



Schola Europaea / Office of the Secretary-General
European Bacculaureate Unit

Brussels, 29 March 2019
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For the attention of
Heads of Delegation of the European
Schools

Dear Heads of Delegation,

As you are aware, in April 2015, the Board of Governors approved the introduction of a New Marking Scale (NMS) for use at secondary level in the European Schools, in order to set up a new competence-based method of assessing pupils. The changes entered into force with effect from 1 September 2018. Introduction of the NMS requires communication with national authorities responsible for higher education and revision of the existing equivalence tables (document 2014-03-D-25-en-5 'Equivalences between the European Bacculaureate and the upper secondary leaving certificate of national schools and admission of European Bacculaureate-holders to Universities in the member countries').

It is of the utmost importance that you ensure proper transfer of information about that process to universities, colleges and other tertiary education institutions in your Member State. As holders of the European Bacculaureate diploma continue their education in various Member States, it is important that the tertiary education establishments are well informed about the changes.

Adaptation of the current document concerning equivalence

The information process needs to be followed by an update of the Document 2014-03-D-25-en-5 'Equivalences between the European Bacculaureate and the upper secondary leaving certificate of national schools and admission of European Bacculaureate-holders to Universities in the member countries'. In most of the Member States, the European Bacculaureate has a very good reputation and it is crucial to retain an appropriate equivalence in order to guarantee fair treatment of European School pupils. However, in Member States where the current situation is less favourable for European School pupils, the introduction of the New Marking Scale is a great opportunity to work together with national authorities in order to improve the situation and ensure fair treatment of all pupils of the European Schools.

In the light of the introduction of the New Marking Scale, a new conversion table should be produced proportionally – as the current positive (pass) scale ranges from 5 full marks (6-10) to 6 full marks (5-10). It should be emphasised that the current pass mark of 6 will be replaced by a new pass mark of 5, meaning that from 2021, a pupil with a mark of 5 will be treated like a

pupil who currently has a mark of 6, as the required level of performance for passing has not changed; it is simply that the range above the pass mark has become more diversified and detailed. In other words, expectations of pupils, in order to be promoted to the year above or to pass the Bacculaureate examinations, will not be lowered.

A range of complementary information is provided in annexes to this letter. Delegations are invited to use this information in the way that is most convenient for them, for example, they can be used in communication with national authorities and institutions.

It is also possible to provide Member States with anonymous European Bacculaureate results of all pupils to see the distribution of marks in a given year as a reference. Similarly, it will be possible for the Member States to request the anonymous results of S5 and S6 examinations using the New Marking Scale when they become available.

Given the fact that the amended document 'Equivalences between the European Bacculaureate and the upper secondary leaving certificate of national schools and admission of European Bacculaureate-holders to Universities in the member countries' has to be made available to pupils in S6, **I would be grateful if you could provide us with input for the new document on equivalence by the beginning of September 2019.**

Please also bear in mind that since no results are yet available for the final examinations using the New Marking Scale, we strongly recommend foreseeing revision of the new equivalence table in the coming years so that it is evidence-based, drawing on the actual results achieved in the European Bacculaureate.

We thank you in advance for giving all due attention to this matter and remain at your disposal should you require any further information.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. Beckmann', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Andreas BECKMANN
Deputy Secretary-General
of the European Schools

cc: Secondary Inspectors

Annex 1.

Implementation of the New Marking Scale in the European Schools

A table clearly explaining the New Marking Scale is presented in Annex 2.

In the 2018-2019 school year, pupils in years S1-S5 will be assessed according to the new marking scale. Pupils in year S6 will follow in the 2019-2020 school year and those in S7 in the 2020-2021 school year. This means that for the Baccalaureate cycle, the new marking scale will be used for the first time in S6 in the 2019-2020 school year and for S7, including the Baccalaureate examinations, in the 2020-2021 school year. In order to provide pupils with all relevant information concerning their European Baccalaureate and possible future admission to higher education when they go into S6 and choose subjects for the final two years of school, all relevant documents will be updated and adapted as soon as possible.

Characteristics of the New Marking Scale

As a result of the pedagogical reform of the ES system, all syllabuses are now competence-based and teaching and learning contribute to development of the key competences. Syllabuses define the learning objectives and contain clear assessment criteria and attainment descriptors for each subject.

