

SPECIAL REPORT

A platform to make it global

An alternative to the HSC is winning over students who are aiming for international careers, writes **Jane Southward**.

TO ACHIEVE a tertiary entrance ranking of 99.95, there must be a secret to your success beyond hard work.

Trinity Grammar student Ben Balzer, 19, who won a \$10,000-a-year scholarship from the University of Sydney last year, says opting to complete the international baccalaureate (IB) diploma was the key to his ranking.

Like many high schools, Trinity Grammar offers students a choice of studying the IB or the higher school certificate. Balzer says he chose the IB because he thought it would give him a better chance to study overseas and the program offered a broader range of subjects.

Balzer, from Strathfield, received the scholarship for outstanding achievement for his perfect score of 45 points in the IB in 2008 and his impressive universities admission index (UAI). Balzer has just finished his first year of a bachelor of medical science, which he intends to lead into a bachelor of medicine and surgery. The courses at Sydney University will take seven years.

While the scholarship money has been handy, Balzer says he is most grateful for the preparation for university afforded him by the workload and standard in the IB.

"For some of the subjects I am doing at uni I have found I had already covered much of the work during the IB," he says.

"The IB course is so much more in-depth than the HSC. It prepared me well for uni."

Springwood student Jacqueline Edwards, 19, who attended St Paul's Grammar, Cranebrook, is hoping her IB result of 44 points will have the same result. Edwards will begin an arts-law degree at the Australian National University in Canberra this year, having taken a gap year to work as a receptionist for a psychologist.

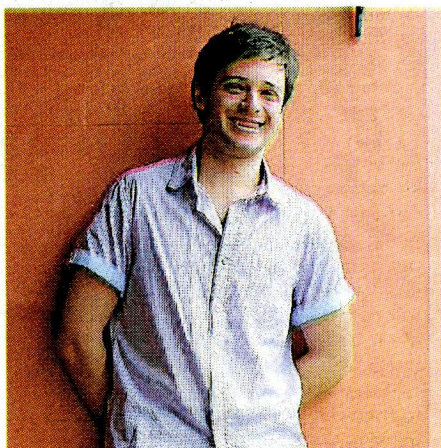
"I chose the IB because I wanted to study French and psychology, which wasn't offered if you did the higher school certificate," Edwards says.

"I thought psychology would be helpful for me in understanding people's behaviour when I am a lawyer. I've also found that the strong result in the IB was scaled well, giving me a great UAI."

Sixty Australian high schools offer the IB diploma, a two-year pre-university curriculum for students aged between 16 and 19. NSW and ACT students last year had their results converted to an Australian tertiary admission rank (ATAR).

Australasia's regional representative from the International Baccalaureate Organisation, Greg Valentine, says Australian students perform well. Last year 113 students worldwide received a perfect score (45 points) and 28 of those were from Australia. Even so, a mere 1.5 per cent of the world's IB candidates study in Australia.

Valentine believes IB students are better prepared for university as the diploma course demands a 4000-word essay, a



Scholarship . . . Ben Balzer. Photo: Angela Brkic

theory of knowledge task which he says teaches students to think, reason and analyse, and a second language.

"All the programs are preparing people to live in a more multicultural world and to have a global view of the world," he says, adding "it's not just about preparing people for university, it's about preparing them for life".

About 65,000 Australian students from kindergarten to year 12 are doing international baccalaureate programs.

Despite the international focus of the programs and the recognition by 3700 universities in the world of students' IB results, 90 per cent of Australia IB graduates attend university in Australia.

Valentine says, however, IB students viewed favourably by international universities. Some, such as the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada, seek IB students for scholarships.

"Those who do study overseas often look at prestigious institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge or Ivy League schools in the US," he says.

"The IB can offer significant scholarship opportunities. I know of one student who received \$125,000 over five years."

STUDYING OVERSEAS

The federal government has a handy website with information on how and why students should consider studying overseas. It includes information on scholarship opportunities for undergraduates and postgraduates, as well as details of fee-assistance options and the key dates for applications. Costs vary depending on the course students are enrolled in within Australia, the course they want to apply for at an international institution and the length of stay. The site says students need \$1500 to \$2000 a semester. For more information, see studyoverseas.gov.au.