



**European Schools**

Office of the Secretary-General

Baccalaureate Unit

Ref.: 2015-09-D-16-en-3

## **Report of the Chairman of the 2015 European Baccalaureate Examining Board**

---

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS**

Meeting on the 1, 2 and 3 December 2015 – OSGES Brussels

---

Ivana Bozděchová

Faculty of Arts

Charles University in Prague

## **Contents**

Introduction

1. Thanks and congratulations
2. Overall observations and remarks
3. Inspections in 2014/2015
4. Visits and meetings
5. Findings
  - 5.1. Pre-Baccalaureate examinations
  - 5.2. Bacculaureate examinations
    - 5.2.1. Written examinations
    - 5.2.2. Oral examinations
6. Summary and recommendations
  - 6.1. Organisation, procedure and assessment of Pre-Baccalaureate and Bacculaureate examinations
  - 6.2. Pre-Baccalaureate examinations
  - 6.3. Bacculaureate written examinations
  - 6.4. Bacculaureate oral examinations
  - 6.5. Miscellaneous
7. Conclusion

## **Introduction**

As I report on the European Schools 2014/2015 academic year, the period when I was Chair of the European Baccalaureate Examining Board during the Czech Republic's Presidency, I look back to one of the most extraordinary, challenging, instructive, interesting, enriching and enjoyable parts of my professional career. A time of broadening horizons, both for Europe as well as for my country, and the further development and sharing of our common European, and specifically national, educational systems and cultures.

### **1. Thanks and congratulations**

First of all, I should like to congratulate all those students, teachers, management and administrative staff involved, as well as the European Schools officials, for another successful school year. I would like to commend their everyday, patient, detailed and never-ending hard work. My deep thanks and true respect goes to all members of the European Schools management, to the Board of Inspectors (Secondary), the Joint Teaching Committee and especially to the members of the Baccalaureate Unit – starting with its Head, Mr. Manuel Bordoy, as well as Carmelina Dispenza and Tatiana Kopilova, to the individual Secondary inspectors, directors of the European Schools, their deputies and parent representatives with whom I met throughout the school year. They all form a well-functioning team, highly professional, tirelessly motivated and always ready to act whenever necessary. At the same time I should like to thank Mr K. Kivinen, Secretary-General, and Mr G. Marcheggianno, Deputy Secretary-General. They all were extremely pleasant, patient and helpful, painstakingly explaining this highly complex and unique school system, which was previously totally unknown to me. Last, but certainly not least, my heartfelt thanks go to both Czech inspectors, Olga Drápalová and Dana Musilová, who gave generously of their time to help and guide me throughout. I do appreciate it, particularly in view of their other duties and the enormous workload involved in preparing and conducting the many working meetings and sessions of the ES management during the school year. I am aware that this work by the entire ES management is renewed each year, with rotating responsibilities and duties for inspectors from various countries, so my admiration also goes to all previous and future officials and inspectors.

## **2. Overall observations and remarks**

My observations originate from my limited view of the European Schools system, based on a one-year experience, particularly focusing on the preparation and implementation of the Baccalaureate examinations. They are based on my attendance at meetings of the Board of Inspectors (Secondary) and the Joint Teaching Committee, on studying and examining the European Schools documentation concerning the European Baccalaureate and other aspects of the ES system (namely the Arrangements for Implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate and the Memorandum on the Organisation of the 2015 European Baccalaureate session), and on my attendance at Baccalaureate examinations in several European Schools (for details see point 4 below).

Given this experience, I have complete confidence in the effectiveness, professionalism and responsibility of the ES teachers' work and in the high quality and applicability of the education provided by the European Schools. The European Baccalaureate guarantees a level of knowledge, skills and proficiencies that goes beyond normal standards and qualifies students sufficiently to follow their academic careers. When we realise the breadth of the range and variety of subjects, which are based in or motivated by national sources, background and curricula, it seems amazing that such "diversity can work in unity". The desirable and necessary task of attaining harmonisation at the level of the ES system is still therefore a relatively distant and in many respects limited objective, which is worth working towards in a systematic, progressive and rational manner. I did sense that the idea of harmonisation was constantly present during the year and I saw major efforts to implement it, despite the many drawbacks and painful moments, and will be commenting on some of these later in the text. My report has been written in close connection with the report on the Czech presidency, which means my focus is only on the Baccalaureate examinations themselves.