Attainment descriptors describe the level of pupils' performance in respect of a given set of competences or learning objectives. They are used for planning of teaching, learning and assessment and for interpretation of final results and, as such, they are an integral part of the assessment process.

A student is deemed to have passed with a mark of 5 (Sufficient – Grade E). A 5 can only be awarded where the requirements of the relevant attainment descriptor have been achieved. However, it is crucial to emphasise that a change of pass mark from 6 to 5 does not in any way mean lowering of the standards or requirements. The previous requirements to be awarded a 6 ('sufficient') now result in a mark of 5 (also 'sufficient'). It needs to be understood that it is not simply a question of transition from a 10-mark scale with a pass mark of 6 to a 7-mark scale with a pass mark of 5, but of a completely new approach, which results in assessment that is better planned and more transparent.

Uniqueness of the European Schools

It is worth noting that the European Schools should not be regarded as a typical national system, given that they do not represent a full range of schools and pupils. The European Schools are a unique system, with competence-based syllabuses and an academic orientation, whose pupils come from a more privileged background (socially advantaged) on average, something which results in higher achievement (higher pass mark and average) than in national systems. It has been confirmed by various PISA assessments that there is a high correlation between pupils' performance and socio-economic status (the more socially advantaged, the better pupils' performance). Although the European Schools do not participate in the PISA assessments on a regular basis, three schools have in fact participated in PISA – two in Luxemburg (2012, 2015) and one in Culham, UK (2012).

The high quality of the European Schools was also noted by European Parliament's Directorate-General Internal Policies of the Union in a document 'Analysis of the academic and professional careers of the European Schools' graduates' – *“Besides language teaching, the European Schools are also above average (as compared to the national educational systems in the EU, analysed by Eurydice) for the teaching of sciences (biology, chemistry and physics). Undoubtedly as a consequence of this, we note that the number of graduates who chose tertiary education in these fields is above the European average, especially so for girls. (...) In a general way, the European Schools prepare their graduates very well to an academic career, since 94%*

of the respondents did start such a career, and of these, 8 out of 9 eventually obtain at least a bachelorship or its equivalent.”

Should you require more information:

A detailed description of the New Marking Scale is available on the European Schools' website: <https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/studies/marking-scale>

All the syllabuses are available on our website <https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/studies/studies-organisation>, so if in doubt the national authorities can consult those documents.

Information about the European Baccalaureate is also available on the European Schools' website <https://www.eursc.eu/en/European-Schools/European-Baccalaureate> and an overview is presented in Annex 3.

Annex 2. New Marking Scale

	Grade (S1-S3)	Numerical Mark (S4-S6)	Numerical mark 1 decimal S7 preliminary mark	Numerical mark 2 decimals S7 final mark	Performance Indicator
Excellent though not flawless performance entirely corresponding to the competences required by the subject	A	10 9.0-9.5	9.0-10	9.00-10	Excellent
Very good performance almost entirely corresponding to the competences required by the subject	B	8.0-8.5	8.0-8.9	8.00-8.99	Very good
Good performance corresponding overall to the competences required by the subject	C	7.0-7.5	7.0-7.9	7.00-7.99	Good
Satisfactory performance corresponding to the competences required by the subject	D	6.0-6.5	6.0-6.9	6.00-6.99	Satisfactory
Performance corresponding to the minimum of the competences required by the subject	E	5.0-5.5	5.0-5.9	5.00-5.99	Sufficient
Weak performance almost entirely failing to meet the competences required by the subject	F	3.0-4.5	3.0-4.9	3.00-4.99	Failed (Weak)
Very weak performance entirely failing to meet the competences required by the subject	FX	0-2.5	0-2.9	0.00-2.99	Failed (Very weak)

Annex 3. Overview of the European Baccalaureate

The European Baccalaureate cycle comprises the final two years of secondary education (S6 and S7) in the European Schools or in Schools Accredited by the Board of Governors.

