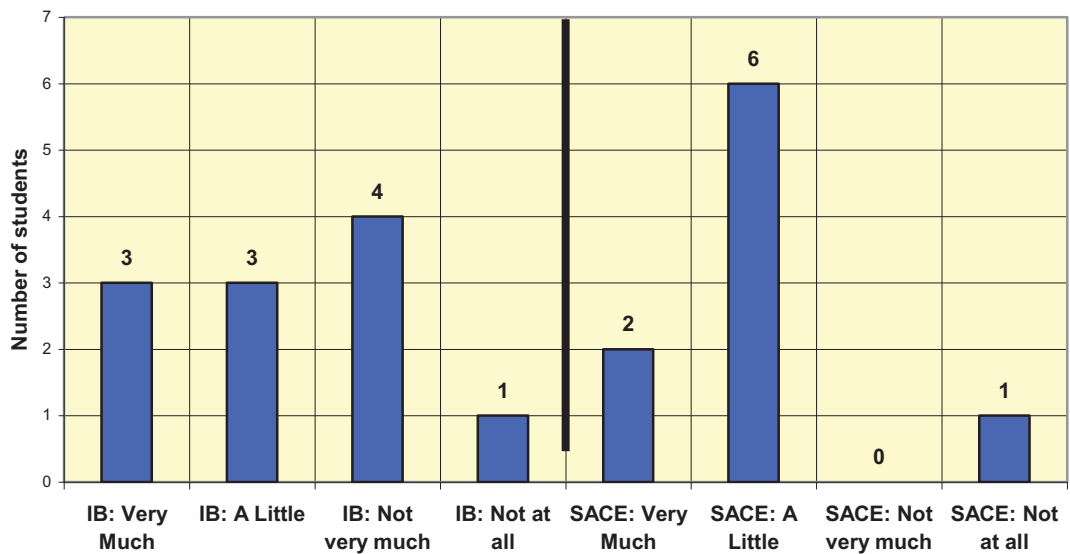


Table iii.6 1997 MOTHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=20



Within this small respondent group, the tendency was for students to indicate that parents did have some influence over choice, though on balance this influence could only be inferred as mild and was indicated by those in the SACE program more than the IB. On a comparative level, the evidence does support the finding from Project 1 (see 5.3.2) that, where parental influence was present in both the IB and SACE programmes, mothers would appear to exert a marginally stronger influence than fathers.

The breakdown below shows a different interpretation on the findings above. The twenty responses to this question were grouped first by course selection and then further differentiated into two subcategories; the first being if a respondent indicated that his parents exerted identical influence; the second being if a respondent indicated a different level of influence. (The five respondents in this category were coded as a, b, c, d, and e, while the colour coding reflects gender). The level of influence that is „very much“, „a little“, „not very much“ and „not at all“ was also recorded for all respondents.

Table iii.7 COMPARISON OF MOTHER’S AND FATHER’S INFLUENCE n=20

IB Respondents n=11	Very much	A little	Not very much	Not at all	Total
Identical level of parental influence	1	3	4	1	9
Different level of parental influence	a b	- b	- -	a -	2 (a and b)

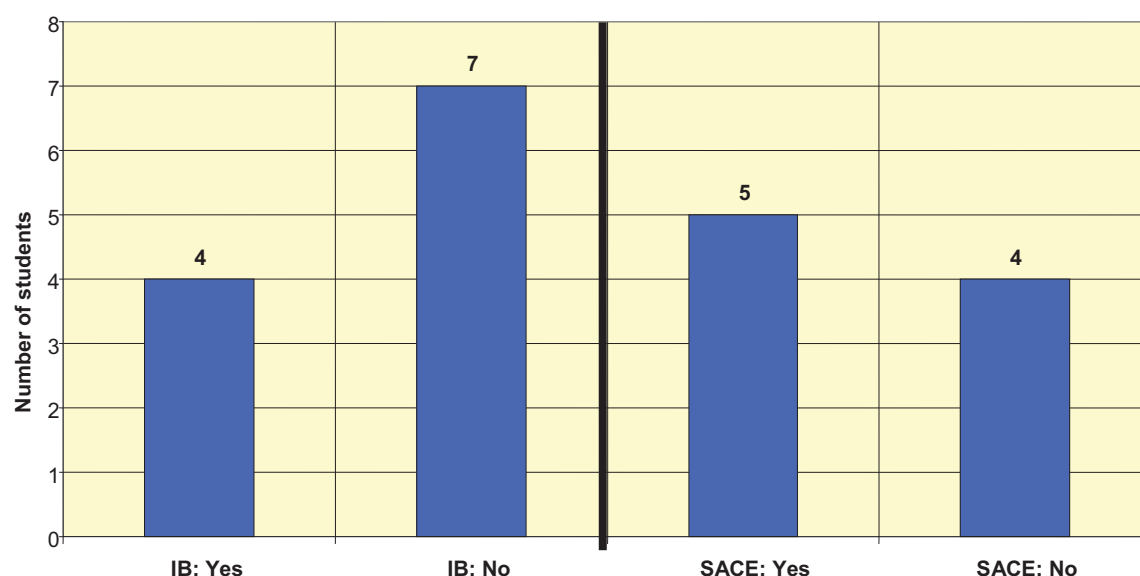
SACE Respondents n=9	Very much	A little	Not very much	Not at all	Total
Identical level of parental influence	1	4	-	1	6
Different level of parental influence	c d -	c d e	- - -	- - e	3 (c, d and e)
Colour code	Mother’s influence is indicated in orange.		Father’s influence is indicated in purple.		

In fifteen of the cases there was no separation of the influence that either parent exerted over the student. Of the five cases that remained in all but one, the mother was documented as having a stronger influence. The findings recorded that in only one case had the father’s influence been more compelling than that of the mother. Thus, where a discrepancy was likely to occur in the degree to which a student was influenced by a parent, that parent was more likely to be the mother. This coincided with the findings from the larger respondent group reported in Project 1 (see 5.3.2).

4.2.2 Siblings and their advice

The following two graphs were designed to establish the role that siblings who had already completed Year 12 had over their brothers who were respondents.

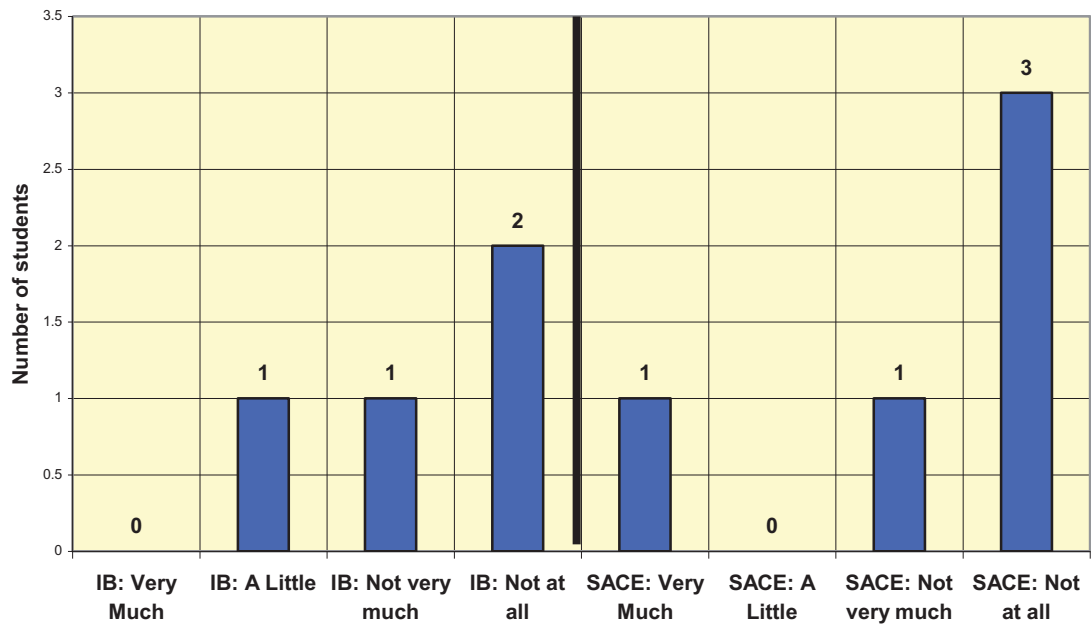
Table iii.8 SIBLINGS WHO HAD COMPLETED YEAR 12 n=20



This initial question was intended to find out how many respondents had siblings who had already completed Year 12. Students who answered yes to this question were then asked to rate the degree of influence that their sibling/s had had on their course choice.

As an interesting aside, just under half answered in the positive, a very similar proportion to that reported in the survey of 2002 (Figure i.14).

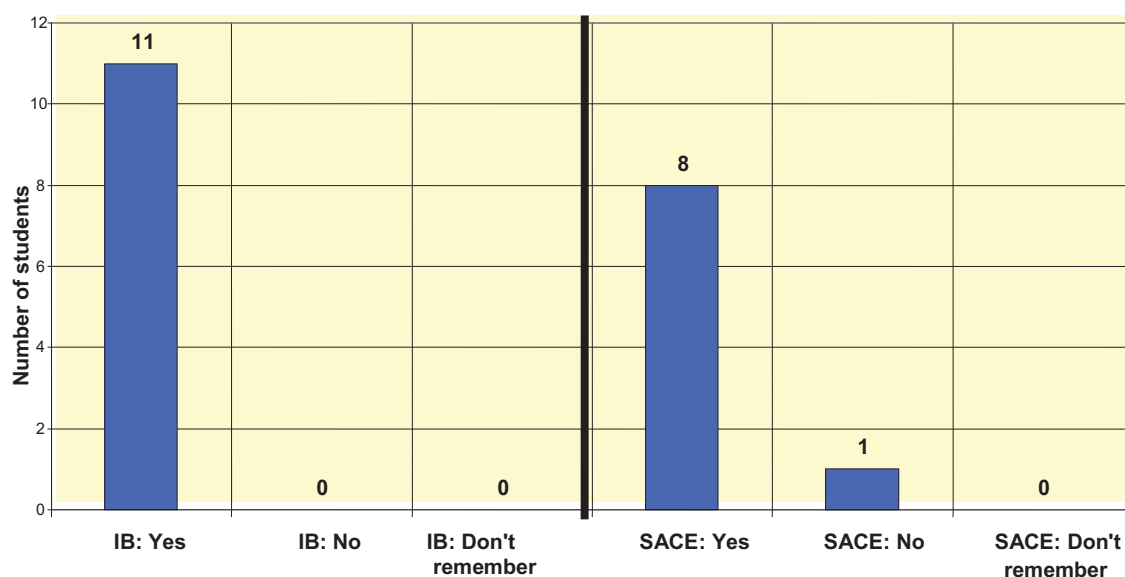
Table iii.9 1997 SIBLING INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=9



The findings here are widely distributed and, overall, there were only nine respondents. The data though show that for seven of the nine respondents, the siblings' experience did not have a significant impact upon the brother's course decision. However, it is important not to undervalue the single case from the SACE group where sibling input was a vital factor in his course choice.

4.2.3 Consultation with other students

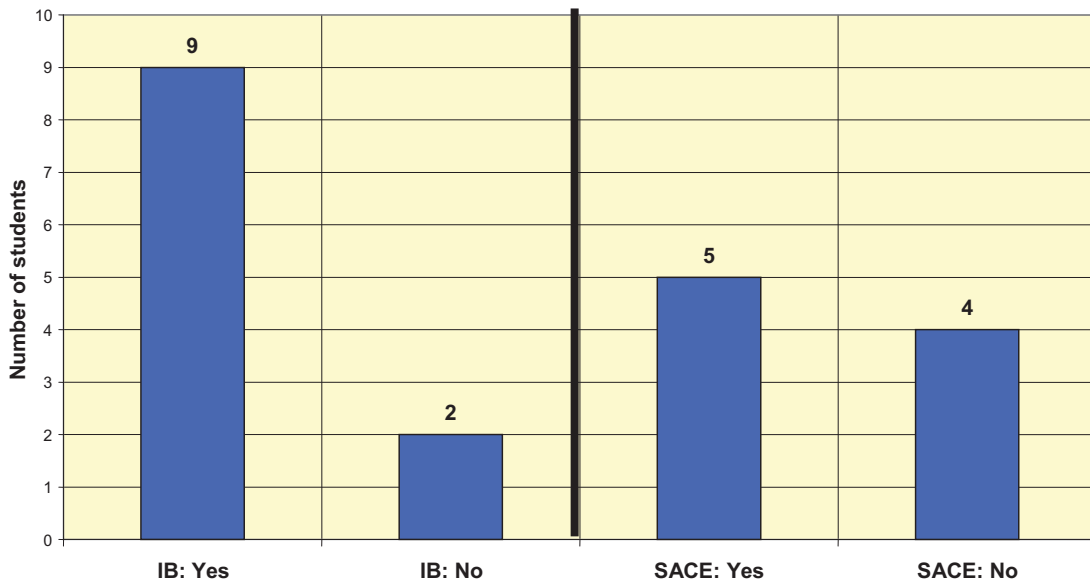
Table iii.10 1997 STUDENTS WHO CONSULTED WITH OTHER STUDENTS n=20



A comparison of reported student behaviour between the 1997 and 2002 cohorts on the issue of consultation with other students shows a remarkable consistency. The data from **Table iii.10** shows that all but one of the respondents had sought information from other students. Although the school had not had any previous IB graduates, one of the IB students commented that he had discussed this with a student who had completed the IB at another local school. Such student-student contact was not structured in a formal way at the school for the students of 1997 and 2002, but this investigation has revealed it as a powerful mechanism for the exchange of information about the courses through the initiative of the students themselves. It was demonstrated in the case of the 2002 cohort (Project 1, **5.3.1**) as a significant feature in assisting student decision-making about their course.

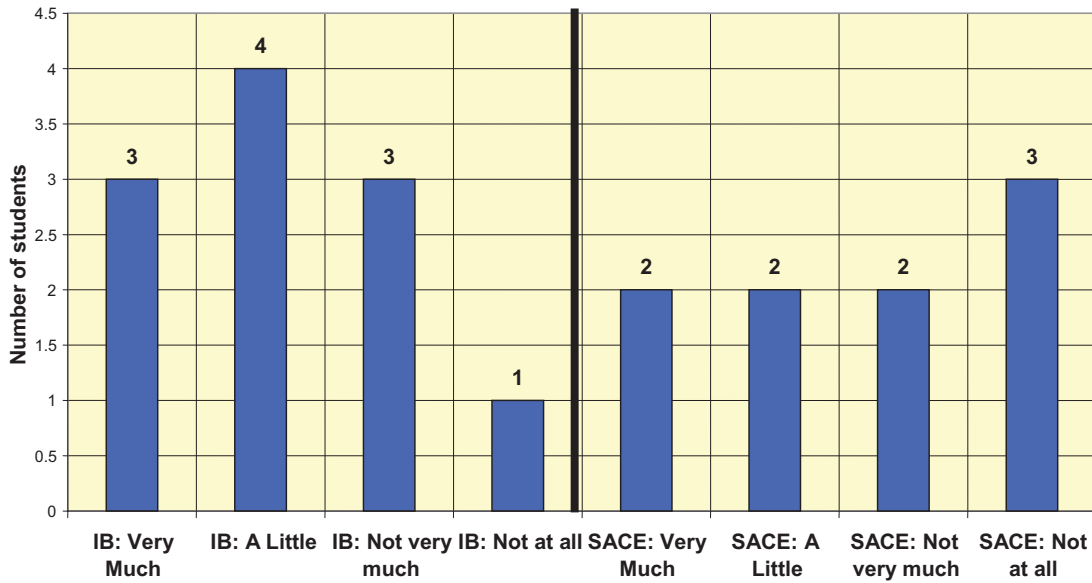
4.2.4 The influence of closest friends

Table iii.11 1997 CLOSEST FRIENDS DOING THE SAME COURSE n=20



The data from this graph suggests that, in the case of the IB students, they tended to be grouped with their friends when it came to course selection, while in the SACE group this tendency was not as strongly evident. Being with one's closest friends does not necessarily imply that influence was brought to bear from friends to enrol in the same course. Therefore, a second question was asked of students to directly account for their friends' influence on their selection.

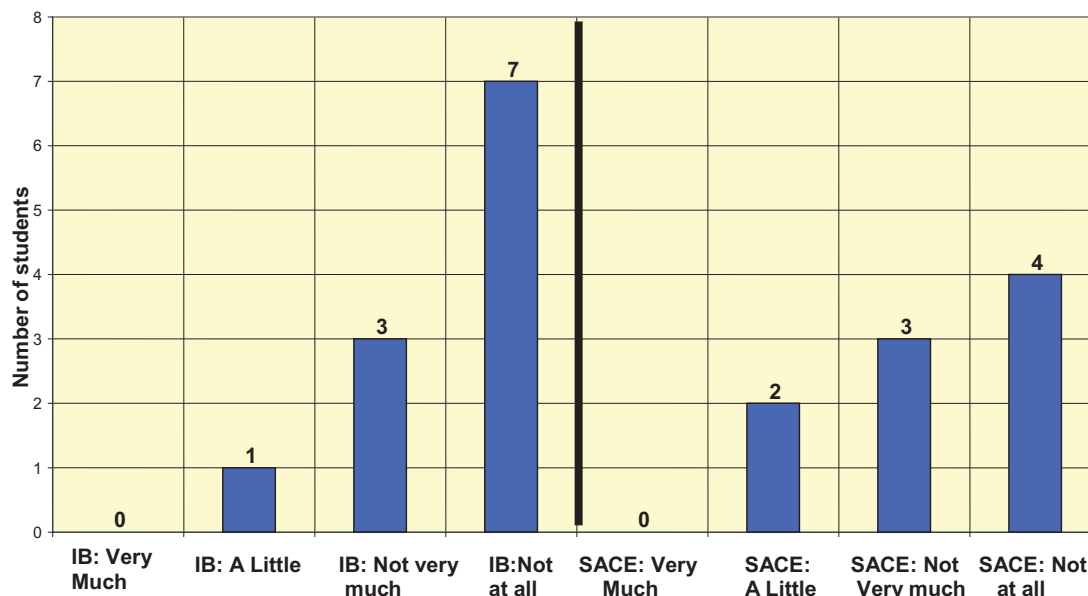
Table iii.12 1997 FRIENDS' INFLUENCE OVER COURSE n=20



The IB respondents were more inclined to acknowledge that their friends had some influence over their course choice. From the SACE responses, apart from two cases, it is difficult to argue that friends' influence was a contributing feature to course selection. The previous findings from Project 1 suggest that friends' influence was not a persuasive feature for students entering either course. As these 1997 responses relate to the first year that the IB was on offer, it may be reasonable to suppose that, in 1997, friends would have played a larger part in the spheres of influence affecting course choice than in subsequent years, as befitted the experimental nature of the first ever trial at the school of the IB programme.