## **3. Inspections in 2014/2015**

During the school year 2014/2015, guided and accompanied by inspector Olga Drápalová, I observed several Pre-Baccalaureate written and Baccalaureate written and oral examinations, corrections of written Baccalaureate examinations and communication of results of Baccalaureate examinations. I also participated in two proclamation ceremonies. In connection with the above, I have had many discussions with teachers, correctors and management staff, as well as with parents and students. The following remarks and comments are purely based on these observations and refer to documents

on the European Bacculaureate and reports by several previous Chairmen of the European Bacculaureate Examining Board. My intention is to refer to the situation in 2014/2015 specifically and to continue on from previous reports.

#### **4. Visits and meetings**

During the 2014/2015 school year I attended meetings of the Board of Inspectors (Secondary) and the Joint Teaching Committee at the Office of the Secretary-General in Brussels (7 – 9 October 2014, 15 June 2015). I observed several Czech language classes taught in the ES Brussels III (8 October 2014 and 26 January 2015) and participated in the In-service training for Czech teachers (Secondary) in the ES Brussels III (19 – 21 March 2015). I observed and inspected Pre-Bacculaureate written examinations in the ES Brussels I, II, III (26 – 28 January 2015) and Luxembourg I, II (29 – 30 January 2015), Bacculaureate written examinations in the ES Mol (3 June 2015) and Bergen (5 June 2015) and corrections of Bacculaureate written examinations in the ES Brussels I (June 2015). In order to inspect Bacculaureate oral examinations I visited the ES Brussels III (24 June 2015), Luxembourg II (25 – 26 June 2015), the accredited ES in Helsinki (23 June 2015) and the ES Alicante (1 – 2 July 2015). I was present at the communication of results in the ES Luxembourg II (3 July 2015). Finally, I attended two proclamation ceremonies in the ES Luxembourg I and II (4 July 2015).

#### **5. Findings**

Based on my observations and many discussions with all the people involved in Pre-Bacculaureate and Bacculaureate examinations and their evaluations, I can report that the efforts during the year, as well as those made over many previous years, bore fruit in the successful 2014/2015 results. The students' performance during examinations proved the robustness of the scheme and the capability of the ES system to handle diversity and choice as well as similarity and unity in the content taught in several language versions. The clear emphasis on language proficiency and the competency-based character of the schooling are, in my view (and not only because I am a linguist), the strongest, most specific and positive aspects and benefits of the ES education. I am not stating anything new, yet I feel that I should repeat it in this report since, at a general level, it proves and embodies a modern, truly European and world-class school of multiculturalism and multilingualism. The most important task facing today's schools is to produce students

prepared to face the new challenges and possibilities of a globalized world. I was pleased to see how many students approached their Bacculaureate examinations with mature opinions, good judgement, self-confidence and a clear vision of their professional goals, ready to apply what they had learned to real life. This was a performance by young people with knowledge and moral awareness, of candidates who most universities would welcome as their students.

### **5.1. Pre-Bacculaureate examinations**

As I was able to observe during the organisation of the Pre-Bacculaureate examinations in different European Schools, in most cases there was close compliance with rules and directives. In terms of the importance of Pre-Bacculaureate examinations for students within the educational process as a whole (both for learning and diagnostics), attention should be always paid to how closely the examinations connect to previous and subsequent subject-content during the 7<sup>th</sup> year of study, especially with regard to 1) how well the questions and topics covered in the Pre-Bacculaureate tests correspond to the given syllabus (it is occasionally argued that some slight discrepancies do exist); 2) providing follow-up and general feedback on questions in class to help students and to allow them to focus on areas of the tests they found more difficult.

### **5.2. Bacculaureate examinations**

Similarly to the Pre-Bacculaureate tests, the Bacculaureate examinations at which I was present complied fully with the Regulations for the European Bacculaureate.

#### **5.2.1. Written examinations**

5.2.1.1. Written tests were carefully prepared, organised and evaluated. As for marking, organised at the ES Brussels I, I would like to emphasise and express my appreciation for the almost constant presence and availability of members of the Bacculaureate Unit; they were very active, extremely patient, effective and fast.

5.2.1.2. Appeals were lodged against the Bacculaureate Mathematics written examinations for being more challenging than expected in comparison with previous years. As Mathematics experts revised the papers carefully and stated that the papers were appropriate and that all questions contained referred to the prescribed syllabus, no action has had to be taken in Mathematics 3. In Mathematics 5 the assessment was moderated by increasing the final mark awarded for the 2015 European Bacculaureate

Mathematics 5p examination by 0.8 across the board, the maximum mark achievable still being 10, and the candidates were allowed to take a new Mathematics 5p examination if they requested. Issues and decisions concerning the 2015 Mathematics examinations have already been documented in detail in a letter to students, parents, teachers and managers on June 22, 2015. Several other appeals were lodged by individual students (parents) concerning the 2015 Baccalaureate session, mainly addressing procedural irregularities in the written examination papers. In accordance with Article 12 of the Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate and with the help of the highly professional and prompt work of the Baccalaureate Unit, I was able to decide on these appeals almost immediately.