The European Baccalaureate cycle consists of a comprehensive multilingual curriculum. Pupils must always follow a combination of language, humanities and scientific subjects, with subjects taught through more than one language. The core curriculum consists of the following compulsory subjects, some of which can be taken at different levels of complexity:

- At least two language subjects (the dominant language and another one)
- Mathematics, either 3 periods/week or 5 periods/week
- One scientific subject, either Biology 2 periods/week or any other 4-period scientific subject in either Biology, Chemistry or Physics
- History and Geography, either 2 periods/week or 4 periods/week, which are taught through a different language from the dominant one, in either French, English or German.
- Philosophy, either 2 periods/week or 4 periods/week
- Physical Education
- Ethics or Religion

In addition to the core curriculum, pupils have a wide range of options and complementary subjects from which they can choose to complete their subject package, which amounts to a minimum of 31 periods per week and a maximum of 35.

Secondary education is validated by the European Baccalaureate examinations held at the end of year S7. Candidates sit five written examinations and three oral examinations. L1, L2 and Mathematics are compulsory written examinations. L1, L2 or a subject taught through L2 (History or Geography) are compulsory oral examinations. Candidates must therefore demonstrate written and oral proficiency in at least two languages.

Each examination covers the entire syllabus of the corresponding subject in S7 but also assesses the competences (knowledge, skills and attitudes) acquired in previous years, especially in S6.

Both written and oral examinations are subject to double correction, being marked by both the candidates' teachers and external examiners. The final mark is the average of the two examiners' marks. In the case of a mark disagreement of more than two points (marks), a third external examiner is brought in and, through thorough analysis of the previous corrections, establishes a final mark between the higher and the lower marks awarded by the two previous examiners. Since 2017, scripts have been anonymised prior to correction and correction has been done online, which allows an additional layer of quality assurance to be provided by the Inspectors responsible for the subjects and by the European Baccalaureate Unit.

The external examiners are appointed annually by the Board of Governors of the European Schools and must meet the requirements laid down in their home countries for appointment to examining boards of the same level.

The European Baccalaureate session is overseen by the Chairman of the European Baccalaureate and the national Inspectors, acting as Vice-chairmen. They guarantee the high level and quality of the Baccalaureate examination papers and fair and reliable assessment of the candidates and ensure that the examination proceedings conform to the European Schools' regulations.

The Chairmanship of the European Baccalaureate rotates every year, in line with the annual presidency of the European Schools. The country holding the annual presidency proposes a prestigious university professor to chair the European Baccalaureate session and he or she is then appointed by the Board of Governors.

Assessment in the European Baccalaureate cycle is criteria-referenced. It measures pupils' attainment in relation to the degree to which the learning objectives and required competences defined in a given syllabus have been attained. The inspectorate also provides very clear assessment and marking guidelines for criteria for both oral and written examinations.

Assessment in the European Baccalaureate is both formative and summative. Formative assessment focuses on the process of learning. It is reflected in so-called 'A marks'. A marks represent the pupils' daily work in a subject, which consists of a variety of tasks and aspects, such as:

- focus and attention in class;
- active participation and quality of interventions in class;
- regularity and consistency in work in class and at home;
- positive attitude towards the subject;
- signs of initiative, independence and autonomy;
- short written progress tests or oral questioning;
- progress tests;
- etc.

Summative assessment reflects a pupil's performance at the end of a given period of instruction. It is reflected in so-called 'B marks', which are achieved in the term or semester Pre-Baccalaureate examinations. These examinations check pupils' competences acquired over an extensive period of time in certain subjects. They are held under certain physical conditions (room arrangement, use of specific formats, invigilation, etc.) and under time constraints.

At the end of year S7, pupils are awarded a preliminary mark, which accounts for 50% of the final mark. This preliminary mark reflects all the formative assessment and summative assessment (Pre-Baccalaureate examinations) carried out by the teachers during S7.

The other 50% of the final mark is awarded through double correction of the written and oral European Baccalaureate examinations by internal and external examiners. The five written examinations account for 35% of this part and the three oral examinations for 15%.

More information can be found here: <https://www.eursec.eu/en/European-Schools/European-Baccalaureate>

An interesting overview of the European Baccalaureate produced by an external body (UK Department for Education) can be found here:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/547385/The_European_Baccalaureate_Guidance_Document.pdf