4.2.5 The role of the media

Table iii.13 1997 MEDIA INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE n=20



None of the students, regardless of course choice, reported being influenced strongly by any media reports about the IB or SACE programmes. In fact, the majority of IB candidates indicated that the media played no part in their decision-making. If one were to consider the students who claimed little or no influence from media sources for their decision, seventeen of the respondents would fall into this category. Even from the remaining three, it would appear that the influence of the media was not significant. This finding is consistent with that of the 2002 cohort (Project 1, 5.3.5).

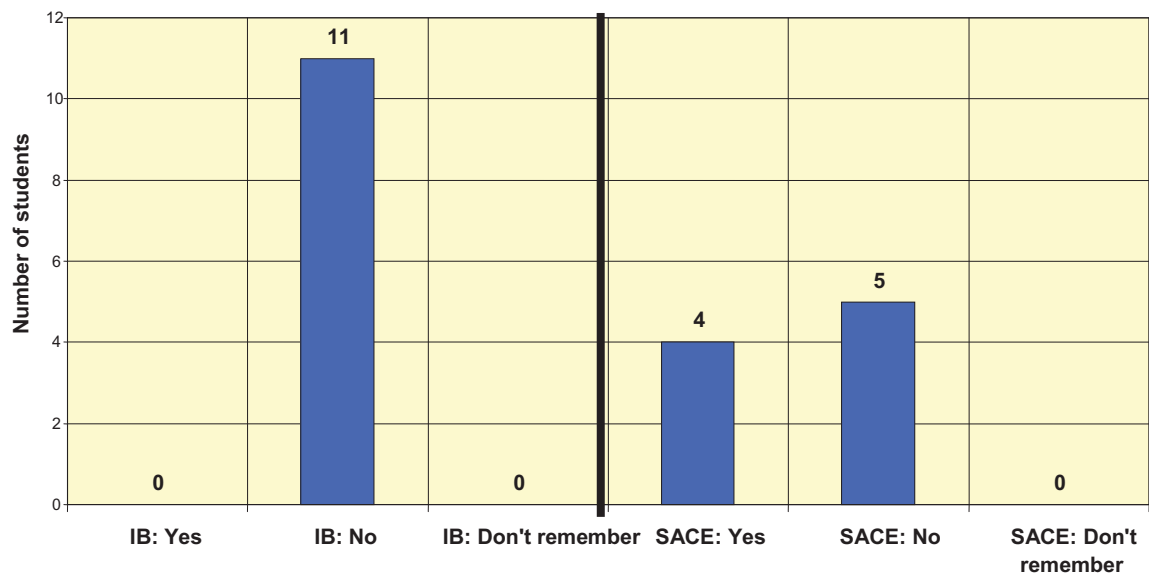
4.3 The nexus between course choice and post-secondary options

PART A of the survey, also asked students to provide information about their future aspirations. Initially, they were asked whether their course selection was a prerequisite for these future plans. They were then asked whether these plans involved some form of

tertiary study and, if so, whether they had in fact continued their study in South Australia, and whether this had been decisive in their decision-making.

The portability of the IB diploma has been widely touted as a useful vehicle for university entrance throughout the world. The original concept behind the IB had been as a credential for those going on to tertiary study. It was therefore seen as an important feature to test these two predispositions against the responses that were received.

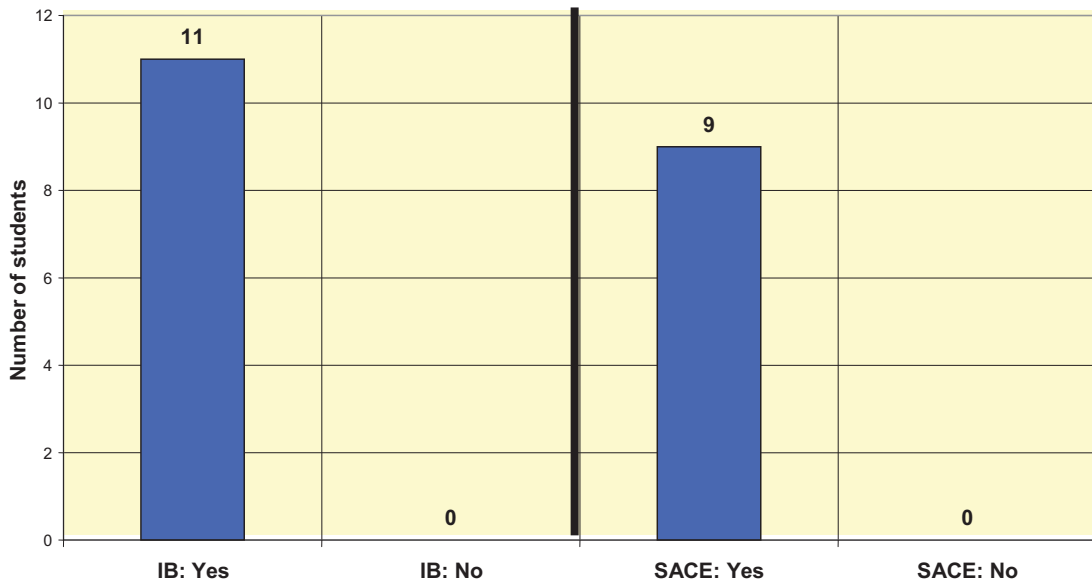
Table iii.14 THE 1997 CHOICE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR FUTURE PLANS n=20



In terms of immediate future, none of the IB candidates judged the IB programme as an official prerequisite for their future. That it could gain them a TER that would prove useful when seeking admission into further work/study places was a separate issue. Most of the SACE respondents also maintained this view. Of the four students who saw SACE as a prerequisite for their future directions, two continued their business courses, another his musicianship, while the last moved into IT (Information Technology). It

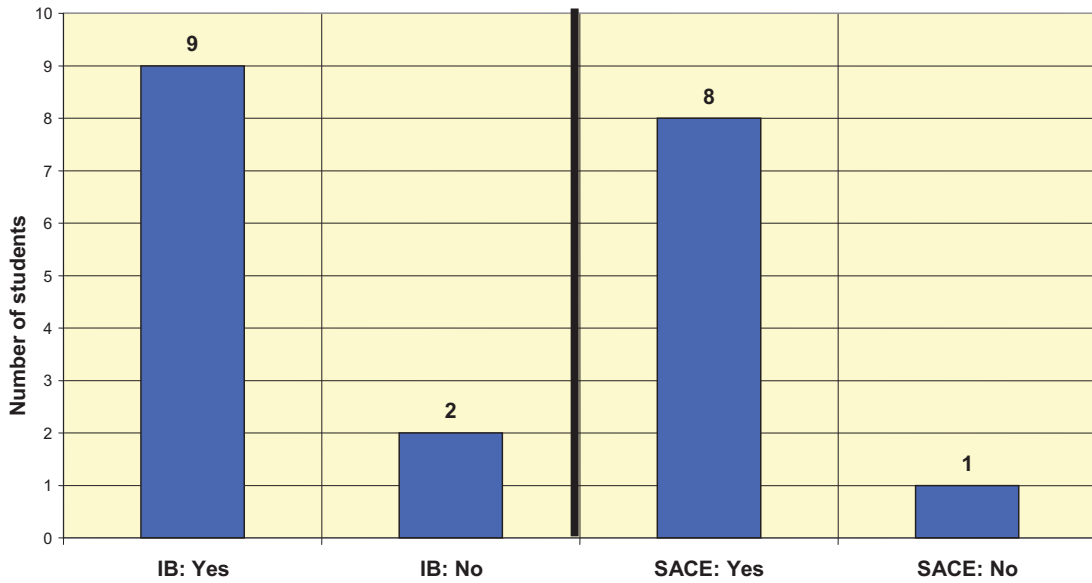
must be acknowledged that the Focus School has not offered business or music subjects within its IB programme.

Table iii.15 1997 STUDENT INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY n=20



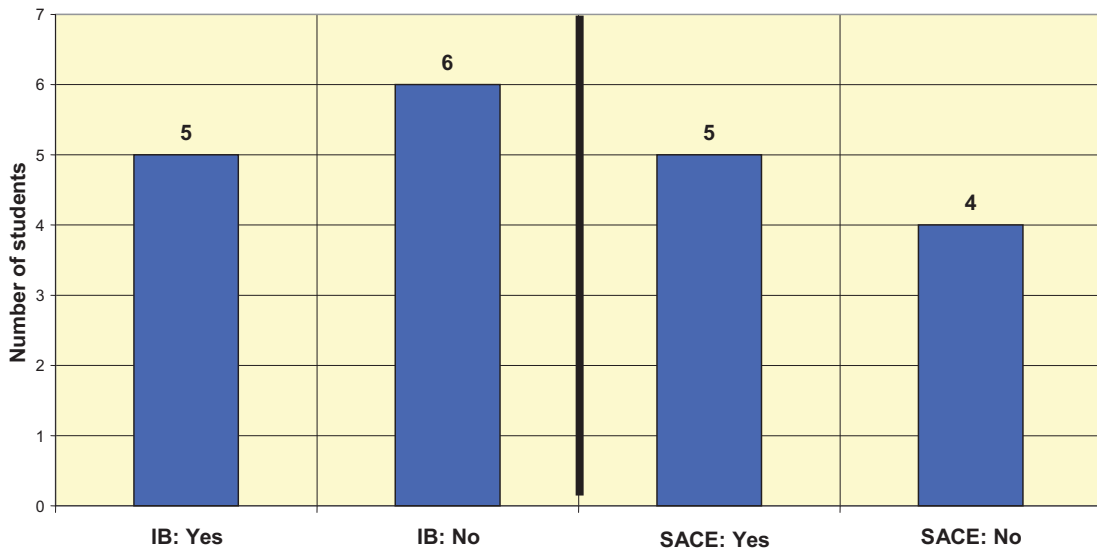
From the data collected, all students who responded to this survey had in fact intended to undertake some form of tertiary study. This reflects the current situation for most of the students at the Focus School. The prevailing political climate both at State and Federal level has supported the continued education of citizens, particularly the young, as revealed in a Government report on *Lifelong Learning* in Australia released by the Australian Government and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2003), just before the Global Financial crisis of 2008/9.

Table iii.16 1997 INTENTION FOR FUTURE STUDY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA n=20



While all students indicated that they had intended to do some form of tertiary study, most reported that their intentions were to study within the state.

Table iii.17 WAS THE 1997 COURSE CHOICE DIRECTED BY FUTURE STUDY NEEDS? n=20



The results of this graph indicate that only half the respondents had chosen their secondary course with regards to their future study needs. Interestingly, this is the same figure that was identified by the 2002 survey which had a much larger respondent base (Project 1, 5.3.7). As shown in Table iii.15, all students had indicated that they intended to

continue with their education. As only half reported that course choice was directed by their future study intention, it could be argued that future needs were not as compelling as other more immediate needs, for example, the practicalities of each course, as assessed by them.

4.4 The influence of commonly held opinions

As the time drew closer to the introduction of the IB programme alongside the SACE programme at the Focus School (that is, 1997/1998), information about the actual administration of the IB course became available, for example, staff allocations, subject content, the procedures for the extra coursework. It was then that informal discussion was found to be circulating amidst the school community at large.

It was one of the intentions of the researcher to establish to what extent this material was persuasive in driving course choice. In the survey to the former students, the following question was included. What follows is a summary of the responses to this question, broken down into the two course offerings, IB and SACE.

Were there any comments or opinions about either the IB or the SACE course that affected your choice? These may have been positive or negative; for example, class sizes, teachers you may have, the work loads, TER scores. Briefly write them down in the space provided.

4.4.1 IB students' responses

While the instruction was merely intended to record any comments briefly, and some respondents did write their comments in note form, other responses were expressed in detail. The table below contains these responses. The eleven IB responses are referred to below using the letters A-K, and are designated IB-A, IB-B et cetera for convenience.

Figure iii.1 IB STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON COMMENTS ABOUT THE TWO COURSES n=11

IB	COMMENT
A	It has been hard to answer some of the above questions, because I initially began SACE, then after three weeks, switched over to the IB. I was finding the SACE completely unchallenging, and most of my friends had opted for the IB. Certainly the teachers seemed to be 'better'. Being the first year of IB, we didn't yet realise how generous the TER conversions were going to be. I think we always knew the workload was going to be bigger. One of the main reasons I initially chose SACE was [that the school] wasn't going to, and still doesn't offer IB music.
B	TER correlation with IB score: small class size of IB=good. Dull, standardized nature of SACE.
C	I noted that the TER conversions for IB scores were quite high – that is if you got above 40 you were in the 99s for TER. I figured it wouldn't be impossible to get 6/7 for every subject (equivalent to 18/20) so thought that IB would be a good choice. Plus good choice of subjects, teachers that I respected were going to be teaching the course, most of my friends were going to be doing it.
D	The workload promised to be significantly greater with IB but this was not a deterrent; in fact it was a positive challenge. In particular I liked the idea of doing six subjects as opposed to five as it allowed me to study a broader range of material including some humanities subjects. I also understood that the subjects were to be taught in greater depth. Theory of knowledge sounded very interesting. Finally, that IB scores of 42 and above scored 99.95 on TER conversion was very appealing.
E	I was aware that the better teachers in the school would be teaching the IB, this was a big factor in my choice, similarly I was aware that students who were less able, and likely to be disruptive to classes were unlikely to want to do the IB, and were discouraged from doing so, this again influenced my choice a lot. The high TERs given to IB marks at the time were also a factor. Another factor in my choice was that the number of subjects (6 vs. 5 in SACE) made subject choice easier, especially since maths was not split into two subjects. If I had done SACE I would likely not to have been able to do German, which ended up my best subject.
F	The IB appeared to be a more academically challenging course, which I anticipated would be more rewarding for me personally. In addition, doing the IB would involve studying more subjects than SACE, which meant that I could continue to study the subjects that I enjoyed. Also, it was likely to get me a higher TER. I was aware that the school was allocating the more senior teachers to teach the IB subjects, but I am not entirely sure to what extent this influenced my decision.
G	In no particular order, all of the following factors played a part in my decision to undertake the IB: National and international recognition, favourable conversion to TER scores, high quality of teachers, small class sizes.
H	Academic rigour. Harder study.
I	IB had a broader and more challenging curriculum. IB was better preparation for university. IB was internationally recognised. IB was hard work. There was a greater weight placed on exams.
J	A family friend had done the IB at [another school] a couple of years previously, which made me want to do it. I also was appealed [sic] to IB because I perceived it to be more difficult/challenging (which is not to say that I rose to the challenge particularly well).
K	I think the fact that it was the first time IB was offered by [the Focus school] made me think that they would make an effort to make it successful and give it the time/money and teaching resources needed to make it successful. It was also exciting and new and a little intellectual challenging/elitist which had a certain appeal at the time.

Though the school has had a number of „late“ course changes, the student responsible for comment A (IB-A) was the only student among those who participated in this research who opted for a change of course. While this situation was thus unique in my investigation, the reasons that he referred to as having an impact on his decision-making were not. These revolved around subject choices, friendship groupings, workloads, challenges, teachers and TER conversions. It is evident from his comments that, while some of these factors had caused him initially to do the SACE course, his priorities changed after he started. His articulation of the process is reminiscent of the description of the three simple premises of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969, p2) as cited previously in the Introduction (see 7.1) to this research. These explain how humans act on „things“ depending on the meanings these „things“ have for them, that these meanings arise from the „social interaction“ between fellow humans, and that finally these meanings are adjusted accordingly through the interaction with all.

The factors IB-A mentioned that weighted his thinking can also be found in other students“ comments, but the emphasis was different for each individual. Even though IB-A explained that the TER conversions for IB were an unknown factor for the Focus School in this the first year of such a course, many of the other students alluded to TER conversions as a factor for consideration in making their decision. Such references can be found in the comments from IB-B, IB-C, IB-D, IB-E, IB-F and IB-G. The situation with TER conversions should be qualified. These conversion rates for the IB-DP which indicate how an IB score is then converted into a tertiary entrance rank have undergone adjustment over the years to better reflect tertiary achievement by IB candidates. The material in the next table demonstrates this adjustment.

In all the IB responses above, the TER conversion was mentioned as an appealing or motivating factor, though it was equally apparent that it was not the only factor at play. It should be reiterated that the TER conversions for this group of students (that is those who graduated in 1999) were more favourable than those for the 2002 students who graduated in 2004, as demonstrated in the table, right. The reduction in TER conversion rates (as highlighted in red) may explain why for the 2002 group, TER was not as decisive a factor.

Table iii.18 COMPARATIVE GUIDE TO TER CONVERSION RATES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

IB Score	1999 TER	2003 TER	2009 TER
45	99.95	99.95	99.95
44	99.95	99.95	99.95
43	99.95	99.95	99.95
42	99.95	99.95	99.85
41	99.90	99.90	99.20
40	99.90	99.80	98.85
39	99.80	99.35	98.50
38	99.30	98.45	98.20
37	99.00	97.25	97.75
36	98.40	96.00	96.30
35	97.50	95.30	95.50
34	95.90	94.45	95.15
33	94.70	93.80	94.55
32	93.60	93.00	93.30
31	91.90	91.80	91.35
30	89.90	89.30	87.15
29	87.50	86.80	83.85
28	84.80	84.80	82.90
27	82.50	81.30	81.30
26	78.90	78.75	78.95
25	75.10	75.10	75.55
24	71.40	71.40	69.90

It was evident in these same IB comments that there were many other reasons affecting student decisions. While TER was obviously a common theme from the responses already documented, the issue of workload/challenge of the IB programme emerged as a considerable incentive to choose the course. The following table is a compilation of the factors listed by IB respondents, correlated with an evaluation of the students' response to these factors. The letters indicate which respondent listed which factors; a red letter indicates that this factor was listed first. IB-G wrote that his response was not listed in order.

