

# INTERPARENTS

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## AIDE MEMOIRE ADDRESSED TO THE WORKING GROUP ON THE REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN BACCALAUREATE

**Subject: Considerations regarding the Proposed Reform  
of the European Baccalaureate**

Reference: doc 2007-D-172

### Introduction

The European Baccalaureate has acquired a high intrinsic value since it was initiated by the European Schools nearly fifty years ago. Students who have gained the European Baccalaureate are accepted at renowned universities in all member states of the European Union and beyond. Holders of the European Baccalaureate occupy top functions in international businesses and institutions world-wide. The European Schools concept engenders citizens with an open-minded, multilingual and multicultural background, thus constituting an educational model which many schools might consider an enrichment of their national curricula.

Opening the European Baccalaureate to accredited schools in the national systems of the Member States is a challenge that needs close monitoring. At the same time, universities are becoming increasingly autonomous and are setting more specific admission requirements for certain disciplines (selective entrance). Accordingly, Interparents welcomes proposals for a reform of the European Baccalaureate which enhance the **quality** of the diploma and guarantee its continued **recognition** by the EU member states and universities and which thus maintain entrance requirements for students with a European Baccalaureate that are equivalent to those applicable to students with a national diploma. Proposals based on financial considerations alone are not acceptable

This document comprises Interparents comments on the document on the proposed reform of the European Baccalaureate, as set out in the Working Group's document 2007-D-172, issued by the European Schools General Secretariat, dated 7 March 2007.

## **1. Reform of the present examination structure**

The increasing autonomy of universities in some member states is giving rise to more demanding admission requirements. Specifically, some studies ask for written examinations in three of their core subjects, whilst the current structure of the European Baccalaureate does not allow for this. Interparents appreciates that steps are now taken to meet these requirements, and that the number of written examinations for the European Baccalaureate will consequently be increased from five to six.

However, the proposal to reduce the number of oral examinations from four to two can only be explained as a cost saving measure. It is not acceptable to justify a significant structural reform of the Baccalaureate examination - which is crucial to the future of holders of the European Baccalaureate - solely on the grounds of reducing costs, particularly as other ways of containing organisational and administrative costs of the European Baccalaureate have not yet been thoroughly investigated.

The following points address in greater detail the proposed reform of the number of examinations in the European Baccalaureate:

- The total number of examinations would be reduced, thus cutting down by one examination and by one subject.

i.e. passing from 5 written + 4 orals = 9 examinations (in **seven** subjects) to 6 written + 2 orals = 8 examinations (in **six** subjects).

It is not clear how reducing the number of examinations contributes to enhancing the quality and recognition of the certificate, which is, according to the authors, the target of the reform.

- The obligation to pass written examinations in 6 subjects might have consequences for time-tabling and subject choices. This should be investigated. For instance, if increasing numbers of pupils choose at least three 4-hour options, then it might become increasingly difficult to include other optional subjects. Pupils would then only be able to choose from a limited range of subjects, prejudging the existing free option choices within the system, and probably leading to fixed packages of pre-combined subjects.

Interparents would regard this as a negative development.

- Interparents is aware that reducing the number of oral examinations is intended to simplify the organisation of the Baccalaureate exams as well as to cut costs. However, it is proposed that oral examinations would be organized only in language subjects; that would further increase the weight of the linguistic component within the European Baccalaureate as a whole.
- Reducing the number of oral exams to only two, would mean that pupils, especially those who are examined in the three science subjects, will have no further possibility to demonstrate their ability in subjects such as history or geography, thus preventing them from conveying the **European dimension** of their education onto their final Baccalaureate certificate.

Consequently, we consider that within the newly proposed reform of the examination structure, the **balance** between the three broad domains of Languages, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, should be reviewed.

- Currently, the two mathematics subjects (5 hours a week and 8 hours) are taught as different subjects, often by different teachers, and are currently examined independently of each other. It is not at all clear how both of these could become subject to a single written examination, covering the content of both syllabi within the time-limit, set for a single written examination.

## 2. Assessment methods and Weighting

The European Baccalaureate includes both external and internal examinations, and gives weight to permanent assessment of class work as well as to final examinations, both written and oral. This is already a vast improvement on traditional systems which, at the limit, used to be based exclusively on external, written, final examinations, only. Great care should be exercised should one would wish to further improve the existing arrangements, which are clearly the result of significant efforts in the past to achieve a constructive balance between these different methods of evaluation.

The Working Group's proposals appear to assume that in the final Baccalaureate mark, the current weighting of internal evaluation (i.e. evaluation by teachers) is too high in relation to the weighting of external examiners. At present, the balance between internal and external evaluation is 70% - 30%. The written and oral Baccalaureate examinations count for 60% of the final mark and the balance of 40% is assessment of the work done during the school year and the pre-Baccalaureate exams (= 25%).

This can be summarized as follows:

- A-marks 100% internal = 15% of final mark
- B-marks 100% internal = 25% of final mark
- 5 written examinations  $\frac{1}{2}$  internal –  $\frac{1}{2}$  external = 36% of final mark
- 4 oral examination  $\frac{1}{2}$  internal –  $\frac{1}{2}$  external = 24% of final mark

The Working Group's report proposes to increase external evaluation to 50%, apparently to achieve a more objective evaluation of pupils' performance. This is intended to enhance the value of the European Baccalaureate and would, within the framework of a reform of the system, continue to guarantee the recognition of the European Baccalaureate by the Member States and universities in the European Union and abroad.