### **5.2.2. Oral examinations**

The oral examinations which I attended, and especially the candidates' performance during them, confirmed the competency-based nature of the ES syllabuses and links between the learning objectives of individual subject matters taught in the secondary cycle classes. The adoption of a competency-based approach for assessment and evaluation as well would entail a revision of all the syllabuses – as stated in the Report of the Czech Presidency, point 5.

Having inspected about 40 oral examinations in 4 European Schools, I can make a number of observations, mostly practical in nature, and pointing out certain differences in examination procedure within the ES system:

- 5.2.2.1. The time structure of the examinations varied: the procedure allowing the first 10 minutes to the candidate for a continuous, non-interrupted presentation was not always followed; the correct time allocated for the examination was not adhered to fully in exceptional cases.
- 5.2.2.2. The amount of teacher intervention in the candidate's performance varied, especially when comparing local and external examiners.
- 5.2.2.3. Occasionally, written directives for examination procedure, assessment criteria and marking schemes were not (visibly) displayed on the table during the examination. There were also a few cases where questions already given (the number of the task) were not put back in the envelope for subsequent candidates to choose from.

5.2.2.4. The assessment of individual candidate's performance was different – sometimes it was carried out immediately after the examination, sometimes it was compared to others (usually 3 candidates). This shows, in my view, that this area should be further discussed and elaborated more precisely.

## **6. Summary and recommendations**

Based on the above, I can summarise by stating that, in general, 2015 Baccalaureate examinations were run in accordance with the Arrangements for Implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate and with the Memorandum on the Organisation of the 2015 European Baccalaureate session. Their procedure and results show the continuous efforts made to ensure harmonisation and the quality of the European Schools education.

My suggestions and recommendations to be considered:

### **6.1. Organisation, procedure and assessment of Pre-Baccalaureate and Baccalaureate examinations**

6.1.1. Many positive steps have been already undertaken to ensure harmonisation at the European Schools; constant attention should be paid to 1) standardisation of Baccalaureate examination questions and their coherence with the content of syllabuses and the subject matter taught and 2) the explicit application of assessment criteria.

6.1.2. Similarly, attention should be always paid to ensuring confidentiality of all examination question papers and examination questions.

6.1.3. When dealing with students' appeals, any concessions and compromises should be carefully decided and made only when unavoidable to avoid and minimise establishing potential precedents.

### **6.2. Pre-Baccalaureate examinations**

Communication channels might be opened up between individual coordinators or inspectors and parents after Pre-Baccalaureate examination papers have been corrected. Pointing out the main and general problems, drawbacks and mistakes occurring in candidates' papers might serve to highlight weak areas during the period between Pre-Baccalaureate and Baccalaureate written examinations.



### **6.3. Baccalaureate written examinations**

6.3.1. As common practice shows, detailed and repeated re-reading and corrections of all assignments and tasks in the written papers are crucial both before and after translation into different languages. Constant and alert attention must always be paid to their correctness and the equivalency of content in all language versions, including the correlation between particular terminology in individual languages. This would ensure that questions and tasks are understood by all candidates equally and that misunderstandings are avoided.

6.3.2. Since it is absolutely necessary that all the papers should be marked using the same criteria and marking scheme applied in the same manner, regardless of language section, constant attention should be paid to complete fairness and transparency in the correction and marking of the written Baccalaureate examinations. To avoid unacceptable differences in the marks given by correctors of the same paper some measures could be considered:

6.3.2.1. Marking schemes should be made more specific to include a range of common mistakes and specify how they should be handled.

6.3.2.2. Training should be given to both groups of correctors. Where one of the correctors has not adhered to the marking scheme, he or she must be informed of this fact.

6.3.2.3. The teacher (first marker) should be able to get an explanation of why the second marker awarded a different mark. Possibilities of how to deal with such feedback could be examined.

6.3.2.4. The option for students to be able to review the marked script and then submit it for further correction might be considered.