Table iii.19 CORRELATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CHOICE WITH DEGREE OF INFLUENCE: IB RESPONDENTS n=11

VALUE FACTOR	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	AMBIGUOUS
WORKLOAD/ CHALLENGE	A/B/D/F/I/J/K (7)		
TER	B/C/D/E/F/G (6)		H (1)
TEACHERS	A/C/E/G/K (5)		F (1)
SUBJECTS	C/D/E/F (4)		
FRIENDS/ STUDENTCOHORT	A/C/E (3)		
CLASS SIZE	B/G (2)		
NATIONAL/ INTERNATIONAL	G/I (2)		
PREPARATION FOR UNIVERSITY	I (1)		
ELITIST	K (1)		
TOTAL COMMENTS	31	0	2

The comments of the IB respondents, overwhelmingly positive, indicated that there were multiple factors affecting choice. These students as consumers were faced with numerous marketable qualities that they had to rate. The often advertised strengths of the IB as a doorway to international study and as possessing a certain *caché* were not frequently mentioned influences over course choice amongst this group. Nor were class sizes. Teachers, subjects and friendship groups played a stronger role for these participants. The two most influential factors it would appear were the TER conversion scores (which, although likely, were in no way assured) and even more compelling, the nature of the challenging workload. An attraction to what was perceived as a hard yet stimulating course was the most influential factor recalled by these former IB students. Although one student wryly admitted that he might have not exactly risen to the challenge, this was still his listed motivation to attempt the course.

Figure iii.2 SACE STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON COMMENTS ABOUT THE TWO COURSES n=9

SACE	COMMENT
A	The opinion that the IB course would have a few problems as it was the first time it had been implemented at the school. The IB wasn't going to help me into my course of accounting any more than SACE as I needed a lowish TER. I had not enjoyed language studies very much and my grades were not very good. This would have affected my TER if I had done the IB course.
B	Pre-deciding whether to choose SACE or IB, I was very favourably inclined towards IB; the school and my friends suggested it was a superior, more mature (though more challenging) course. On the other hand my parents were against the course, presumably because they feared its novelty; that it was unproven to give better TER scores.
C	There was a general feeling that the workload in the IB course would be significantly greater than that for the SACE course and that was a major factor in me electing to do the SACE course. Also, from memory, I think 1999 was the first year [The Focus School] introduced the IB and my year being a bit of a 'guinea pig' year was also a factor in me electing to do SACE.
D	SACE - less work. Was the first year of IB, SACE was more proven track record.
E	SACE was more suited to my style of learning.
F	The possibility of a higher TER was my only attraction to IB. The teachers that taught IB weren't the teachers that I wanted (in general). This is why I chose SACE.
G	The school refused to offer IB music and, as I wanted to study music, this decided it for me.
H	SACE seemed to be a standard and meet all the requirements for what I needed.
I	Workloads sounded quite high but TER scores were apparently moderated accordingly in the IB. Didn't really have much affect on my choice in the end as I thought I'd be studying in the state anyway so didn't feel the IB was necessary.

4.4.2 SACE students' responses

The figure above is a summary of factors that were listed by the SACE respondents as affecting choice. There were nine SACE participants who were designated A-I. Individual comments that are later discussed are categorised SACE-A, SACE-B and so on for convenience.

As this was the first year that the IB programme was to be introduced at the Focus School, there was a certain trepidation felt by some students and families about the success of an untested course. This resistance was not found to be a factor for course choice in the 2002 research, once the IB had become established part of the curriculum. SACE-A, SACE-B, SACE-C and SACE-D highlighted the concern of some to the perceived novelty of the IB course at the Focus School. Their comments were in direct contrast to some of the IB candidates who appeared undaunted by the IB's novelty, and in fact, were keen to take up the challenges offered by the new course.

Amongst the SACE students, though, the „unproven“ status of the IB programme was not the only factor in the decision-making process. Again there were many factors driving choice. The table below is a compilation of the factors listed by SACE respondents, also correlated with an evaluation of their responses to these factors. For consistency, the letters indicate which respondent listed which factors; a red letter indicates that this factor was listed first.

Table iii.20 CORRELATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CHOICE WITH DEGREE OF INFLUENCE: SACE RESPONDENTS n=11

VALUE FACTOR	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	AMBIGUOUS
IB UNPROVEN COURSE		A/B/C/D (4)	
SACE SUITABLE WORKLOAD	C/D/I (3)		
SACE SUBJECTS BETTER	A/G/ (2)		
LEARNING STYLE	E (1)		
TEACHERS	F (1)		
ALL OF THE ABOVE	H (1)		
TOTAL COMMENTS	8	4	0

The information above is concentrated in two specific areas; the novelty of the IB and the relative merits of the workload and subject choice. The most cited influence over choice was generated by negative responses to the IB rather than positive responses to SACE. These particular students did not want to participate in a programme that they deemed largely experimental nor did they want to take on extra workloads when this was perceived of as unnecessary. In the domain of workloads, there was also clear reference to the fact that subject offerings by the Focus School for the IB programme were incompatible with the preferences of some students.

4.5 Comparing the 1997 and 2002 decision-making.

This concludes the analysis of material pertaining to Part A of the survey. The questions from Part A were identical for both IB and SACE students and established details about the administrative processes available to students who were then in Year 10 deciding upon their course and the influence of a range of factors affecting that decision. These replicated the questions posed to the Year 10 students in the 2002 survey reported in Project 1.

Two observations can be made about the findings from both surveys. The first is recognition that the administrative mechanisms put in place by the Focus School were more streamlined and formal in 2002 than in 1997. The second is recognition of a feature in both surveys for the decision-making process to be complex and for factors affecting student choice to be very similar between the two groups. Students from both groups were consistent in recording, for example, that fellow students were a valuable source for information about the courses, maternal influence (where acknowledged) was likely to be stronger than paternal influence and the media were not a significant influence overall.

Furthermore, the isolation of specific factors that were repeatedly listed as instrumental in the decision-making process such as workloads and subject choice, demonstrated that these were prevalent in both groups. Given that the Focus School was relatively unchanged over the period between each survey, with course content and teachers very similar too, it was perhaps unsurprising that the same issues were driving the course choice of students. Hence, it can be argued that the decision to map the 1997 survey group against that of 2002 for the purpose of investigating the long-term outcomes of the decision-making was both valuable and justified.

4.6 Reflections on advice

Part B of the questionnaire related to the experiences of former students but differentiated these along IB and SACE course choice. Questions 25 and 26 were related by theme, in that they asked the respondents to reflect upon course advice. It seems appropriate to discuss them here as a longer term consideration of the advice they had received in making their choice. Question 25 posed the following:

In hindsight, what was the most useful advice that you received about making your course choice?

It was hoped that some factors emerging would assist future students in their choice of course. The comments are cited in full in the table below; their presentation is organised under the main themes that emerged.

Figure iii.3 REFLECTIONS ON USEFUL ADVICE RECEIVED WHEN CHOOSING A COURSE

SACE n=9	IB n=11
No specific comment	
<i>Left Blank by respondent</i>	<i>Left blank by respondent</i>
Don't remember.	I can't remember
Nil	None
	n/a
Reflections about TER	
Do PES subjects to limit the scaling down of TER scores.	The conversion of IB to high TER scores. Level of academic rigour greater. Six subjects instead of five.
Work out what you want to study at Uni and choose subjects that will get you the best marks.	Work towards achieving a high tertiary entrance to give yourself as many options as possible in course choices.
Reflections about curriculum options	
If you don't think you can commit fully and meet the workload requirements which are extensive, you would most likely be better off doing SACE.	The most useful advice I received was probably the advice on the courses available, in both SACE and IB and the teachers who would be teaching the subjects.
Do what will be fun.	IB had a broader more interesting curriculum
To choose subjects I enjoyed.	Don't do HL maths, chem. Or German
Reflections about choice in general	
It didn't matter what course I chose-I was capable of following any path I wanted to either way.	To be honest, I didn't even think about the choice. I knew I wanted to do IB even before [the school] introduced it (although I would not have left [the school] to pursue it) so when it was offered it was a foregone conclusion I would do it. All this on the basis of some casual conversations with a family friend 2 years my senior!!
	Don't know. I'd heard about IB when I was in primary school because one of the schools I was attending was thinking of introducing it. It was seen as being a better qualification then and I guess I carried that with me to [this school].

Half of the respondents either had no comment to make in this regard (seven students) or stated that the choice was not an issue (one student) or not dependent on any factor related to the school (two students). Four respondents were clearly mindful of the „number crunching“ that would occur to their final exam results in order to come up with a TER and of the possible advantage/disadvantage that good/poor subject selection could have on their score. Other advice revolved around specific curriculum offerings. There was a different focus in the comments between the advice that concentrated on the process of the course, for example, ‘Do what will be fun‘, ‘Don’t do HL maths, chem. Or German‘ and the advice that fixed more on outcomes, for example, ‘[IB] was seen as being a better qualification‘ and ‘Do PES subjects to limit the scaling down TER scores‘.

These alternate foci of process and outcomes have emerged in the discussion of results in the two earlier research projects. Advice sought by students tended to gravitate between information surrounding the mechanics of doing the course and the possible outcomes of having done the course. It was difficult to determine which advice was the more persuasive, although the evidence from Project 1 pointed to the fact that many Year 10 students sought the advice of students currently undertaking each course. This suggests that assessing the offerings and demands of the next two years was a more compelling concern, but not necessarily exclusive of evaluating the end product of each course.

Question 26 asked students to suggest any advice that they considered might have been useful to them when deciding on their course. The responses could be grouped into three categories; the first simply recorded those who gave no responses or advice;

the second related to advice about the mechanics of doing the course; the final category concerned advice relating to the longer term outcomes of each course. The second and third categories again reflected the different foci of advice identified above: the demands of the immediate future and the longer term outcomes.

Figure iii.4 REFLECTIONS ON ADVICE THAT COULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL WHEN CHOOSING A COURSE

SACE n=9	IB n=11
No advice	
<i>Left Blank by respondent</i>	<i>Left blank by respondent</i>
	<i>Left blank by respondent</i>
	<i>Left blank by respondent</i>
Reflections about no good advice	
<i>At that stage in my life I don't think any amount of good advice would have gotten me to make the correct choices anyway!</i>	I can't personally imagine any reason to prefer SACE over IB, nor could I in year 10. So I can't think of any specific advice that would help anyone make a choice: if they're considering SACE, then they clearly have very different priorities to me, and so I'm not likely to be able to give good advice.
Reflections on immediate concerns	
<i>Enjoy school</i>	A stronger sense of what my intellectual disposition was (viz humanities) though due to mandatory science and maths, wouldn't have changed anything, just enforced my SL/HL decisions.
<i>Choose subjects you are interested in as this will lead to better results as I always do better when I enjoy something.</i>	Knowing there would be smaller classes in IB (but presumably this changes from year to year depending on how many people choose IB). Knowing which teachers teach IB and knowing about those teachers (generally those who taught IB were fantastic).
<i>People don't care what you do. Scaling is minimal. Do courses you can, regardless of PES/PAS/SAS status.</i>	

Reflections on longer term outcomes	
The stereotype of uni successful students is wrong.	In hindsight the advice [which] would have best served me would have been to consider what I wanted to do and my making my choice based on that, not what my friends thought I should do.
At the end of the day will it help you achieve your planned career?	Opportunity for work experience.
Some more details about how important completing English could have been in future studies.	True status of the IB internationally. I haven't had any trouble but I have heard of others who have had issues getting the IB accepted.
If you are pursuing entry to a high TER course the IB really is the way to go if you know you can cope with a heavy workload.	I think it would have been useful to really explore all the possibilities IB opened up in the world that is if you do really well, attending world leading institutions (that is Oxford and Harvard etc) and scholarships etc. These never occurred to me until about 5 years after graduation (in the sense that I never really considered them realistically.)
	How IB score is converted to TER and how this is different in different states.

These comments have obviously evolved from and reflect each candidate's personal experiences of his course and post-secondary education life. Needless to say, the advice articulated revolves around balancing shorter term and longer term issues, regardless of the course choice. No pattern was evident across the responses to suggest what additional procedures the Focus School could adapt to make decision-making more effective.

5. Outcomes of the choice

The following section is again derived from Part B of the survey where questions were designed to discover how a student's course choice unfolded over the two years of the actual course and then the years beyond. Responses gave rise to data about

elements of the chosen courses, the transition to further study, and intended occupations, as well as observations by participants about skills acquired in the process.

5.1 Choice of subjects within the chosen course

In the area of subject choices within the chosen course, the following list was drawn up from the subjects that respondents indicated they studied. These do not represent the total number of subjects on offer in the school that year, but simply reflect the choices made by the respondents. The subjects are listed with the numbers of respondents who studied them given in the brackets.

Figure iii.5 SUBJECT CHOICES OF SACE AND IB STUDENTS#

SACE SUBJECTS (9 students @ 5 subjects each)		IB SUBJECTS (11 students @ 6 subjects each)	
PES*	English (4) German (1) Economics (1) Accounting (2) Geography (1) Maths 1 (7) Maths 2 (3) Biology (2) Chemistry (6) Physics (5) Drama (1) Musicianship (1) Music (Performance) (1)	HL†	English (2) French (1) Economics (1) Geography (1) History (2) Maths (9) Chemistry (7) Physics (10)
*PES = Publicly Examined Subject		†HL = Higher Level	
PAS**	English (1) Business Studies (5) Physical Education (1)	SL††	English (9) French (1) German (4) Mandarin Chinese (5) Economics (2) History (1) Information Technology in a Global Society (ITGS) (5) Maths (2) Chemistry (4)
**PAS = Publicly Assessed Subject		††SL = Standard Level	
SAS***	English (1) Business Maths (2)	Extended essay, TOK and CAS†††	
***SAS = School Assessed Subject		††† TOK = Theory of Knowledge CAS = Creativity, Action, Service	

An IB student also opted to study SACE Latin.

The range of subject choices reflected in this list reveals the types of learning experiences sought by these students. The IB students were required to study a language and this was reflected in the numbers doing languages in the IB section. Among the SACE students business courses were popular. The IB candidates were weighted towards HL Maths and Science which was indicative of the bias of the respondents, although these subjects also appeared popular amongst the SACE students. Even though SACE offered a wider variety of assessment models, that is PES, PAS and SAS (as they were termed in 1999), there was still a preference, regardless of course choice for those subjects that were publicly examined/assessed. (The current terminology for these subjects is HESS general or restricted, see glossary for further clarification.)

This preference was in turn partially driven by future study needs. All of the students surveyed intended to pursue some form of tertiary study, and any application to many of the tertiary institutions required a strong component of publicly examined material. Furthermore, all three universities in South Australia offer bonus points towards admission for those students who performed well in certain subjects in their courses.

The example given below is from the University of Adelaide.

Figure iii.6 University of Adelaide, Bonus Point Scheme

NOTE:
This figure is included on page 226
of the print copy of the thesis held in
the University of Adelaide Library.

The University of Adelaide's scheme, according to SATAC (The South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre, the body that oversees all applications for tertiary entry), is clear that „provided a student obtained a Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) in 1999 or later, they will be eligible for the Bonus Points Scheme.“ Should any IB student from the Focus School have applied to this University, he would immediately have been eligible for the LOTE bonus and, if doing Maths at HL, the maths bonus would have also applied. This meant that nine of the IB students were eligible for all possible bonus points, with a further two IB students eligible for the language bonus. Of the SACE students, three would have been eligible for the Maths bonus and one for the language bonus. It should also be mentioned that at the University of Adelaide, too, if any IB student achieved a high enough result in a designated Higher Level subject, he/she might be awarded credit for some part of his first year university course and gain exemption usually from first semester study.

While any advantage derived from these bonus point schemes to enter a university was dependent upon the subjects studied that contributed to a student's TER, more of the IB students would have been eligible for more bonus points. Further, more IB students would also have received credit for some part of their first year course (subject to course rules) due to their HL subject results.

5.2 Transition to tertiary study

A further question in the survey related to the ease of transition between the students' secondary and tertiary education. There had been some general observations made by various members of the school community that students might be better equipped for tertiary studies if they followed one course or another or that their motivation,

independence or organisational skills could have been enhanced by certain course requirements. These assumptions had not been tested in any forum. The responses from the candidates in this survey have been grouped into three classifications, the first indicating that the transition was relatively easy, the second that the transition was mixed (in that some aspects were easy while others more difficult) and the last indicating that the transition was difficult. It should be noted that one IB student left his response blank and hence the total number of IB responses is only ten.

The comments are recorded on the following pages; the SACE students are in the first column, while the IB responses are in the second column as in previous figures. As the comments in **Figure iii.7** have been classified into three categories which extend for several pages, **Figure iii.7** has been split into the three separate sections (**Figure iii.7a**, **Figure iii.7b** and **Figure iii.7c**), and the analysis follows each section.

Figure iii.7a RELATIVELY EASY TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES

SACE n=2	IB n=5
<p>I had no problems-felt there was a lighter workload.</p>	<p>Exempt from the first semester of some maths and physics subjects. This may or may not have been a good idea. As there is now a steady flow of IB students, I believe this has been somehow formalised by the Uni of Adelaide. Certainly well prepared for workloads.</p>
<p>Not overly difficult, the level of difficulty was at a higher standard but that was compensated for by all the extra study tools, e.g. tutorials, work groups etc. There was definitely a lot of people who didn't /couldn't cope with the transition but I think the expectations and workload the Focus School put on us in Year 12 equipped us for Uni better than perhaps other schools did.</p>	<p>University was much less interesting. Not much scope to study things like Philosophy, Geography and English within the confines of an Engineering and Finance degree. The transition was easy I think because we'd already covered most of our first year subjects at high school. The structured and regimented nature of compulsory education holds a lot of people back, I think. The universal freedom of the IB is a step in the right direction.</p> <p>I didn't have any particular problems with the transition: I found it relatively straightforward. I found the content of many first year courses relatively uninteresting, since they were targeted at students who had not studied that level of content before.</p> <p>I found the transition fine. I did not find there was a huge jump from IB to first year uni subjects. While teaching methods were different, I adjusted quite quickly. I had no trouble adjusting to/meeting expectations.</p> <p>Easy, was a bit of an intellectual snob for a while, but learned not to behave like that eventually. Most material comprehensively addressed at school, entirely prepared, got lazy, failed an exam, and learned not to be lazy.</p>

The group above, seven in all, were quite comfortable with the transition. Nearly half the IB group of eleven saw no difficulties in the transition to university. Some had benefited from the fact that their higher level subject results had allowed them exemptions in some of their first year course work, though three out of five commented on the lack of challenge of subjects and how uninteresting the content was. It was not simply the depth in the material that was missing, but one student missed the breadth as well.