The new proposal reads as follows:

- A-marks 100% internal = 10% of final mark
- B-marks 100% internal = 15% of final mark
- 6 written examinations 1/3 internal - 2/3 external = 50% of final mark
- 2 oral examinations 1/3 internal - 2/3 external = 25% of final mark

Interparents comments on the proposed modification of the weighting criteria are as follows:

- Only 25% (A+B) of the final mark would be made up of assessment for work during the school year (A) and of the results obtained for the preliminary exams (B), whereas 75% of the final mark will be determined by performance during the centralised examinations. This would in practice over-state the weight of centralised European Baccalaureate examinations. It should be borne in mind that the European Baccalaureate system **does not allow for re-examinations**.
- The leaving certificate of a secondary school should not be restricted to reporting scores obtained during the final examinations (which give an indication of the pupil's knowledge at that given moment in time) but should also reflect a pupil's global competences and performances demonstrated during the school year through balanced assessment. Furthermore, a final mark based exclusively on centralized examinations, does not reflect competences which students need to acquire before pursuing university studies.
- Attributing only 10% of the final mark to assessment of daily coursework will discourage pupils' commitment and performance in class.
- The proposed weighting of the two oral examinations, (25% in the final mark i.e. 12,5% each) is out of proportion to the weighting of the A plus B mark and to each of the individual written examinations (8,3% each).
- Transferring an important part of the evaluation to external examiners presupposes that the procedures for selecting such examiners, provide for appropriate emphasis on knowledge of the European School system and of the European Baccalaureate's specific requirements. They must have a thorough competence and up to date knowledge in the subjects concerned as well as command of the required examination languages.

- Should it be decided to transfer a more important part of the evaluation to external examiners, we recommend that clear instructions and criteria on marking be issued to all examiners, thus avoiding significant discrepancies between internal and external marking.
- In general, harmonization of educational practices, syllabi, evaluation and marking is not sufficiently advanced across all language sections and all European Schools. Consequently, it is most important that the weight of internal assessment in the present system of examinations be maintained at a reasonable level.

Accordingly, Interparents would wish to keep open for the time being the question of the number of subjects examined and of the weighting between internal and external examinations, between written and oral examinations and permanent evaluation of class work. Should however a change prove to be necessary, and as a tool for further consideration, we would submit an alternative matrix in this regard, in the Annex to this document, which would in our view illustrate a more balanced approach to the issue.

### **3. The future of the European Baccalaureate**

The European Baccalaureate enjoys the outstanding advantages of a genuinely balanced multi-lingual and multi-cultural education, and of formal recognition by all the European Union Member States, as being equivalent to national school leaving qualifications. These strong qualities may well become the foundation of a much wider opening of European Education for our children throughout the Union, but they must not be lightly tampered with, not least in view of the past achievements of the European Schools and their Alumni.

Indeed, certain aspects of the reform that is envisaged, have given the impression that the European Baccalaureate might inadvertently slide towards a different approach, currently characterised by the International Baccalaureate. Interparents wishes to say plainly that this would not be an acceptable or desirable outcome. In several EU Member States, the International Baccalaureate is considered to be a foreign diploma. It is not universally accepted as an entrance qualification by all universities.

In any event, the European Baccalaureate is part-and-parcel of the increasing need throughout the European Union for successive cohorts of highly qualified, multi-lingual young women and men whose education has spanned the cultural divides among our societies. Granted, this need no longer be linked specifically to the European Union's Public Service. Thus, opening the European School system is primarily about maintaining and improving the quality and diversity of European Education and the European Baccalaureate while expanding the opportunities for young people to participate fully in our future economy and society, throughout the European Union.

Specifically, Interparents appreciates several characteristics of the European Baccalaureate:

- Subject teaching in Mother Tongue and second languages
- the broad basic education (teaching of 10-12 subjects)
- free subject choice supplementing a common core of subjects
- Balanced consideration of all components of evaluation in determining the final mark.

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In conclusion, Interparents draws attention to the above considerations to those concerned with the proposed reforms of the European Baccalaureate, at all levels. We consider that we have the right and an obligation to participate directly in the committees and working groups that are currently addressing this matter. We request the opportunity to participate directly in this work, before any definitive options are determined.

Meanwhile, Interparents will continue to monitor closely the evolution of these discussions. We reserve our position with respect to any new proposals or final recommendations that may emerge.

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Annex:       Alternative weighting matrix.

**Internal and External Assessment and corresponding Weighting**  
**An alternative proposal**

|  | <u>Type of assessment</u> | <u>Weight</u> | <u>% of the final mark</u> |                           |
|--|---------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| A mark                                   | internal                  | 100%          | 20%                        | preliminary<br>mark = 40% |
| Written part examinations (B mark)       | internal                  | 100%          | 20%                        |                           |
| Six instead of five written examinations | Internal                  | 25%           | 42%                        | Examination<br>mark= 60%  |
|  | +<br>external             | 75%           |                            |                           |
| Three oral examinations                  | Internal                  | 25%           | 18%                        |                           |
|  | +<br>external             | 75%           |                            |                           |
| Proportion of internal assessment        |                           |               | 55%                        | 100%                      |
| Proportion of external assessment        |                           |               | 45%                        |                           |

|                      | <b>Summary Total = 100%</b> |                     |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
|                      | Internal Assessment         | External Assessment |
| Class Work (A Mark)  | 20%                         | --                  |
| Written Examinations | 20% (B Mark)<br>10.5%       | --<br>31.5%         |
| Oral Examinations    | 4.5%                        | 13.5%               |
| Totals               | 55%                         | 45%                 |