6.3.3. As recent experience with the Baccalaureate written examinations has shown – this year in Mathematics (details see point 5.2.1 above) and similarly in 2014 in Chemistry – the questions and tasks of examination tests must fully correspond to the content of syllabuses. If not – and especially if this occurs repeatedly – this might affect the prestige of the European Baccalaureate. Constant attention should be paid to ensuring that the examinations are unimpeachable. It is certainly in the interest of the European Schools and therefore the Board of Governors, the Board of Inspectors (Secondary) and the Joint Teaching Committee to consider taking the necessary measures.

6.3.4. Based on the situation regarding the Mathematics and Physics inspector this year, I would like to make one more recommendation. After the withdrawal of Mr P. Brzakala during the school year and with no other Mathematics and Physics inspector to take over his responsibilities in the run-up to the Baccalaureate examinations, the Czech inspector Mrs Drápalová kindly agreed to be appointed as alternative inspector for the 2015 European Baccalaureate Session. To prevent similar situations occurring in future, my recommendation for the Board of Inspectors (Secondary) with the working groups of inspectors for individual subjects would be to consider measures to deal with such emergencies (e.g. the appointment of a deputy inspector for the main Baccalaureate subjects acting during the European Baccalaureate Session with the same duties and responsibilities as the inspector in charge).

6.3.5. Another subject of students' appeals which deserves further attention concerns instruction on how to write the answers: well-marked and highlighted directions could be inserted at the beginning of the form explaining that only answers written on the subject paper are valid (and those written on any other paper will not be considered or assessed).

#### **6.4. Baccalaureate oral examinations**

6.4.1. A certain subjectivity of individual examiners' is evident and to certain degree inevitable. To come closer to harmonisation, some more detailed guidance of examination procedure and assessment might be prepared, perhaps in the form of some practical handbook of oral examinations with Guidelines developed by the Baccalaureate Unit. That would be helpful especially for new external examiners and a greater standardisation of the share of intervention by local and external examiners (mentioned above in 5.2.2) might be attempted.

6.4.2. As a possible follow up to Guidelines mentioned in 6.4.1, and with respect to specific situations and needs, brief and focused brainstorming sessions or workshops might be organised for all the examiners, including external examiners, prior to the oral examinations, in the schools themselves.

#### **6.5. Miscellaneous**

6.5.1. Problems in communication between parents and teachers are occasionally reported, sometimes in connection with the lack of didactic guidance for teachers to prepare them sufficiently for such interaction.

- 6.5.2. Inspections of the Chairman of the Examining Board at the Baccalaureate examinations might be planned and scheduled ahead in coordination with Vice-Presidents for the Baccalaureate. That way, more schools and subjects could be observed.
- 6.5.3. Continuous feedback on the success rate of the European Schools' graduates could present valuable information for and about the European Schools system in different aspects. In particular, information on the scope and number of university entries might increase the prestige of the European Schools system and could be used to assist decisions regarding its structure.
- 6.5.4. To enhance the continuity of both national Presidency teams and the Chairmen of the Examining Board work and their reports, some more directive guidance might be elaborated, such as pro-forma advice on drafting reports. This would also make it easier for the European Schools management to use reports.
- 6.5.5. The Chairman of the Examining Board could be more involved in the work of the working groups and Baccalaureate Unit during the school year to improve continuity. He/she might possibly attend working meetings as an observer, to obtain a better understanding and as an opportunity to participate.

## **7. Conclusion**

I opened this report by expressing my thanks and there is nothing more appropriate than to conclude it by reiterating my great respect for everybody in the European Schools with whom I met, namely the European Schools management and European Baccalaureate Examining Board and Baccalaureate Unit for carrying out their challenging, demanding and responsible work with their hearts always open and their minds always listening and understanding. They are fully aware of the fact that the future of their pupils begins here and now. From my short and very interesting learning experience during the 2014/2015 school year, I believe that the European Schools system is a top-quality educational system, providing a positive material, organisational, human and spiritual environment and inspiring atmosphere for the community of pupils, teachers and parents to demonstrate the best of their knowledge, to share and enrich each other. It is a system of schooling appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Congratulations!

**OPINION OF THE JOINT BOARD OF INSPECTORS**

The Joint Board of Inspectors has issued a favourable opinion on the Report and submits it to the Joint Teaching Committee for an opinion.

**OPINION OF THE JOINT TEACHING COMMITTEE**

The Joint Teaching Committee has issued a favourable opinion on the Report and submits it to the Budgetary Committee for information and to the Board of Governors for a decision.

**OPINION OF THE BUDGETARY COMMITTEE**

The Budgetary Committee took note of the Report of the Chair of the 2015 European Baccalaureate Examining Board.

**PROPOSAL**

The document will be sent to the Board of Governors for a decision.