Figure iii.7b MIXED TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES

SACE n=3	IB n=3
Much lighter workload. Teaching staff no longer have answers or any real form of review. Much more like real world but also very isolated from a content/student point.	The content of the IB was more difficult compared to first year university; but the teaching methods were vastly different. It was not simple to stay focused at university, whereas during the IB we were placed in an environment ideal for that purpose.
Course content wasn't particularly hard. Being totally self-motivated was the biggest transition and at that point in my life I found it incredibly difficult.	I found transitioning to tertiary both easy in some ways difficult in others. I really made the wrong choice in course (Engineering) and that made it impossible for me to concentrate and put the effort required into my studies. That had little to do with the IB though, and more with me making my course choice highly influenced by narrow minded viewpoints of friends. The transition was easy in the sense that if I enjoyed what I was doing, I never found it difficult to do well, and understand the course material. In fact I coasted my way through mostly, once I found what I liked doing
Pretty similar, but different expectations regarding content and layouts of assignments.	Uni was a lot less structured than school-intellectually wasn't as challenging or intense (at least for first few years)

Of the group who felt they had had a mixed transition, the SACE students didn't suggest that the transition was difficult because of the workload, but more for other reasons, for example, self-motivation, social isolation and different assessment expectations. The same distinctions were made by the IB candidates. There were no obvious problems with the difficulty of university study, but issues about personal focus and motivation made the adjustment harder. The sense that the IB students did not find the early years at University challenging is again featured in their comments.

Figure iii.7c DIFFICULT TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES

SACE n=4	IB n=2
It was difficult because the University courses (that is Medicine) were so disorganised and sloppy. However this was probably just medicine.	I did a very difficult course – medicine at Melbourne University. Consequently it was a difficult transition-a much faster learning rate was required at university. It was more difficult for me than some others as I had not done biology at school. There was a far stronger emphasis on self-directed learning at uni. There was also more learning in teams/groups at university. Having a strong work ethic, which IB was instrumental in forming, made an invaluable difference. I strongly suspect that the transition would have been much harder had I done SACE.
Focus of learning/performance totally on self rather than teachers. The standard of learning at a tertiary level is much higher than at high school.	Drastic increase in the amount of work, complexity of material. Compared to IB, almost no supervision of learning. Required to be very self-motivated and organised.
The responsibility to make yourself learn was interesting; I didn't have the maturity in 1 st year to force myself to study.	
I began Uni immediately after finishing school. This was a bad idea for me, as I wasn't passionate or motivated about what I was doing. The only reason I did it was to satisfy my parents. The Uni teaching method was hard to adjust to as a result. We were definitely 'spoon-fed' at [the Focus School].	

The two IB candidates who found the transition difficult were the only ones from the IB group surveyed who had moved interstate to study. Although their comments refer only to the challenges of their new study regime and the increased demands on self-direction and motivation, one should acknowledge that in their new university context, both were deprived of the ready support network of family and friends which was available to those at South Australian universities. Of the SACE students, one student found the transition to his medical course difficult due to the course structure. The other SACE students found the adjustment difficult for other reasons; the higher standard of learning, and the rush to undertake some tertiary course without the necessary maturity or motivation.

On balance, the conclusion reached from the comments above suggests that the IB students surveyed fared better than their SACE counterparts in making the transition from secondary to tertiary studies, even though for half of these IB students, the early years of their tertiary experience were reported as unchallenging or uninteresting. This judgement is confirmed by the comparison of later outcomes in the nature of the qualifications gained and subsequent employment that follows.

5.3 Study and occupation pathways

As indicated in **Table iii.15**, all students surveyed had intended to undertake tertiary study. Below is a quick overview of responses to the question:

Briefly describe what you have been doing since leaving school.

The comments have been analysed in terms of tertiary study programs and occupation pathways taken by the participants. The table below summarises details of the eleven

IB respondents and also includes factual data of an additional student as forwarded to the researcher by a parent.

Figure iii.8 POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS FOR IB RESPONDENTS n=12

UNIVERSITY	TERTIARY COURSE	WORK	FURTHER STUDY
Adelaide	B. Eng (Hons: computing systems)	IT business-5 years	Music overseas
Adelaide: Flinders	B. Commerce: B.A. (Screen & drama) incomplete	Travel. Various theatre work.	
Adelaide	B. Commerce/LLB (Hon)	Commercial law firm	
Melbourne	MBBS		Physician training- Melbourne
Adelaide	Engineering (changed) Computer Science (changed) B. Sc- Geology/Geophysics	Geological consulting firm	
Adelaide	B. Eng (Elect-Hons)/ LLB (Hons)	Software company	
Adelaide	B. Eng (IT and Telecomm)/B.A (Spanish/German)	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	
Melbourne	MBBS	Doctor	
Adelaide	B. Comm/LLB (Hons)	Investment banker.- Sydney	
Adelaide	B. Comm/LLB	Solicitor- London	Ongoing e.g. Grad Dip in Applied Finance
Adelaide	B. Eng/B. Finance	Investment banker- Sydney	Ongoing e.g. MBA/CFA
Material forwarded by parents or school			
Adelaide	B. Eng (Hons)/LLB (Hons)	Melbourne law firm	

It is important to recognise that overall the initial group of 25 IB respondents had gained results in 1999 with an average of 38 points out of a possible 45; equivalent to a South Australian TER of 99.3.

From the data, all these students continued to do some form of University course after they left school, the University of Adelaide being the dominant educational institution. From anecdotal evidence received by the researcher, it is understood that both students who studied interstate did not necessarily choose that as their first option, which might have been to continue their study locally. Although there were three degrees that were recorded as incomplete, there were a total of nineteen completed degrees (five in Engineering, five in Law, four in Commerce, two in Medicine, one in Science, one B.A in languages and one degree in Finance); seven with Honours and seven of the students had completed double degrees. Their occupations included three lawyers, two doctors, two investment bankers, two IT workers, one geologist, one in theatre and a Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) officer. Most of these occupations are traditionally associated with high status and high income, while requiring high qualifications. It is also worth noting that four students have continued to study, some in completely new areas. What was also apparent was that five of the original surveyed, plus a sixth on the list, had all started or finished an engineering degree. None of these were in fact working as engineers. Six of the candidates were working or studying interstate (4) or overseas (2).

The table below summarises details of the nine SACE respondents and also includes factual data of three other students as forwarded to the researcher by parents or the school. While there was not an opportunity to calculate an average TER for this group as not all results were identified, it is important to recognise that the average TER of the group would have been lower than that recorded by the IB students. The number of SACE graduates for 1999 was much larger than for the IB and the respondents were drawn from a more diverse academic spectrum.

Figure iii.9 POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS FOR SACE RESPONDENTS n=12

UNIVERSITY	TERTIARY COURSE	WORK	FURTHER STUDY
[unknown]	B. Management/B. Business	Building industry-project managing	
Uni SA	B. Comm (Acc)	London Accounting	Professional Year ongoing
[unknown]		Marketing- Brisbane	Accounting and Finance
Adelaide	MBBS	Medical resident	
[unknown]		IT consultant /analyst	
Adelaide	Music (Hons)	ASO/Instrumental teaching	Masters in Performance Sydney
Adelaide	B.Sc M.Comm(Acc)	[unknown]	
Uni SA	B. Applied Science	Aircraft charter pilot	
TAFE	Cert IV Fitness	Personal trainer/travel	Electronics
Material forwarded by parents or school.			
Adelaide	B. Sc (Hons)	Scientist	PhD-ANU Canberra
[unknown]		Aircraft Pilot- WA	
Adelaide	B. Eng	Engineer	

Of this group, it is apparent that the University of Adelaide was again a popular choice for tertiary study, but the University of South Australia and TAFE feature as well. It must be acknowledged that both the universities were geographically very close to the Focus School, so proximity as well as course offerings might have had an impact on choice.

Among the SACE group, there are a total of ten degrees, two with honours and two double degrees. The occupations included two pilots, one doctor, an engineer, a scientist, one in IT, an accountant, a project manager, a musician, one in marketing and a personal trainer. In contrast to the IB cases, the engineering graduate is in fact pursuing this as his career. Five of the candidates were working or studying interstate

(4) or overseas (1). Five of the group were continuing with some form of official study or training, with two of these in new areas.

While numbers were small, it would appear that the pathways for students who embarked on tertiary courses and their eventual occupations were remarkably similar regardless of the programme they chose at secondary level. In other words, the tertiary study options and career pathways taken by IB and SACE students appear comparable in that the majority could loosely be grouped into professions involving business, medicine or engineering, but there was a considerable difference between the IB and SACE students in the extent of the take-up of these pathways. Entry to a double degree, followed by an Honours year was a more likely tertiary outcome for the IB students than for the SACE students. Further, no respondents reported that they were negatively affected by their TER.

Of the three students who did study elsewhere, it would appear that both the IB and SACE were acceptable entry credentials for this. It is also apparent from their documented career highlights that respondents' education history has been and in some cases is still very extensive. In fact there was a tendency for their first tertiary experience to be local, while further tertiary studies were not as locally based, regardless of the IB or SACE experience.

5.4 Skills gained from the respective courses

Question 22 in the survey required students from both programmes to identify any skill sets that they saw as part of their learning experience. As a prompt the question had given examples of skills they might have gained.

Please identify any skills that you consider you gained from the SACE/IB course, e.g. thinking about your own learning, independent working, time management, making deadlines etc.

The figures that follow cite the comments of the students, categorized under SACE (Figure iii.10a) and IB (Figure iii.10b) headings for a comparative study. The nine SACE responses are presented separately by the blue letters A-I. The eleven IB comments are presented similarly, but by black letters A-K.

Figure iii.10a IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS GAINED FROM SACE RESPONDENTS n=9

<i>Question 22: Please identify any skills that you consider you gained from the SACE/IB course, e.g. thinking about your own learning, independent working, time management, making deadlines etc.</i>	
SACE	Comments
A	Identified the complexity of things that seemed simple. Encouraged learning.
B	Deadlines. Prioritising.
C	Individual responsibility for making deadlines.
D	Independent from some subjects only, others were more force feed style of teaching. I learnt the basics of time management.
E	Independence, ability to work under pressure, ability to prioritise.
F	Working in groups-teamwork and independent working. Having set objectives to be met by certain dates.
G	I really believe I didn't gain any of the above skills from SACE. I either already had them, or developed them by being in the workforce.
H	Having to think about which way I wanted to direct my studies towards mostly. Apart from that most study habits were pretty similar to what I had been doing in previous years anyway.
I	The skills above were developed but only to a minor degree. Because [the School's] SACE course was very well run as long as we did the homework and studied what was taught, things were very easy.

Figure iii.10b IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS GAINED FROM IB RESPONDENTS n=11

Question 22: Please identify any skills that you consider you gained from the SACE/IB course, e.g. thinking about your own learning, independent working, time management, making deadlines etc.	
IB	Comments
A	All of the above.
B	All of the above - even if the above examples had not been cited I would have stated exactly the same things.
C	I learned to focus on the particular goals and outcomes being examined that is what is relevant/important, that is the curriculum etc. I learned to handle substantial projects, that is extended essay and the foreign literature essay for English. To an extent the TOK [Theory of Knowledge] course made me reflect on 'knowledge' that is more thoughtful/critical thinking (although I'm not sure whether this developed afterwards and I think TOK was useful in hindsight).
D	Learning to juggle a lot of balls at once was a useful skill. Time management to a lesser extent.
E	Time management and deadlines certainly. Thinking outside, and further than, the basic requirements.
F	Time management. Independence of approach to outcomes. Good critical thinking.
G	I learnt about time management skills, the importance of being prepared in advance and the importance and value of self-directed learning in reinforcing and supplementing what was learnt in class. I learnt to be applied and dedicated to my study. I learnt how to be more analytical.
H	Time management. Research and referencing skills. Autonomy in learning. Scientific method. Organisation of larger and longer undertakings e.g. extended essay.
I	Independent learning, capacity to read large novels, vastly better critical analysis, hard work at great personal harm due to never improved time-management skills.
J	Doing IB taught me how to study independently, though it didn't help my time management skills. It did improve my confidence in my academic abilities. It also allowed me to meet the pre-requisites of courses I undertook at Uni.
K	I'm not completely sure that I can attribute many of the above-mentioned skills specifically to studying the IB- to the extent that I have those skills; I suspect I still would have studied SACE. I'm not entirely sure that the IB's much-vaunted emphasis on self-directed learning is entirely accurate, at least in my experience. In both courses, you are taught a specified syllabus which you learn for an exam which is intended to test your knowledge of it. It's just that the IB syllabus is more difficult.

These two sets of comments are integrated into a third figure (Figure iii.10c) below which categorises the specific skills that are mentioned by the students. Again, blue

letters indicate skills listed by SACE students. Black letters refer to the responses from IB students.

Figure iii.10c COMPILATION OF SPECIFIC SKILLS IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS

<i>Question 22: Please identify any skills that you consider you gained from the SACE/IB course, e.g. thinking about your own learning, independent working, time management, making deadlines etc.</i>			
SKILLS	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NO or LIMITED
Independent work	A/B/D/E/F/F/G/H/I/J (10)		The students listed below suggested that their skills were either those that they had largely acquired earlier or developed them later in the work force. Therefore, they did not attribute them to their course <i>per se</i> .
Time management	A/B/D/D/E/F/G/H (8)	I/J (2)	
Critical thinking	A/B/C/E/F/G/I (7)		
Deadlines	A/B/B/C/E/F (6)		
Ability to handle pressure/workloads	E/C/D/H/J (5)		
Focus/prioritise	B/E/C/G (4)		
Identified complexity	A (1)		
Force feed		D (1)	
Encouraged learning	A (1)		
Teamwork	F (1)		
Totals	(43)	(3)	(4)

An obvious deduction from the responses above suggests that there were similarities between the types of skills that the SACE students and IB students claimed that they felt their particular programme honed or encouraged within them. The ability to work independently, to meet deadlines and to focus on tasks were mentioned by both IB and SACE students on several occasions. What is more at issue was the extent to which the programmes themselves were responsible for the development of such skills or whether these skills were learning approaches that the students themselves

already possessed or, as in one case, developed later. From the material above, opinions varied widely. The perceptions that the students had of their skill acquisition ranged from them attributing these directly to the framework of their courses or asserting that was not the case at all. From the nature of the qualitative comments above, neither course emerges as being inherently preferable in regard to the question posed.

However, while such skills as time management and the ability to handle the workload were listed by both SACE and IB students, the IB students were more likely to refer to these. While most students reported these in a positive way, two IB students acknowledged that their time management skills in no way benefited from their course. Of further significance was that seven IB students identified that their course had developed their critical analysis/thinking skills, though this wasn't directly referred to in the given prompts. No SACE student used this terminology, though there was a reference from one to the „identification of complexity“.

It is also important to note the scepticism apparent in some of the responses. Some references, such as „in both courses, you are taught a specified syllabus which you learn for an exam which is intended to test your knowledge of it“, suggested that students did not benefit from their particular course structure with regards to skill acquisition. Negative issues were also identified; for example, there was a resentment felt towards the idea that some SACE material was force fed and that IB demands were achieved „at great personal harm“.

6. Reflective Evaluations

The next sections in this project are concerned with the students' personal appraisals about their respective courses. The first part concentrates on assessing the elements of the course that the students as individuals liked or disliked. The second part involves evaluating students' responses to a series of quotations that relate to either the SACE or IB courses.

6.1 Likes and dislikes of the chosen course

In questions 23 and 24 of the survey, respondents were asked to highlight the elements of the course they most enjoyed (question 23) and those that they disliked (question 24). The material has been documented below, with a separate table being compiled for each question. One obvious difference between the responses to each question was that the comments that were received about the dislikes were longer than those of the likes, even though more students failed to comment on this question. In **Figure iii.11**, while SACE and IB responses have been kept separate, the material has been grouped around the main themes discussed by each of the respondents. These responses are direct quotations and have been placed under the topic that seemed the most important when there were several mentioned. The role of teachers, the general course content, the nature of specific subjects and particular features interestingly recur as points raised by students in both courses.

Figure iii.11 ELEMENTS MOST ENJOYED IN THE SACE/IB COURSES

Elements most enjoyed SACE n=9	Elements most enjoyed IB n=11
The role of teachers	
Independent learning but under guidance of great teachers.	Interaction with peers and teachers. Interesting practicals in the science subjects.
The interaction with teachers.	Small class sizes, good teachers, a good sense of camaraderie over the 2 years. A good relationship between students and teachers.
	I enjoyed the collegiality with students and teachers. I enjoyed working on some major projects like the extended essay. I also enjoyed the practical aspects of the sciences-physics and chemistry.
The general course content	
The variety of subjects interspersed with extracurricular activities and the support network	Extension topics and 'options' (maths and physics) that one now realises were really quite advanced .*
A lot of choice, well structured and organised.	Contents/topics of all subjects excellent. HL English: discussion, performance of play generated hunger for material .*
	I enjoyed the additional (more academic)* content of the course as compared with the SACE curriculum.
The nature of specific subjects	
Physics- delving into how things worked. Chem-understanding how things are made and interact (elements)	I enjoyed German and Physics the most, largely due to the teachers.
PAS English was a great subject. I enjoyed German and accounting too.	I most enjoyed the academic rigour * of my higher level subjects, i.e. maths, physics and chemistry. I enjoyed the philosophy and analysis of learning in TOK.
Lab work in Chemistry, Discussions in English.	Broad curriculum especially in English and TOK. Chance to work on more involved projects, e.g. extended essay, group 4, ITGS (Information Technology in a Global Society) project. In many cases it was the first time I was genuinely challenged * by the course material in school.
Other particular features	
Variety and options available. Having tried all options before years 11 and 12.	Small class sizes. Quick pace of learning. Wide variety of subjects (You can't just focus on one particular type /course of study like you can with SACE.
Free periods to work on assignments/homework while still in a study environment rather than at home.	<i>One response left blank.</i>
* These five comments are to be discussed as a group later.	

On some aspects, there appears to be little difference amongst the recollections of the former SACE and IB students when evaluating the offerings or course experiences they enjoyed. For example, the interaction with their teachers, certain course content and their enjoyment of particular subjects were all mentioned by students from both courses. However, there was one common theme found in five of the IB responses, but not mentioned by any of the SACE respondents; that referred to the level of challenge presented by the IB. (These references have been made **bold** in the table above.) These students obviously relished the difficulty itself. For these IB students, the perceived degree of difficulty or challenge that the IB course presented was seen as a positive feature, whereas SACE students were inclined to register this as a negative factor in the decision-making process.

The IB students did acknowledge that small class sizes were an enjoyable element of their course, while there was mention that for a SACE student having „free periods“ was enjoyable. [As SACE students had less formal contact time because of their fewer subjects, these students were given timetabled „free periods“ to work as they chose.]

Another IB observation that was notable for its omission in the SACE responses was the role of student peers. There were several mentions by both IB and SACE students that their teachers played a role in the enjoyment of their course, but only IB students mentioned their student peers and their interaction and camaraderie as a source of enjoyment. This situation could in fact relate back to the structure of small class sizes, to the nature of the IB cohort as being much smaller than the SACE cohort or to the fact that IB students tended to study their subjects together for two years, or any or all of the above. While it must be acknowledged that the number of respondents is very

small, it is intriguing that among this limited group there is such a positive reference to student peers in the IB responses and no reference at all to this aspect in the SACE responses. Moreover, in the choice of words used by the IB candidates, not one refers specifically to their enjoyment being derived from „friends“, but all use the more generic terms „students“ or „peers“; this in a question that was completely open ended and did not offer any examples or prompts.

The following table contains the comments that relate to the least enjoyed elements of the courses. These responses have also been grouped around several common themes. As this was the first group at the school for whom parallel courses were being run with the introduction of the IB programme, there were some issues identified with this circumstance. Other material described issues with specific elements of the content or perceptions about staffing, while some former students were frustrated by inadequacies within the structure of the curriculum or the approach of the school.

While the statements recorded personal observations that were highly individual, there was a perception inferred from the tone of the SACE students that the school and the system had disappointed them in some ways, principally in the regard or value placed upon their learning. This position was also been endorsed by a parent of a former SACE student that year who anecdotally maintained that preferential treatment was given to the IB programme. In the case of the IB students this tone was not apparent, as the overwhelming issues seemed related more to some of the frustrating practicalities and logistics of their subjects. It is of interest that the Year 11 and Year 12 Studies carried out later when the two courses had been on offer for a number of

years at the Focus School did not reveal the same level of disaffection amongst SACE students.

Figure iii.12 ELEMENTS LEAST ENJOYED IN THE SACE/IB COURSES

Elements least enjoyed SACE n=9	Elements least enjoyed IB n=11
<i>One response left blank.</i>	<i>One response left blank.</i>
A 'no' comment	
	None from memory
Issues with staff	
Sometimes the teachers appeared uninterested in the SACE course, or distracted by IB commitments. I understand that the teachers themselves were struggling to adapt.	My year was the first year in which the IB programme was introduced to the school, and there were unfortunately miscommunications between staff and students in relation to course requirements. The lack of work experience component was also slightly disappointing.*
Viewed as second rate to the IB course, IB students seemed to receive favourable treatment and priority.	[Teacher X] was not a particularly nice or reasonable person.
Issues with curriculum	
Forced rote learning in some subjects. (Maths)	I didn't enjoy the workload, but it was a necessary evil. I struggled through higher level maths and did not enjoy it at all.
	SL Chemistry: less discussion, too matter of fact, learn this etc.
TER system	There was nothing specific about the IB that I disliked, although I would recommend that prospective students avoid ITGS: I found it to be a complete and utter waste of time and regret taking the subject. I also think that probably the TOK course should be revisited: the IB's conception of the course seemed to be as a half-hearted attempt to make students aware of basic concepts of philosophy in a more comprehensive sense or teach the concepts not as a separate subject, but as an element of the other subjects which students study (for example taking a more detailed look at the scientific method in science subjects)

Business studies; I didn't really enjoy the subject.	Language teaching/curriculum was not adequate preparation for exam. ITGS course content was too elementary and frankly boring.
Did a couple of subjects which were moderated down and in hindsight I wish I had chosen harder subjects as I would probably have received better scores.	I didn't like French as a whole because I didn't understand anything that was going on, only having started French in Year 10 and not trying very hard. [The teacher] was great though. At times I didn't enjoy the poetry comprehension in English again because I didn't understand it, but upon reflection I am very glad to have done it.
	Large focus was on the academic outcomes, when perhaps more time should have been spent on extended essay, CAS, etc –these are the things that really differentiated the course. Though I do understand why the focus needed to be first and foremost on academic outcomes!
Miscellaneous frustrations	
Most information learned was pointless. Not real life valuable. Don't need to memorise trivial things in real life. It's about understanding and interaction. School curriculum overlooks basics of professional life.	Whilst a valuable exercise, I found the process of completing the extended essay somewhat tedious.
Not being able to complete 'trade' style subjects because they were portrayed as second rate and not appropriate in academia.	

* It had been a course requirement for SACE students at year 11 to undertake work experience for a week during school time. Students would visit a workplace, usually of their choosing, in order gain some experience of possible career paths as well as some understanding of a workplace environment. There is no such requirement for IB students. The school has since determined that all Year 11 students should undertake this regardless of IB or SACE status.

6.2 Comments on quotations

From the wealth of material on the IB and SACE courses available in the press, research findings, official websites, school magazine articles and student memoirs, it was decided to select a series of opinions that focused on various aspects of each course. These quotations formed the basis of question 28. The intention was to find out how far the experiences of the students reflected the judgements of the selected writers.

In question 28 of this survey, the SACE and IB students were asked to respond differently. While the format of the question was similar for each course, the content differed. Six quotations about each course were given and the following instruction was supplied to the respondent.

The following are a series of quotations culled from various sources relating to the [IB or SACE] course. Please indicate the degree to which you think each is accurate/inaccurate and any observations you may have about these claims.

The content of the responses supplied by the SACE students are investigated first and then those of the IB students. If a response confirms that the view is accurate, then that response is colour coded in green. Should the response be ambiguous or qualified then that response is colour coded yellow. If the response contradicts the quoted view then that response is colour coded red. A black colour is registered against a non response.

It was also considered appropriate to take into consideration the style, content and nature of these responses, although, as the SACE students and the IB students were each responding to a different set of quotations, this approach was more cautious.

This will be done at the conclusion of the general appraisal of both the IB and SACE responses.

6.2.1 Evaluating SACE

Figure iii.13 SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION a n=9

a	<i>'Other pursuits appeal to me too, such as the school play or football, and although of course these options are open to IB candidates, they have less time outside the classroom to spend on them because they study six subjects'</i> (James Cockbill, 2002, Malvern View).
Green	I would say this is very accurate. It was my experience that friends doing the IB had a lot less time to pursue other interests due to the increased workload.
	Sounds very true; the IB course is more time consuming.
Yellow	Slightly accurate as the course and work load was higher, but can still be easily achieved.
Red	Inaccurate. It's all about priorities and time management...two things I didn't have when I was at high school.
	It's not the 6 subjects. It is the workload of those subjects. But even then I disagree. SACE lets you sleep an extra hour a day and play instead of studying.
	Don't think it's very accurate. The workload may be bigger, but I don't think an extra subject would have made that big a difference. Most extra-curricular activities are run immediately after school hours and if you are committed then I wouldn't think it would be too hard to balance with study in the IB.
	The people that succeeded at either course were able to participate regardless. The people that struggled in either course had to manage their time better and weren't always able to participate.
	The guys I knew who completed the IB seemed to have enough time to complete extra curricular activities.
Black	N/A

The majority of SACE students did not agree with the opinion that IB students were disadvantaged when it came to their participation in extra pursuits, even though some of them acknowledged that the IB workload was heavier. It was apparent that in the course of their studies they had witnessed the participation of the IB students in such pursuits and one astute observer made the comment which has been reported in other

project findings, that participation in such activities was often related to motivation and time management regardless of whether a student was studying IB or SACE.

Figure iii.14 SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION b n=9

b	<i>'At age 16 students ought to take responsibility for their subject choices but IB students do not get the same degree of freedom when choosing which subjects to continue and which to drop' (James Cockbill, 2002, Malvern View).</i>
	I agree that it is accurate that IB students had less choice regarding subject choices than SACE students had but I don't feel that this is necessarily a negative thing. In a lot of cases (including perhaps my own) 16 year olds are too immature to make responsible decisions regarding subject choice and will often take the path of least resistance.
	Accurate. SACE is soft and two [sic] flexiable [sic].
	Personally I think 16 is almost too young for students to take responsibility anyway as most have no real idea of what they want to do later in life. I also thought IB students have quite a degree of freedom in choosing what they study, it's just that there are less of the 'easy options' that are traditionally in SACE. So I guess the statement is accurate, to an extent.
	Unsure. I thought IB students have more freedom.
	Don't know the intricacies of subject selection of the IB.
	Students need lots of support with choices. Too easy to pick poorly. Don't know enough about IB to understand why the above is true. Except the language requirement. Seems minimal.
	Inaccurate
	I disagree. I wanted to study other subjects to what I chose but they were in different streams.
	Left blank

The students' responses were not as confident in assessing the degree of freedom experienced by those participating in each course. One assumption made in the original citation was that the lack of freedom experienced by the IB students was a negative. This was, in fact, challenged by one of the respondents as was the assumption that all students at age 16 were in fact ready to take responsibility for their choices. Another factor affecting a response to the question was the admission by the SACE students that they really were not sufficiently informed about the IB situation to reach any decisive conclusion.

Figure iii.15 SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION c n=9

c	<i>In a recent survey, 'Of the SACE students 44 per cent believed that the IB-DP [Diploma Program] and the SACE are equal in preparing students for their future and 93 percent of them believed that the IB-DP is harder to study' (Paris, 2003, p. 238).</i>
	That was definitely the feeling about the two different courses in 1999.
	Accurate, because IB is inflexiable [sic] it is harder to complete and be successful.
	True/agree. From a credential point of view, I think the IB students get higher TERs but my colleagues and I would unanimously agree that 'no-one cares about your TER'- it is an overvalued concept, as long as you can get into the course you want.
	I believe that IB is harder, having to do a language and the extra subject made up for a higher workload.
	In retrospect I would say that the IB is of greater value in preparing students for the future, however there are a lot of students who simply wouldn't cope with the intensity and workload of the course and would be better off on the SACE course. Absolutely agree the IB is harder to study.
	Sounds pretty accurate. I think most students get the impression that the IB is harder to study than SACE. I think, from the sounds of it, the IB is a better preparation for the future but quite a lot of students would see SACE as being adequate for where they are trying to head with future studies.
	I have not had as much contact with many other students to find out how there [sic] selections effected [sic] their studies. Post tertiary studies I do not believe that Yr 12 subjects affect post tertiary studies.
	IB more work, not harder. 75% is 7/7, seems easier with more workload.
	Left blank

In this question, there were no dissenting views and the only qualification appeared to be over the phrase „the IB-DP is harder to study“. One student emphasised that in his opinion the IB was not harder but rather involved more work. This idea has been a recurrent claim in the evaluation of other project findings.

The distinction made by Paris documented in quotation c, between the perceived difficulty of each course and each course’s successful preparation for the future of

students is certainly corroborated in earlier findings in this survey, see **Table iii.15**, **Figure iii.8** and **Figure iii.9**.

Figure iii.16 SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION d n=9

d	<i>The SACE is an internationally recognised credential that opens pathways leading to vocations and careers, further studies and employment (The SACE Board, 2009, About SACE).</i>
	It has done everything I have wanted of it so far.
	Absolutely, however that is ever more the case for the IB as that is well recognised and regarded internationally to a greater degree than SACE.
	Agree, but IB was always pushed if you were considering overseas study.
	I guess
	True to the extent it is complemented with a decent tertiary qualification.
	Fairly accurate. If your marks are good enough, I think most countries would recognise it, as would interstate universities. I think the IB is better suited for studies abroad though as that is why it was designed-would give a better idea of what level your education sits at without necessarily having great marks.
	Only if you choose English as a subject. I believe that IB is more widely recognised and accepted in more countries and states.
	I'd say this has some truth, but perhaps a little overstated. I can't really comment, as I have never applied for further study overseas, and entered Uni outside of SA through mature age entry. [Student studying accounting and finance in Brisbane.]
	I don't know if it is internationally well recognised. It is enough for SA careers though.

The students are in agreement that SACE provides a suitable credential for careers or further study at a local level, though there are some reservations expressed by students about the true status of this credential at an international level. These reservations are expressed from the point of view that none of these students have tested the SACE credential internationally. What has emerged from the comments generally is that while there is acceptance of this quotation from the SSABSA website, there is an acknowledgement that IB credential would be more acceptable or recognised abroad.

Figure iii.17 SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION e n=9

e	'After spending 12 years together in the same school Mulvea McGovern and Michael Whitehead are going their own ways. After receiving their SACE certificates yesterday the students from Mintabie School, in the far north of South Australia will pursue very different ambitions...Dr. Janet Keightley, Chief Executive of the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) said that the wide range of subjects offered by SSABSA has allowed very different dreams to be reached for these students (SSABSA, 2004, A story of two SACEs).
	Agree/ accurate.
	I agree there is a lot of choice offered by SACE, this is one of the major advantages SACE has over the IB. If you are not interested in pursuing a professional career you would almost definitely be better off on the SACE course.
	True, because of its flexiablility[sic] the above can and does happen. SACE has become easier because of its flexiablilty [sic] and will become a less recognised credential as a result.
	Yeah, it's an accurate statement, but you can enter entirely different career paths after studying the same subjects at SACE anyway, subject variety doesn't really make that much difference in the end.
	I believe that it is not SACE that allows them to choose different paths but their own ambition and drive. SACE helps but the teachers teaching and improving the kids are a bigger factor than the subject matter.
	The subjects I chose in Year 12 were irrelevant to what I am doing today (although, coincidentally very similar!) SACE had nothing to do with the path I have chosen.
	Indifferent. I don't think SACE would change your future career more significantly than IB.
	You leave school, do different things. Sounds sensible. Does SACE enable that, no. But it doesn't prevent it.
	<i>Everyone</i> [researcher's italics] is going to want to complete a different career or a different spectrum in the same career.

While many agree that the SACE course offers a wide range of subjects, they are less inclined to support the claim that this has enabled the two students mentioned in the quote to follow very different ambitions. The respondents highlight a greater complexity of variables at play than simply a range of subject choices. These former students, like those surveyed in the previous projects, consistently refer to an intricate array of elements that are weighed up and refined to inform choices, subject choice being but one.

Figure iii.18 SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION f n=9

f	<i>'A student noted the "inflexibility of the IB-DP" curriculum as a critical factor for his decision not to do the IB-DP' (Paris, 2003 p. 240).</i>
	I'd agree with this.
	Accurate. The inflexibility makes it harder and less appealing.
	Yes, I agree this would be a major factor for a lot of people, it is one of the key advantages SACE has over IB.
	He obviously liked a SACE course IB didn't offer. Fair enough.
	Can't really comment. Wouldn't really affect my choice even if it were true.
	Same answer as (b). Don't know the intricacies of subject selection of the IB.
	Inaccurate.
	I disagree; it depends on what subjects you want to do. I think TOK [Theory of knowledge], a language, science, and English/humanities are a large variety.
	As I said before, I didn't think the IB was that inflexible. The main concern with subject selection is if you need prerequisites to enter a tertiary course and I'm pretty sure the IB would offer any course that might be a prerequisite to uni courses.

The recurring element of the flexibility of one course over another was again tested with the use of this quotation. It is not clear from the responses whether this is in fact an issue or not. Four of the respondents accept the proposition as presented. Two respondents have claimed that they are not sufficiently aware of the IB requirements to make a judgement (while one of these said it would not be a factor in choice anyway). The remaining three respondents are disinclined to accept the notion of flexibility as a „critical factor“ in their decisions. Several suggest that informed decisions regarding correct subject choice re university prerequisites would be more critical.

6.2.2 Evaluating IB

The following material (**Figures iii.19-24**) relates to the comments supplied by the IB students. Again the first item in each table is the statement to which students responded and the colour-coded responses are recorded underneath.

Figure iii.19 IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION a n=11

a	<i>'IB students seemed less focused on narrow tertiary outcomes but instead were concerned with broader educational goals such as personal development' (McKenzie,C.M. 2000, D. Ed Thesis, p. 104).</i>
Agreed	I agree, but I am pretty sure we were all aware of what our plans for tertiary study were.
	I think this is accurate in the particular context of my experience.
	Yes agree. This is the beauty of the IB course. Focusing on narrow outcomes is a silly thing to do when you're 15 years old. There's a whole world out there full of opportunities to do all sorts of things, don't limit your options.
	Perhaps this is accurate. I don't know, I'm a fairly sceptical person and I really have no way to tell how accurate this is. Personally I wish I had been more focused on academic outcomes (i.e. marks) since this is how your are judged at first instance when applying for jobs etc.
I don't believe that this statement is necessarily correct, but it may be. My guess would be that the more naturally inquisitive and academic students would be much more likely to prefer the IB, and so the statement might relate more to inherent selection bias rather than to any traits which the IB instils in students.	
I don't think there was a real difference between IB and SACE students – just IB seemed more focused and intense. I think "personal development" is a bit too much for 16 and 17 year old kids.	
	Cannot say that I agree. While there are aspects of the IB which lent itself to furthering personal development, e.g. a requisite philosophy subject, the focus of my and that of my peers doing the IB was still the means to achieving a favourable tertiary outcome.
	Disagree-IB students are still human. As a matter of fact, I came to regard the students and myself of [the School's] IB to be that ilk of smart, terrified children who, lacking the necessary machismo to compete on the sports field, divert that need to prove themselves into work. A bunch of brats, but that's a lesson learned more easily than some meathead who never learned how to speak like a civilised human being. But I digress.

Opinions were divided on this summation of the focus for IB students. While four students fully endorsed the statement, four disagreed and the remaining three were unconvinced. There appeared to be an unwillingness on the part of several candidates to entertain or declare this as an obvious point of difference between the two courses.

The next statement dealt with a perception that the IB was very theoretical in its content, on the one hand, and the counterclaim that students who did the course did not necessarily find this so. The findings are presented below (**Figure iii.20**) and in this case there was much agreement. It was obvious from the responses that many of the students challenged the definition of the term „highly theoretical“, while acknowledging that the content of many of their subjects did contain theoretical aspects. A few contrasted the theory component with the large practical component of subjects e.g. the sciences. None of the comments suggested that the theoretical aspect was detrimental to their studies. In fact, this was seen by some as a necessary and appropriate, and by others as an enjoyable element of their course. Two of the students indicated that from their understanding there was little difference between the theoretical component of their course and that of their SACE counterparts.

Figure iii.20 IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION b n=11

b	<i>'IB is often accused of being highly theoretical but it is not perceived that way by the students who have done the course' (McKenzie, C.M., 2000, D. Ed Thesis, p. 107).</i>
	Agree.
	Agree (as a former student) – though I think school in general is quite theoretical which is not a bad thing.
	Theory is by nature necessary and important for certain subjects. I certainly didn't find it 'too' theoretical, in fact I enjoyed the more theoretical aspects of the course.
	I didn't think it was highly theoretical. Frankly, how can you teach physics and chemistry in a non-theoretical way? And the other subjects were taught very appropriately i.e. in history, we analysed various historians views, in English analysed various texts etc. I thought it was appropriately theoretical where necessary/appropriate.
	I certainly didn't consider the IB as highly theoretical. As far as I noticed the course material covered was similar to that covered in SACE, though in more detail.
	I think this is correct. It is not specifically highly theoretical: it just has more content, and is more difficult. This is not the same as being theoretical.
	Not highly theoretical. As much as it needs to be. Especially humanities, very liberal discussion, conversation, very engaging at a base level.
	Wrong. The practical component of this course is large. I can't remember the % breakdowns but I remember doing lots of pracs for Physics, Chem and fieldwork for Geography. Doing speeches and analysing poems on the fly in English.
	Subjects like English, maths, basic science and theory of knowledge are innately fairly theoretical. Learning a language and my humanities subject, ITGS, could hardly be described as highly theoretical. I do not think that being highly theoretical is a negative description for a secondary school course that is a stepping stone to tertiary education. A course is most "practical" (i.e. non-theoretical) when it is vocational and IB is not intended as a vocational course.
	Many of the IB subjects were highly theoretical. However, my understanding was that this was no different from SACE subjects, and I did not perceive it as a flaw of the programme. Mathematics and the sciences by their nature contain many theoretical concepts, but there were frequent opportunities to put those concepts into practice in practical experiments.
	It may well be highly theoretical, but I enjoy that. There certainly seemed to be enough practical involvement, particularly in the sciences, and it seems perhaps more so at [the School] than from some people I have spoken to in other schools.

Figure iii.21 IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION c n=11

c	<p><i>'[The IB] is not simply for brilliant kids; it's for kids who are prepared to work hard and who are motivated to study'</i> <i>(Greg Crafter, 2004, in article entitled 'Smart Schools pass global test for success', Atkinson, J., The Independent Weekly).</i></p>
	Agree.
	This is true, I remember a few less brilliant kids who did the IB and successfully completed it. However, it certainly does have wonderful opportunities for the more brilliant kids, when other options like SACE, can lead merely to boredom.
	Yes agree. Though you can't just take it for granted-you have to do the work. So breezing through years 8-10 is very bad preparation. Some sort of cadet regime might be the answer here.
	I couldn't agree more. Those who succeed in life are not those who are innately 'brilliant' but those who are applied and dedicated. Similarly, those who do well in IB have worked hard to earn their achievements.
	I would agree with this statement, in order to do well at the IB it is necessary to work hard, in fact I would say it is more important to be able to handle a high work load, than necessarily be highly intelligent or 'brilliant'.
	I think this is true. It is also for those who have a genuine interest in learning new things, rather than just doing what they must to achieve certain academic results in pursuit of other goals.
	I think this is very true. In fact I would say that IB rewards hard work and motivation more so than SACE.
	I strongly agree. In fact, I would go further and say it's for everyone. It is structured very well, covers a great range of subjects etc. When you are doing a well-prepared/structured course, I think it helps you work/do well. This statement carries an assumption that there is some easy fallback course to do-well, what is the value in that really? Why not do the IB to the best of your ability and get 28 (or whatever) rather than do some rubbish course just because it's not challenging and it's easy to pass?
	Yeah, IB is obtainable by most students given the right environment and motivation.
	Agree to some extent, but the programme does demand a higher standard of intellectual ability from the student. While it was certainly possible for most students to complete the course through diligence and a motivation to study, the pace of the course is such that those with the ability to pick up concepts quickly would have had an easier time.
	Disagree. I think those that got the most out of IB were the 40+ kids – the other ones were probably left behind a bit.

The response to this statement was very interesting in light of pervasive research indicating that the International Baccalaureate has grown as a curriculum advocated for gifted and talented programs. As early as 1986, Passow commented that „the International Baccalaureate is being viewed as providing an appropriate curriculum for gifted students“ (1986, p.189). More recently this has been reiterated in greater detail:

The Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) Programs have become increasingly prominent service options for gifted and talented secondary students, and are often the primary option in many school systems...There is an emphasis on the fit of AP and IB Programs for gifted students seeking advanced study in science and math (Callahan, 2003).

The respondents in Project 3 of this Portfolio are from a school that has a non-selective entry policy. On the whole their comments were strongly resistant to the notion of the IB being for „brilliant“ kids, thereby endorsing the statement. They talked more specifically of characteristics such as diligence, motivation, application and dedication as being necessary traits for those undertaking the IB.

A number of the IB students did indicate, in several of the comments, that they wanted or appreciated the perceived academic rigour or intellectual challenge of the IB course but none of these students were selected for this course on the basis of their „measured“ intelligence. Rather, the fact that they did the IB course was a matter of self-selection, where they were drawn to the course on the basis of the level of academic stimulus they themselves wanted.

Figure iii.22 IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION d n=11

d	<i>'The Extended Essay was another special feature for me. This independent research task, supervised on a one-to-one by a member of staff, is an exciting training for University research' (Beth Chappell, 2003, Malvern View).</i>
Green	<p>Agree</p> <p>I thought it was an interesting and exciting project regardless of whether it was training for university. It helped develop a broader understanding of how to go about a big project and how to understand a big topic. I'm not sure how much it trained me for university research, but it certainly helped me appreciate depth of thinking/research generally.</p>
Yellow	<p>At the time, 4,000 words seemed so enormous. When one gets to uni and beyond, one realises that it was pretty pathetic! However it probably was a good 'first' assignment of the type, and good preparation for later work.</p> <p>I wouldn't go so far as to say it was 'exciting training for University research'. Certainly it provides some valuable experience in collecting information from a large variety of sources and then collating, analysing and presenting that information. The research that I have done at university was laboratory based and was hence vastly different to the process of completing the extended essay. In more social areas of research the processes would be more similar yet of course much more rigorous. Another point of difference is that University research leads to relevant new findings which is what makes it so worthwhile and exciting; this is not a realistic expectation of the extended essay.</p> <p>I found the extended essay largely a waste of time, although it did in some ways prepare me for uni (even rushing it at the last minute). This however is probably more due to me not taking it as seriously at the time as I should have.</p> <p>I found the extended essay interesting and different from the course's other requirements. I can't comment on it being training for university research: the areas I studied at university were not areas in which activities similar to the extended essay would be relevant.</p> <p>The Extended Essay certainly has merit, but not necessarily as 'exciting training for University research' whatever that means. I found the opportunity to develop your own research project very stimulating and enjoyable. So stimulating in fact that I chose a difficult topic and did very poorly. I believe that extended essays in Quantum mechanics are now strongly discouraged.</p> <p>I think this is the ideal outcome – was not the case for me but that was probably my own fault a bit. I (knowingly) let my extended essay slide and probably needed more pushing on this one.</p> <p>Maybe. It definitely could be. For me it was more a case of sitting down one weekend and belting out 4,000 cohesive words. Maybe more feedback between students and mentor would be appropriate (but who knows? Maybe this has changed since 1999.)</p>
Red	<p>Essays are essays, and though I was initially excited about 'my own' question, I soon lost interest and was simply obliged to finish it.</p> <p>The Extended Essay was not a factor I took into account in choosing to do the IB. Personally, at that stage, I recall finding the assignment difficult as we were unaccustomed to undertaking research and writing of that length and depth. In the case of my Essay in economics, the input from the member of staff was minimal due to the nature of the topic I chose. However, I understand some of my peers found the experience positive.</p>

The responses to statement d rarely captured the enthusiastic tone of the student Beth Chappell whose views were quoted in this instance. Most of the comments from the former students showed much greater circumspection surrounding the process of this task⁹. The completion of an extended essay in the IB course is one of the much acclaimed features of the Diploma Programme. On the IB website the extended essay is described as:

The extended essay is an independent, self-directed piece of research, culminating in a 4,000-word paper. As a required component, it provides: practical preparation for the kinds of undergraduate research required at tertiary level [and] an opportunity for students to engage in an in-depth study of a topic of interest within a chosen subject (International Baccalaureate, 2007).

The majority of the students cited seemed to have been underwhelmed by the experience and one senses that the virtues extolled above do not accurately portray the reality for these respondents. One student suggested that the „ideal“ did not, in his case, match the reality. Most of these students, however, did attempt to come to grips with the terms of the quotation in presenting their views against it.

⁹ It should be noted that this was the first experience for staff from the Focus School to supervise such an undertaking.

Figure iii.23 IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION e n=11

e	<p><i>'Shouldn't [Year 11] be a time for wider reading and enjoying outside interests, rather than focusing on a battery of crucial exam papers? In the IB, although there is plenty of work, there are no compulsory exams in the first year, and in the final year the number of papers taken is kept within reasonable limits' (Beth Chappell, 2003, Malvern View).</i></p>
Agree	<p>Yes, agree. Year 11 was magical. I enjoyed the absence of pressure, and instead immersed myself in the material, or at the very least pretended to.</p>
	<p>I think this is accurate. The schedule of assessment fitted in quite well with my progress. The exams at the end were a culmination of rather than an interruption to my learning.</p>
	<p>Yes, that's more or less what we did wasn't it? It seemed like we did a lot of exams at the end of yr12, but this doesn't seem unreasonable.</p>
	<p>I had forgotten this! I certainly do appreciate this; my study picked up considerably in year twelve and had my year eleven marks counted I would have obtained a considerably lower score at the end. The number of exams in final year was indeed reasonable.</p>
	No real comment.
<p>We still undertook an examination in Year 11 which counted towards our internal grading and were compulsory in that sense, but the results from which did not count towards university entrance. I do not entirely agree that the numbers of papers in the final year was "kept within reasonable limits"; we did as many papers as humanly possible.</p>	
<p>I don't really see the need for year 11 to be a time for wider reading and outside interests, it should be used to gain skills and for preparation for the next year. This seemed to me how the IB in year 11 was treated at [the school], which seems sensible to me. We still had a battery of exams at the end of the year, yeah just weren't for the final results, they still felt 'crucial' at the time.</p>	
<p>To some extent I agree, but at the same time I know IB students from other schools who sat some of their final exams in year 11 (so that in year 12 they were studying fewer subjects). They tell me that this was very valuable to them – I can imagine that had the school let me, I would have done this too, and used the extra time in year 12 either to study another subject, or to allow greater focus on my other subjects, thus (hopefully) learning them in more depth, and most likely also improving my marks.</p>	
<p>It's good that it is a 2 year course – have a long time to build up to completion. Though maybe that is stressful for some...</p>	
<p>This is a matter of personal opinion and I don't have one either way.</p>	

Five of these responses agreed with the statement, while the others supported this proposition up to a point. There was no-one who rejected the claim. The majority still seemed to remember their exams and none of the respondents seemed to find the position described untenable. Several, in fact, saw a positive role for these preparatory exams in the overall learning process.

Figure iii.24 IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION f n=11

f	<i>'I assumed that everyone who was doing it [the IB], really wanted to be there and there'd be a more positive environment in the class.'</i> (Ashlea Bartram, 2004, in article entitled 'Smart Schools pass global test for success', Atkinson, J., <i>The Independent Weekly</i>).
Agree	I would definitely agree with this statement, it is pretty much describing how I felt about the IB, and the fact that it would likely have only able and willing co-students was a big part in my decision to undertake the IB.
	Yes, almost all of the students who chose the IB were positive, self-motivated students. The learning environment was positive and promoted discussion within the small classes.
	It certainly seemed to be the case that those who did IB were more academic and motivated. I noticed this when we put in our preferences for IB at the end of year ten. I believe this led to a more positive collaborative environment in the class as well.
	There certainly was that positive environment in our year. Possibly because it was the first year, only those who were really sure had taken the plunge. It certainly wouldn't have been the same with 'duller' people.
	I believe this is correct. Since the IB is more challenging, you will get students who are interested in a challenge studying it.
	Definitely a more positive learning environment, but that's probably due to hanging round with smart motivated people. You can't help but get swept along with the tide.
	Perhaps this is the case and explains why I found such a great sense of collegiality. Probably an empirical question though really.
I think some of the people in my year regretted doing the IB. However, as a relatively small group compared to the SACE cohort, I think there existed a somewhat unique culture of achievement and excellence. This wasn't always positive, but for the most part, I think it was.	
No. Prestige, elitism, superiority. And didn't stray too far from the herd. There was a harsh and critical intellectual environment, especially from the more gifted students. But I don't necessarily resent this.	

On balance the majority of respondents did confirm that they experienced a positive learning environment and many also identified that the students who self-selected the IB-DP course were largely „willing“, „motivated“, „interested in a challenge“ and „academic“, to list a few of the mentioned attributes. There were a couple of students who recognised that this type of atmosphere doesn't necessarily suit all learners.

It is worth noting that there are several references to the „collaborative environment“, a „great sense of collegiality“ and „good student teacher interaction“. This spirit of camaraderie is acknowledged by members of a group who were seen by some members of their school community as being very competitive academically, yet there was only a single reference to this in the final comment recorded, „there was a harsh and critical intellectual environment“.

The intention of question 28 was to compare the IB or SACE experiences of these alumni with a series of select quotations about the relevant courses. In simple terms, they were asked whether they found these comments accurate or not. Space was also left on the survey form to write down any further observations they wanted to make on each comment. This format proved most effective. The detail from these observations proved a rich source of data, where the complexity of responses revealed as much about the students' own preferences and strategies as their opinions of the quotations.

7. Conclusions

One immediate observation was that in both the IB and SACE surveys from the 1997 Year 12 students, blank responses or non responses were rare. The depth of detail

from the respondents was very useful to the researcher, particularly in Part B of the survey which demanded individually tailored answers. Furthermore, in Question 28 which required students to generate their own opinions towards a collection of six different quotations, every IB candidate supplied a response whereas there were only three non responses in the SACE documentation.

While the responses have been examined for their stated material, the style and nature of these responses were interesting in their own right. PART B of the survey gave rise to extended comments by the respondents. Of the questions in this section, both IB and SACE students had to answer a series of identical questions (Questions 22-27 inclusive) framed for their chosen course that are represented by **Figures iii.10a and b**, **Figure iii.11**, **Figure iii.12**, **Figure iii.3**, **Figure iii.4** and **Figures iii.7a, b and c**, in that order. A comparison was done between the quantity of material generated by each group. The SACE group had nine participants and the IB group had eleven, though on occasions not all these had responded to all questions. The figure below is a summary of the number of responses for IB and SACE students per question against the total word count.

Table iii.21 IB AND SACE WORD COUNT COMPARISON

Question	IB Response by word count		SACE Response by Word count	
22	n=11	349 (average ~ 32)	n=9	156 (average ~ 17)
23	n=10	210 (av ~ 21)	n=9	94 (av ~ 10)
24	n=10	334 (av ~ 33)	n=8	135 (av ~ 17)
25	n=10	190 (av ~ 19)	n=8	85 (av ~11)
26	n=8	261 (av ~ 33)	n=8	129 (av ~ 16)
27	n=10	520 (av~ 52)	n=9	257 (av ~ 29)
Total	59	1864 (av ~ 32)	51	856 (av ~ 17)

While it is evident that there were more IB responses than SACE in many of the comments collected, it is also evident that the IB students were often writing more than double their SACE counterparts when responding to the material on any given question. Even the slightly greater number of IB respondents does not account for the considerably higher word count of their responses.

This difference is not only to be measured in the evidence of the word count but can be seen in the style, manner and tone of the comments. **Figures iii.7a, b and c** above focused on the ease of transition between secondary and tertiary study for these students. The comments in these figures indicated that the IB students had a somewhat easier transition than their SACE counterparts, with half the group describing their transition as relatively easy. Yet they wrote much more describing this relative ease than the SACE students, four of whom described the transition as difficult. There were ten IB responses in all (one more granted) however their responses were twice the volume of the SACE. Likewise, in the question preceding this, question 26 (**Figure iii.4**) discussing any advice that might have been useful in affecting their course choice, where the number of responses was identical (eight in both cases) the SACE students again wrote half that of the IB students.

The study is driven by a qualitative approach; one can ultimately only interpret what has been written. The more detailed IB responses tended to follow a similar pattern or style in that there was an obvious answer to the question, but it was nearly always couched within a framework of a wider explanation or further justification for the original assessment.

It was not merely the word count as a number that was of interest, but the reality that to many of these questions the IB students were providing more detailed information. As a researcher this factor cannot be ignored when trying to evaluate why students are opting for one course over another. The more consistently detailed responses from the IB students may either indicate that students who are drawn to the IB have, in fact, a predilection for detailed responses and the expression of a definite line of argument or that the IB course produces by way of, for example, its curriculum students who are predisposed to providing more detailed information and presenting a case. There is also the possibility of an interaction effect between these two factors. Not until analysing the findings from Section B of the survey was there any apparent difference in the style of response.

The tendency for the IB students as a group to provide more comprehensive answers to the survey questions was also apparent in the material from Question 28, though both SACE and IB students responded to different sets of quotations. However, the following quotations provide an exemplar. The first quote is the initial comment to which the student (the second quote) was required to respond.

IB students seemed less focused on narrow tertiary outcomes but instead were concerned with broader educational goals such as personal development.

[McKenzie, C.M. D. Ed Thesis, page 104]

I don't believe that this statement is necessarily correct, but it may be. My guess would be that the more naturally inquisitive and academic students would be much more likely to prefer the IB, and so the statement might relate more to inherent selection bias rather than to any traits which the IB instils in students.

The response of this former student captures the essential ingredients of other such responses. While not prepared to wholeheartedly endorse the statement, the student sought to reflect on the characteristics of IB students that he considered underlay such a conclusion. As such he highlighted an aspect of the IB and SACE divide that was emerging. The choice of course, whether IB or SACE, was more a reflection on the individual temperament and personal attributes of a student than either course producing students of a particular type.

**SATISFYING THE CUSTOMERS
IN SENIOR SCHOOLING**

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CONCLUSIONS
SATISFYING THE CUSTOMERS IN SENIOR SCHOOLING

CONTENTS

1. Preamble	270
2. Considering the findings.....	271
3. Reflecting on methods used.....	277
4. Limitations and future research	283
5. Implications for the Focus School	284

CONCLUSIONS

SATISFYING THE CUSTOMERS IN SENIOR SCHOOLING

1. Preamble

In the imagery of Paul Gauguin's painting „Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?“, the viewer is watching the symbolic journey of the individual and interpreting the struggles of the life transitions that ensue. As a participant observer researching this portfolio, I set out to record and interpret in each separate project, student thinking processes and the subsequent struggles over student course and employment decisions as the various respondents made their own personal life transitions. The first project ascertained the views of a cohort of Year 10 students as they had just decided which course they wanted to pursue to conclude their secondary schooling. The second project then followed a small group of this cohort during their final two years, while the third project was a snapshot of twenty former students and the transitions they had made over the ten years since they had graduated from their chosen course. The findings from all projects portray the factors that influenced student course choice, depict the relative importance of these factors, especially in relation to longer term outcomes, and suggest implications for the Focus School.

The discussion that follows in the conclusion to the portfolio describes some of these general findings about students and their course decision-making. Three further areas that impinge on these findings are also highlighted. The first appraises some of the issues about the survey method used for the research, the second details possible follow up research that may provide further insights around student course selection

and the last area records material that has emerged from the findings that has implications for the Focus School.

2. Considering the findings

From the chapter entitled „Careers Advice“, Rowling (2003, p. 586) created the following conversation between the student Harry Potter and one of his mentors, Professor McGonagall. Their discussion examines the decision-making he must undergo for his final years of schooling and beyond.

„Any questions, Potter?“

„Yes,“ said Harry. „What sort of character and aptitude tests do the Ministry do on you, if you get enough NEWTs [Nastily Exhausting Wizarding Tests, elsewhere described as an equivalent of UK A-Levels or the IB]?”

„Well, you“ll need to demonstrate the ability to react well to pressure and so forth,“ said Professor McGonagall, „p̄severance and dedication, because Auror training takes a further three years, not to mention very high skills in practical Defence. It will mean a lot more study even after you“ve left school, so unless you“reprepared to...take even more exams after Hogwarts...“

The dilemma for Harry Potter, as an individual student of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, was which course of study would best accommodate his academic abilities, personal attributes and future employment preferences. Harry, like the students in this study, appeared to be assessing the future risks and possibilities for his own particular situation.

This research was framed, in part, within the context of individuals in today“s society as risk-takers who need to manage this risk (Slattery, 1991, p. 256). To choose to study one course over another, when decisions about one“s future may reside with this

decision, is an example of such a risk. The data from the research reveal the many levels on which students were grappling with this decision and the implications of their choice. Both IB and SACE students manifested in their responses the dilemmas they were facing with course selection. Yet, there were some interesting aspects to when and how these risks were managed.

For the Year 10 students in Project 1, the IB was often viewed as risky by those who opted for SACE. It involved extra prescribed work and the time to do this, „*SACE: less extreme effort for basically same gain*“ (student comment, pastoral care group E, Project 1 **5.4.2**). There was also an unstated risk inherent in the comments that the time commitment would put at risk other activities in which the student wanted to participate. This is not to say that SACE students were averse to risk. Several chose subjects that were completely untried, though these were the exceptions. In contrast, for the Year 10 IB students, any risk in doing the course was not viewed as a negative feature, but one that could be managed; in fact there seemed, for some IB students an attraction to the course by virtue of the risk (though this was always carefully calculated) and they embraced the many new, compulsory components of the course that they had not previously experienced.

For the respondents in Project 2, the IB students all continued with their studies from Year 11 to Year 12. While there were certain concerns voiced about the programme, none changed from their anticipated path. The SACE students were more likely to change elements of their programmes, particularly subjects after Year 11, searching for the most appropriate combination of subjects for their final year. It was at this time

that the SACE students were more likely to demonstrate risk taking with subject selection. This risk, though, was within the confines of their chosen course.

From the evidence of Project 3, there were two areas which emerged that revolved around issues of risk. As the IB course was first introduced for these students, the risk to choose an untested course was reported as a significant deterrent by some students who selected the SACE course. By contrast, the very „novelty“ of such a course was an exciting risk for some of the IB candidates. A second area of „risk“ emerges out of an investigation of the career paths of former students. It is an interesting feature of many of the respondents, both former SACE and IB students, that a number of these students are pursuing careers in fields not directly related to their initial post-secondary studies. That said, this feature occurred more often among the IB respondents.

In its introduction of the IB course, the Focus School itself was taking a risk. As the SACE course was the existing model there were already procedures to support students“ academic issues. The flexibility within the SACE programme meant that students could fulfil their course requirements through a variety of assessment frameworks that best suited them. This same flexibility was to provide the safety net for IB students who struggled in Year 11. These IB students could switch to the SACE model at an opportune time without compromising their final Year 12.

In the Introduction to this portfolio, student learner profiles were recorded (see **5.3**) that indicated characteristics considered „typical“ for a respective IB or SACE

candidate. From the responses to the open ended questions in particular, there was a level of confirmation for the respective student models.

Among the SACE students there was certainly evidence of achievements „in a diverse range of learning and training situations“. Many students were „innovative“ in their approach to their future pathways, often possessing „positive attitudes towards ...lifelong learning“. For the most part they were „active“ in the learning process as well as „confident“ and „self-directed“.

The IB candidates often demonstrated their capacity to „explore concepts, ideas and issues“ and „to understand and express ideas and information confidently“. Further, the general nature of their comments endorsed a proclivity „to exercise initiative in applying thinking skills critically and creatively“, while giving „thoughtful consideration to their own learning and experience.“ The nature of the data collected from these students corroborated that they were „accustomed to seeking and evaluating a range of points of view“ and that they often approached „unfamiliar situations and uncertainty with courage and forethought“. The explicit characterisation of the learner in the IB profile as „risk-taker“ was evident in the comments of a number of the IB respondents, for example, „the [IB] course is a challenge“¹⁰ and „it [the first IB year] was also exciting and new“.¹¹

Some other traits which emerged with regard to IB and SACE students at the Focus School, are exemplified below.

¹⁰ See Project 1, Pastoral Care Group H, page 107.

¹¹ See Project 3, Figure iii.1, comment K page 212.

Advanced academic work... will demand five qualities which are not generally and equally distributed among the age group. These are a capacity for conceptualization and analysis, a memory good enough to hold a number of facts or concepts in the mind simultaneously, an unslaked curiosity, a capacity for recognizing and, in rare cases, formulating new interpretations of available information, and a commitment to the intellectual formation and solution to problems (Peterson, 1972, p. 34).

From the responses throughout all Projects, very few students were unable to recall information. The perception was that both IB and SACE students exhibited good memories of factual and contextual information, and could provide detailed information of the circumstances surrounding their course selection. What became evident, particularly in Project 3, was that the nature of the responses between the IB and SACE students was different. The level of detail and analysis recorded by the IB respondents tended to be deeper, more intricately assessed and more discerning. Many of these students, without prompting, also reported that the course had developed their thinking skills. This differentiation was not a routine distinction between every IB and SACE student, but rather a documented propensity among the IB respondents.

It could be argued that the students who selected IB were already predisposed to pursue a course that had been described by many of the students surveyed as difficult and challenging. Many of the comments from IB students revealed that they accepted the difficulties and embraced this course for its intellectual stimulation: that is, they had a „commitment“ to the IB for its own sake. No comparable comments were made by the SACE students about their course.

It was also apparent from their post-secondary studies, that the students who had completed the IB course were more likely to complete double degrees. This pattern was also apparent when the IB students in Project 2 reported a higher incidence of wanting to enrol in double degrees when they left school.

When students made their course selection, it was evident that the decision-making in the majority of cases was complex, often driven by factors related to the specific nature of a course. The configuration of the IB course, with its array of compulsory subjects (particularly a language) and its anticipated demanding workload did not appeal to many of the SACE students, though many of them, however, recognised that IB class sizes might be smaller or that TER scores could be very high. Students were also weighing up their decision against sporting, other extra-curricular and leadership commitments. For these students, the greater flexibility of the SACE structure and the need to study five, not six subjects were the attractions. The ability to manage time effectively and to be organised was often mentioned as more important than academic strength, were the IB to be undertaken.

Nevertheless, it is also important to ask what influence significant others had in the process of making the decision. In general terms, the role of family was not reported as influential in the decision, except in a few cases where mothers were more likely to be of significance than siblings or fathers. The direct influence of Heads of House and the Career Counsellor was even less, except for a very small number of students for whom these individuals played a decisive role in the final decision. Likewise the role of the media was unlikely to influence the majority of students.

What did emerge, however, was the pivotal role played by selected peers from whom many students sought information relating to the courses. On the evidence of the open-ended responses, these older scholars were approached at various times on an informal basis for their advice, and completely on the initiative of the younger students. This situation reflects the findings of Reitzes and Mutran (1980) and is further alluded to in the work of Kiuru, Aunola, Vuori and Nurmi (2007).¹² It is acknowledged that the Focus School's large programme for sport, music and many other extra-curricular activities provided diverse peer networks and contexts in which this could readily occur. Yet it is noteworthy that these peer networks sometimes extended beyond the Focus School. Some students from Project 3, in the first year that students were required to make the choice, specifically mentioned getting information and advice from friends and acquaintances involved in IB programmes outside the school. This feature of consultation with peers was reported as common for both IB and SACE students and was deemed important by many in the process of their decision-making.

3. Reflecting on methods used

Much of the research data was collected through surveys. These surveys combined two distinct approaches because of the nature of the data to be collected and analysed. The first approach required responses that could be quantified and compared, so a series of questions was asked where respondents had to select „forced“ or „closed“ answers. The second approach involved using open ended questions, the responses from which were to be interpreted in a qualitative manner. The Focus School was interested to have an evaluation of the formal mechanisms by which course

¹² See Project 1, 3.2 Peer Influence, page 51.

information was disseminated to students and families, so it was decided that these should be incorporated within the series of closed questions. Each questionnaire also contained a section devoted to open ended questions, to encourage the respondents to voice their own opinions about their decision-making and their reflections upon the processes at work.

The use of the two approaches yielded much information about the contexts and influences on decision-making. The repeated framework of closed questions in Projects 1 and 3 was important in demonstrating that the factors influencing student course choice were similar for both sets of respondents. For example, it highlighted one of the significant factors affecting choice, the role of select peers. It also revealed other information such as that mothers potentially could have more influence than fathers and that the media overall did not exert much weight. The consistency of responses between the two groups was a valuable finding in itself.

The addition of the open ended questions provided a different dimension to the data. Whereas the closed questions revealed that, in general terms, the Heads of House were for example not seen as having a significant influence in course selection, the open ended questions revealed that, for a small group, their Head of House was a critical force in their decision. While the closed questions tended to focus on a single factor for each response, the open ended questions revealed that the majority of students were grappling with multiple factors simultaneously; that the decision-making was generally not driven by a single issue, but was more likely to be driven by a consideration of competing factors.

Whether the right balance of closed and open questions was achieved is difficult to ascertain. What is known is that participants were prepared to answer both types of questions with very few blank responses which indicated that they were not deterred by the process. What is also acknowledged is that to have used both approaches was very profitable, not only in generating material, but also in casting different perspectives on the nature of that material.

The research was not done as an isolated project but prompted by external forces as part of a sequence of events integral to the Focus School. As such, it was anticipated that students were indeed aware, familiar and comfortable with the topic of course selection and had formed views on the process. Furthermore, it was deemed appropriate to hold a special briefing session for students prior to Project 1 survey to inform them about the general nature of the whole research, the survey component Project 1 and the survey component Project 2 which would evolve as a consequence to Project 1 and in which a number of students present would be asked to participate. The way that I could integrate these events within the school timetable as a teacher at the Focus School, and enlist other teachers to assist with supervision and other such support, was an asset.

In Project 3, a further survey was sent to intended respondents with an accompanying letter of explanation. Again, all candidates approached had dealt with the issue of course selection. In addition, some of these candidates had siblings who had taken part in the earlier surveys and were already aware of the research. As this Project was underway, however, I left teaching at the Focus School to concentrate on the research

and, once away from the campus, I found it much more difficult to co-ordinate the collecting of data.

Being associated with the Focus School as a teacher in both SACE and IB courses presented both advantages and disadvantages for the research situation. The initial groundwork that preceded the actual surveys took many months, while numerous stakeholders were given an outline of the nature and extent of the research. The issue of time and its constraints was ever present, particularly when trying to balance my role both as employed teacher and researcher.

The research did not commence until the school's senior administration, relevant staff, students and parents had knowledge to varying degrees of the study. Support from the leadership at the Focus School was forthcoming and with that came both important administrative and clerical support that assisted the logistics of the enterprise. One disadvantage in the early stages of the investigation was that it was necessary to accommodate requests to generate specific data for some stakeholders in the research, while at the same time managing refusals to accommodate requests from others. Once the refinements to the process and content were in place and Project 1 was underway, this issue was largely resolved.

The research situation, whereby both the teacher-researcher and the respondents shared an understanding of the topic within the context of the Focus School, was an advantage and contributed to the success of the question-answer cycle of the surveys. The nature of the questions and the language in which they were couched tried to reflect the prevailing culture of the students' environment. Further, the researcher was

asking questions that had sometimes already been framed and were being explored within the school community.

In Project 3, survey candidates were older and not only physically but intellectually removed from the original context. Yet again there was a pre-existing contextual relationship between the researcher and the respondents, as I had taught a number of these alumni when they were students. By drawing upon an established context or framework out of which the research data could be extracted, there was a reasonable expectation that respondents would not only provide this data, but could also interpret the researcher's questions as intended.

The researcher was also presented with the dilemma as a participant observer in the research process, who had been part of the school environment that the respondents had also experienced. The sharing of a similar context, its site, idioms, timeframes, rites and practices all played a significant role in deciding who would be surveyed, what was to be examined, and how and when the research was to be conducted. The research question had been present in an unarticulated way ever since the school decided to introduce the IB course as an alternative to the SACE course (in the late 1990s), as had the dilemmas for students trying to select the appropriate course for their final years of schooling. This shared context was viewed as an advantage, but the researcher's established profile could have proved to be a disadvantage in that the personal relationship between teacher and student might have influenced how keen students would be to participate. Furthermore, some students might seek to impress or others to subvert. In Projects 1 and 2, student responses were anonymous and many responses were very candid and pithy. As such, there was no evidence of any obvious

disadvantage, although the study was not designed to gauge student motivation. In Project 3, most of the participants went out of their way to identify themselves, often attaching personal messages of support to the researcher with their responses. The rate of response, together with the volume of material collected throughout the entire portfolio, suggests that the presence of the researcher did not have a negative impact on the process. Rather, the relationship between researcher, participants and Focus School facilitated the research and strengthened it in terms of both the quantity and quality of responses.

In the process of carrying out this research, it became clear that the factors which prompted an individual's choice of course were highly flavoured by that person's predilections. Therefore any writing up of the data always strove to report what could be identified loosely as a series of overall trends in the decision-making, as well as the highly personalised rationale of the individual. In fact, the highly individual nature of some responses often shed more light on a student's decision-making process than a more perfunctory response. In some cases too the personal knowledge of the researcher about individual students or circumstances provided clarification of ambiguities. For example, in Project 3 it was known that two IB students who were listed as studying interstate had originally applied to study locally.

It has been suggested that „it is a mistake to view respondents as passive agents. Rather they should be seen as being engaged in joint „sense-making“ activities with the researcher“ (Foddy, 1993, p. 23). For the researcher it was an important part of the interviewer-respondent relationship that the respondents be viewed as active agents, in terms of how they were approached for their participation and of the way the

questions were worded. In retrospect, much of the success of the whole research process arose from the fact that the respondents saw themselves as somehow empowered by their participation and entitled to articulate their actions and decisions. This was encouraged by the Focus School leadership and the support of the administration for the research.

4. Limitations and future research

In essence, the research in this portfolio was confined to a single independent school in South Australia whose student population was all male. The material and its findings were limited by these circumstances. Additional limitations existed by virtue of the portfolio being small scale, in terms of its respondent number, the amount of data and its evaluation driven by largely qualitative analysis.

Follow up research should attempt to explore areas both contingent on and contextual to this portfolio. The experiences of students facing such course choices in other schools, both government and independent, could be examined. It would be interesting to compare the experiences in the context of an all girls secondary school.

At the time when the research for this portfolio was drawing to a close, the „new SACE“ course model was being introduced in South Australia. The first graduates of this course are anticipated to finish their studies in 2011. This establishes a new imperative to examine the factors affecting course choice between IB and new SACE.

As the longitudinal study produced such abundant material, further longitudinal studies of IB and SACE students aimed at an examination of longer term outcomes

could prove a valuable exercise. Further, there may be ramifications for such courses with the impending introduction of the National (Australian) Curriculum.

5. Implications for the Focus School

The information collected from the respondents to this research provided important insights into the students' decision-making for the Focus School. On a pragmatic level, there was verification that the IB/SACE information night was well supported by students and parents alike. In the majority of cases, course booklets were read and Heads of House and the Career Counsellor were consulted by students in the decision-making process. From a student perspective, one practical recommendation for the future would be to involve the Head of House more formally earlier in the proceedings.

As prospective IB/SACE students were seeking course advice from selected peers, and this opportunity for networking was perceived as vital in this process, it would be useful to maintain and even enhance the numerous informal opportunities for this to occur. This would encourage individual students to seek course advice at natural and opportune times, and approach those whose opinions they personally valued.

In spite of early concerns expressed within the Focus School, there was no evidence to support the notion that cliques were developing around course choice. No student reported this directly and the evidence from descriptions about friendship groupings dismissed this as unlikely.

From the Project 2 findings, it emerged that IB candidates tended to report a more significant leap between the study demands of Year 10 and 11 than between Year 11 and 12. In turn, SACE students were more likely to find the leap between Year 11 and 12 more demanding, despite a reduction in their study load from six to five subjects. Were students to be forewarned that this might be „typical“ of their IB or SACE experience, the management of their two year programme might be practically assisted.

The tertiary study and career paths of former students would appear to indicate that neither the IB nor SACE course presents as the obvious, preferred model. Future IB/SACE students can be confident that their aspirations can be accommodated by either course. There was no evidence from the alumni surveyed, for example, that the IB proved more portable than the SACE credential. Students should be counselled however, that the uptake of tertiary study (concerning the likelihood of single/double degrees, the type and location of institutions) might be styled differently for IB and SACE graduates. Students, in hindsight, tended to self-select for each course.

The evidence that the majority of those surveyed had judiciously balanced multiple factors in the process of deciding upon their course was most instructive. No advice presented to students should seek to reduce the decision to a simple formulaic representation. While it is accepted that there may be one overriding factor that influences course choice for some students, this was not the experience of the majority of students in this research.

The Focus School's foresight and provision to take advantage of the flexibility of SACE to allow transfer from IB where students were experiencing difficulties was a very useful safety net. It ensured that those who presented for the IB examinations at the end of Year 12 were in a good position to succeed and feel satisfied with their achievements.

On the evidence of the above analysis, it can be argued that the students, as consumers, were aware of the products in the marketplace and were adept at carrying out their own market research. They evaluated the attributes of the various „merchandise“ on offer, largely ignored the media advertising, but gathered information from those who were recent purchasers. It was these peer networks operating by word of mouth that indicated former customer satisfaction and often drove the demands in the market place. Although a few were disappointed that some subject product lines were unavailable and two students thought that neither product on offer addressed „real life“, from the accounts of most students, whether IB or SACE graduates, it could reasonably be assumed that they were largely satisfied customers.

The implication of this interpretation for the Focus School is that the decision to offer both courses has addressed a perceived educational need at the senior secondary level. It has proved a worthwhile exercise particularly for those students who wanted to avail themselves of the niche IB market. A further implication for the Focus School is that the dual course offerings provide a point of difference between it and other like schools. As a consequence, the school can pitch the value of this choice in their marketing strategy to future clientele.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Permission Letter

Dear Parents of Year 10 students,

A teaching colleague Mrs Meredith Coleman, is currently undertaking post-graduate research at the University of Adelaide. Her area of interest is in examining the course choices of our students at Years 11 and 12, and the underlying reasons for their choices.

As part of this research, a survey of the current year 10 cohort would yield much valuable data for this, and would inform the School in greater detail about factors influencing the students in their decision-making.

Permission is being sought to involve your son in a survey about his intentions for study over the next two years. The survey form is to be answered anonymously and individual students will in no way be identified in the process. The time needed to do this will be managed by the School. The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete.

It is anticipated that the data gathered would be analysed and a summary of results be given to the Headmaster next year. If you consent to this it would be appreciated if you could complete the consent form below.

My good wishes,

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

5 December, 2002



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I do / do not give permission for my son (name)

to participate in the Year 10 survey.

Signed: Dated:

Please return to School on Tuesday, 10 December 2002

APPENDIX B: Year 10 Survey

YEAR 10 SURVEY 2002

Research is being carried out looking at the choice of courses by students for years 11 and 12 at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx. This survey is designed to provide information so that the School may understand more fully factors affecting why some students choose SACE and others IB. Please take time to read and answer these questions as carefully as possible. Your name will not be required and your individual answers will not be identified. A summary of the results will be given to the Headmaster next year.

Please CIRCLE the appropriate response.

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|--|----------------------|-----|------|
| 1. What is your House? | <input type="text"/> | | |
| 2. Which course have you selected? | | IB | SACE |
| 3. Did you attend the information night? | | YES | NO |
| 4. Did your parent(s) attend the information night? | | YES | NO |
| 5. Have you read the Year 10 course handbook? | | YES | NO |
| 6. Did you talk to your Head of House about your options? | | YES | NO |
| 7. Did you speak to xxxxxxxx about your options? | | YES | NO |
| 8. Did you speak to students who had done IB or SACE? | | YES | NO |
| 9. Did you choose your course because it is a pre-requisite for what you want to do when you leave school? | | YES | NO |

YEAR 10 SURVEY continued

10. Do you have any siblings who have completed Year 12? YES NO
If yes, go to question 11.
If no, go to question 12.

11. How strongly did your **sibling(s)** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

12. How strongly did your **father** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

13. How strongly did your **mother** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

14. How strongly did your **Head of House** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

15. Are your closest friends doing the same course? YES NO

16. How strongly did your **friends** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

17. How strongly did your **media reports** (newspaper articles, TV reports of successful students etc) influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

18. Do you think your choice of course will help you in your future career?

YES	NO
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YEAR 10 SURVEY continued

19. Do you want to do some form of tertiary study?
If yes, go to questions 20, 21 and then 22.
If no, go to question 22.

YES	NO
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20. Do you hope to study in this state?

YES	NO
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21. Has your choice been made with this in mind?

YES	NO
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22. Have there been any comments or opinions about either the IB or the SACE course that have affected your choice?
These may be positive or negative; for example, class sizes, teachers you may have, the work loads, better TER scores.
Briefly write them down in the space provided.

Thank you for your assistance. Good luck for next year.

APPENDIX C: Headmaster A's Letter

Dear Parents of Boys in Year 10,

SACE AND IB

At this important time of decision-making for the future, I enclose additional information on the distinctive features of both the SACE and the IB which I hope you will find useful.

I have become aware of some 'misinformation' within the School community relating to SACE and the IB, and feel that it is important that certain facts are made clear.

The suggestion in some quarters appears to be that the School favours its IB students at the expense of those doing SACE, deliberately allocating teachers and minimising class sizes to ensure that this is so.

The first point I wish to make is that we have been at pains to emphasise that the IB is an alternative pathway to SACE, not necessarily better but one that may suit some students just as SACE may suit others. We do not wish the IB students to be seen or to see themselves as some elite group.

Secondly, we have from the start taken the approach that we involve as many teachers as possible in teaching the IB and we have supported our staff extensively with professional development opportunities to achieve this outcome.

Currently we have 31 teachers teaching the IB. Of those 31, 29 also teach SACE at Year 11 or 12. There is no elite hierarchy of teachers involved in the IB only and such a concept is totally at odds with the School's philosophy.

With regard to class sizes, it is true that the average IB class size is lower than the average SACE class size. This is brought about, however, predominantly by the size of the respective cohorts. In Year 12 there are 42 students taking the IB and 106 taking SACE. At Year 11 there are 33 taking the IB and 119 taking SACE.

Having said that, the average Year 11 class size at SACE is 16 and the average Year 12 class size is 12. These figures would compare very favourably with any school nationally. The average Year 11 class size at IB is 12 and the average Year 12 class size is 11.

Please do not hesitate to contact XXXXXXXXX, the Acting Director of Studies, XXXXXXXXX, the Careers Counsellor or your son's Head of House if you would like to discuss further the most appropriate choice of future pathway for your son.

Yours sincerely,

Headmaster.

APPENDIX D: Year 11 Study

Year 11 Study

2003

Part 1

Which course?

1. Summary of the group's findings.

- Describe your reaction to the findings.

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- Are the findings relevant or accurate for your situation?

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2. Evaluation of your first year.

- Has the year met your expectations? Provide details with your answer.

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- How do you feel about your subject choices? Refer to specific subjects in your answer.

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- Have you discovered any more information about your future career or study path that has had an impact upon your decision? Explain.

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- What part do the upcoming exams play in your view of this year and next?

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- Has your friendship group changed in any way this year? Why or why not?

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- How would you describe the workload of **your** course this year?

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- (a) How would you describe the workload of **the other** course?

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(b) How did you arrive at this opinion?

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- Have you come to any conclusions about either course this year that are different from last year? Cite particular examples.

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- In hindsight what was the most useful advice that you received last year about your course choice?

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- In hindsight what could have been useful advice to you when making your course choice?

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APPENDIX E: Year 12 Study

Year 12 Study

2004

Part 2

Which course?

1. Have you advised any students either formally or informally about doing either SACE or IB? Circle the correct response.

- NO
- YES If yes, please indicate about how many and in what context.

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2. Evaluation of your second year.

- Has the year met your expectations? Provide details with your answer.

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- Are you satisfied how your subject choices have turned out this year? Refer to specific subjects in your answer.

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- How would you describe the workload this year? Has it altered from last year?

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- Are you intending to study next year? Please circle the correct response.
- YES. Please give details of the course you intend to pursue. What it is and where you will be studying, e.g. the University/TAFE and its actual location e.g. Adelaide, Melbourne etc.

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- NO. Please give details of your intended pathway next year.

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- a)What information did you gain from your recent trial/mock exams?
- b)Are you satisfied with your progress?
- c)What general comments can you make about the demands of either your course or the other course?

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- Has your friendship group changed in any way this year? Why or why not?

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- Did you undertake any extra commitments this final year of your schooling? If yes, please give details.

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- Did this have any impact on your academic workload?

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Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX F: IB/SACE Letter for Alumni Survey

Dear [Former Student]

In consultation with the School, I am carrying out research in the area of post-compulsory secondary schooling. I am investigating year 11 and year 12 curriculum at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, looking particularly at the choice students make between the SACE and IB courses.

The research I am currently doing is to fulfil part of my Doctorate in Education at the University of Adelaide. I am hoping that the research will assist the School community, administrators, teachers, parents and students to identify what factors affect and inform student choice after year 10. In appreciating these factors, future candidates may be provided with valuable information to direct their course choice.

The last part of my research is to survey a group of former students, which includes our first cohort of IB graduates and a similar group of SACE students who finished Year 12 in 1999. I hope that you are able to complete a short questionnaire in this regard.

Your opinions on your choice of course, its nature and outcomes are integral and valuable. Please leave blank any questions you would prefer not to answer. No findings that could identify any individual participant or the School will be published.

I have enclosed a copy of the questionnaire together with a stamped self-addressed envelope. Alternately, should it be more convenient for you, an electronic version is available from me at meredith.coleman@adelaide.edu.au, and if you have any queries regarding the project please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Meredith Coleman

APPENDIX G: IB Alumni Survey
POST-SCHOOL SURVEY 2007

Research is being carried out looking at the choice of IB and SACE courses for students at [The Focus School]. This survey is designed to provide information so that the School may understand more fully factors affecting why students choose IB or SACE.

This survey is aimed at former IB candidates who were part of the School's first cohort. Please take time to read and answer these questions as carefully as possible. Your name and that of the School will not be identified. A summary of the results will be given to the Headmaster.

Please CIRCLE the appropriate response.

PART A: This section reflects questions asked in an earlier survey given to year 10 students in 2002.

1. Did **you** attend an information session prior to entering Years 11 and 12?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

2. Did **your parent(s)** attend an information session?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

3. Did you read any Year 11/12 course syllabus statements?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

4. Did you talk to your **Head of House** about your options?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

5. Did you speak to **a career adviser** about your options?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

6. Did you speak to other **students**?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

7. Did you choose your course because it was a pre-requisite for what you wanted to do when you left school?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

8. Did you have any siblings who had completed Year 12? If yes, go to question 9.
If no, go to question 10. YES NO

9. How strongly did your **sibling(s)** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

10. How strongly did your **father** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

11. How strongly did your **mother** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

12. How strongly did your **Head of House** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

13. Did your closest friends do the same course? YES NO

14. How strongly did your **friends** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

15. How strongly did **media reports** (newspaper articles, TV reports of successful students etc) influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

16. Did you want to do some form of tertiary study?

If yes, go to questions 17 and 18.

If no, go to PART B.

YES NO

17. Did you study in this state?

YES NO

18. Was your choice made with this in mind?

YES NO

19. Were there any comments or opinions about either the IB or the SACE course that affected your choice? These may have been positive or negative; for example, class sizes, teachers you may have, the work loads, TER scores. Briefly write them down in the space provided.

PART B: This section looks at your course choice and post-secondary experiences.

20. What subjects did you study in Year 12?

21. Briefly describe what you have been doing since leaving school.

22. Please identify any skills that you consider you gained from the IB course, e.g. thinking about your own learning, independent working, time management, making deadlines etc.

23. Highlight the elements of the course you most enjoyed.

24. Highlight the elements of the course you disliked.

25. In hindsight, what was the most useful advice that you received about making your course choice?

26. In hindsight, what could have been useful advice to you when making your course choice?

27. If you went to study at tertiary level, describe the transition to tertiary, e.g. ease of study, challenges of course content or new approaches, meeting expectations.

28. The following are a series of quotations culled from various sources relating to the IB course. Please indicate the degree to which you think each is accurate/inaccurate and any observations you may have about these claims.

a) 'IB students seemed less focused on narrow tertiary outcomes but instead were concerned with broader educational goals such as personal development' (McKenzie, C.M., 2000, D. Ed Thesis, p. 104).

b) 'IB is often accused of being highly theoretical but it is not perceived that way by the students who have done the course' (McKenzie, C.M., 2000, D. Ed Thesis, p. 107).

c) '[The IB] is not simply for brilliant kids; it's for kids who are prepared to work hard and who are motivated to study' (Greg Crafter, 2004, article entitled 'Smart Schools pass global test for success', The Independent Weekly).

d) The Extended Essay was another special feature for me. This independent research task, supervised on a one-to-one by a member of staff, is an exciting training for University research' (Beth Chappell, 2003, Malvern View).

e) 'Shouldn't [Year 11] be a time for wider reading and enjoying outside interests, rather than focusing on a battery of crucial exam papers? In the IB, although there is plenty of work, there are no compulsory exams in the first year, and in the final year the number of papers taken is kept within reasonable limits' (Beth Chappell, 2003, Malvern View).

f)'I assumed that everyone who was doing it [the IB], really wanted to be there and there'd be a more positive environment in the class.' (Ashlea Bartram, 2004, article entitled 'Smart Schools pass global test for success', The Independent Weekly).

Thankyou for your co-operation

APPENDIX H: SACE Alumni Survey
POST-SCHOOL SURVEY 2007

Research is being carried out looking at the choice of SACE and IB courses for students at [The Focus School]. This survey is designed to provide information so that the School may understand more fully factors affecting why students choose SACE or IB.

This survey is aimed at former SACE candidates who left school in 1999. Please take time to read and answer these questions as carefully as possible. Your name and that of the School will not be identified. A summary of the results will be given to the Headmaster.

Please CIRCLE the appropriate response.

PART A: This section reflects questions asked in an earlier survey given to year 10 students in 2002.

1. Did **you** attend an information session prior to entering Years 11 and 12?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

2. Did **your parent(s)** attend an information session?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

3. Did you read any Year 11/12 course syllabus statements?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

4. Did you talk to your **Head of House** about your options?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

5. Did you speak to **a career adviser** about your options?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

6. Did you speak to other **students**?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

7. Did you choose your course because it was a pre-requisite for what you wanted to do when you left school?

YES NO DON'T REMEMBER

8. Did you have any siblings who had completed Year 12? If yes, go to question 9.
If no, go to question 10. YES NO

9. How strongly did your **sibling(s)** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

10. How strongly did your **father** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

11. How strongly did your **mother** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

12. How strongly did your **Head of House** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

13. Did your closest friends do the same course? YES NO

14. How strongly did your **friends** influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

15. How strongly did **media reports** (newspaper articles, TV reports of successful students etc) influence your choice?

VERY MUCH A LITTLE NOT VERY MUCH NOT AT ALL

16. Did you want to do some form of tertiary study?

If yes, go to questions 17 and 18.
If no, go to PART B.

YES	NO
-----	----

17. Did you study in this state?

YES	NO
-----	----

18. Was your choice made with this in mind?

YES	NO
-----	----

19. Were there any comments or opinions about either the SACE or the IB course that affected your choice?

These may have been positive or negative; for example, class sizes, teachers you may have, the work loads, TER scores.

Briefly write them down in the space provided.

PART B: This section looks at your course choice and post-secondary experiences.

20. What subjects did you study in Year 12?

21. Briefly describe what you have been doing since leaving school.

22. Please identify any skills that you consider you gained from the SACE course, e.g. thinking about your own learning, independent working, time management, making deadlines etc.

23. Highlight the elements of the course you most enjoyed.

24. Highlight the elements of the course you disliked.

25. In hindsight, what was the most useful advice that you received about making your course choice?

26. In hindsight, what could have been useful advice to you when making your course choice?

27. If you went to study at tertiary level, describe the transition to tertiary, e.g. ease of study, challenges of course content or new approaches, meeting expectations.

28. The following are a series of quotations culled from various sources relating to the SACE course. Please indicate the degree to which you think each is accurate/inaccurate and write down any observations you may have about these claims.

a) 'Other pursuits appeal to me too, such as the school play or football, and although of course these options are open to IB candidates, they have less time outside the classroom to spend on them because they study six subjects' (James Cockbill, 2002, Malvern View).

b) 'At age 16 students ought to take responsibility for their subject choices but IB students do not get the same degree of freedom when choosing which subjects to continue and which to drop' (James Cockbill, 2002, Malvern View).

c) In a recent survey, 'Of the SACE students 44 per cent believed that the IB-DP [Diploma Program] and the SACE are equal in preparing students for their future and 93 percent of them believed that the IB-DP is harder to study' (Paris, 2003, p. 238).

f)'A student noted the "inflexibility of the IB-DP" curriculum as a critical factor for his decision not to do the IB-DP' (Paris, 2003, p. 240).

Thankyou for your co-operation.

APPENDIX I: IB Learner Profile

NOTE:

This image is included on page 316 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

APPENDIX J: SACE Student Qualities

NOTE:

This appendix is included on page 317 of the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

(Dellit, J., 2003, pp. 11-12, used with permission)

APPENDIX K: Excerpt from Headmaster B's Newsletter

From the Headmaster

ISSUE 2 27th February 2009

Imagine a school that could only focus on two things. What would you choose?

[The Focus School] provides a broad and liberal education in which we aspire towards and achieve excellence in so many more areas than just two. However, if I had to answer the hypothetical question, I would focus on character and academic excellence.

Are we accountable? Yes we are. The [Focus School] is accountable to:-

the seemingly endless number of accountability forms imposed by those clipboard-carrying Canberra bureaucrats,

the thousands of hours of professional support, advice and direction, given in good faith, by our teaching and support staff,

our parents. We can justify their enormous financial and emotional investment that has gone into the education of their most precious asset, their sons, and,

the most important customers of all, the boys.

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