



Brussels, 17 October 2019
2019-10-LD-11-AB/ER/cd

For the attention of
Heads of Delegation of the
European Schools

Dear Heads of Delegation,

As a follow up to my letter of 29 March 2019 (2019-03-D-27; see annex), I would like to share with you our observations after the first year of implementation of the New Marking System (NMS). As you will recall, the New Marking System is introduced in three steps:

Step 1: S1 to S5 in the 2018/19 school year

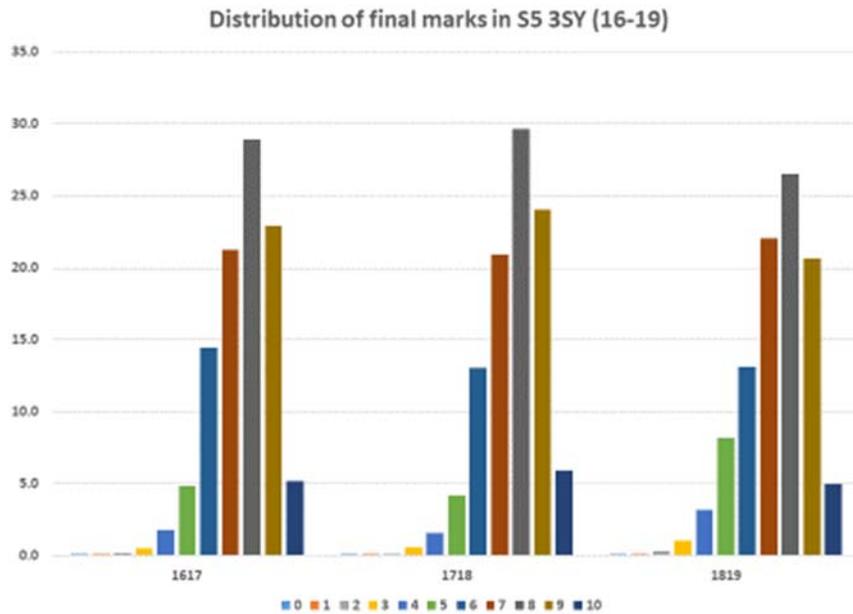
Step 2: in S6 in the 2019/20 school year

Step 3: in S7 in the 2020/21 school year with the first BACC session in June 2021.

The observations are meant to provide you with further guidance when establishing the national equivalence tables.

In years secondary 1 to 5 the New Marking System was implemented during the school year 2018/2019. We have performed a first analysis of the results of the pupils at the end of S5 and the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. The NMS seems to have been implemented as expected.
2. The overall distribution of marks had a very similar shape over the last two school years (2016/17 and 2017/18); their distribution the previous school year (2018/2019) differs somehow – the distribution curve of passing grades looks rather similar, however the range of the passing marks is different, which can likely be attributed to the introduction of the New Marking System.



3. It can also be observed that as the percentages of pupils who receive a mark in the same interval are now distributed over six intervals, there is a drop in the percentage of students in the higher levels.

<i>Distribution of positive marks in all ES</i>						
	Mark 5	Mark 6	Mark 7	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
2016/2017 S5 pupils (old system)		15,6%	22,9%	31,7%	24,8%	5,6%
2017/2018 S5 pupils (old system)		13,9%	22,4%	31,7%	25,7%	6,3%
2018/2019 S5 pupils (NMS)	8,6%	13,7%	23,1%	27,8%	21,6%	5,2%

In particular, **no “lowering of standards”** can be observed. As expected, pupils now receiving a 5 and passing, do not correspond to the cohort of pupils who were receiving 5 in the OMS and failing. A slight decrease in the percentage of failures should rather be attributed to the new philosophy of marking (competence based).

Success and failure rate in all ES		
	Success rate	Fail rate
2016/2017 S5 pupils (old system)	92,7%	7,3%
2017/2018 S5 pupils (old system)	93,6%	6,4%
2018/2019 S5 pupils (NMS)	95,4%	4,6%

4. As anticipated, the **average** of the final marks is **0.5 point lower** (on a 10-point scale), which can be explained by the fact that now there are more positive marks (from 5 to 10, instead of from 6 to 10) and the scale of positive marks is stretched. This is a result of the overruling aim not to drop the standards.

Overall average final mark for all ES	
2015/2016 final mark in S4 (old system)	7,65
2016/2017 final mark in S5 (old system)	7,51
2016/2017 final mark in S4 (old system)	7,78
2017/2018 final mark in S5 (old system)	7,58
2017/2018 final mark in S4 (old system)	7,69
2018/2019 final mark in S5 (NMS)	7,18

We strongly recommend that not only the difference in the scale, but also the differences in the distribution of marks would be considered when establishing a revised national equivalence table and when providing information to universities located in your member state.

In this context, I would like to kindly remind you that it is of utmost importance that you ensure an effective and timely communication on the process of introduction of the New Marking System to universities, colleges and other tertiary education institutions in your member state, clearly announcing a change in the Marking System of European Schools that will first reflect on our pupils' results at the end of the school year 2020-21. As holders of the European Baccalaureate diploma continue their education in various Member States, it is important that the tertiary education establishments are well informed of the changes and that the document 2014-03-D-25-en-5 "*Equivalences between the European Baccalaureate and the upper secondary leaving certificate of national schools and admission of European Baccalaureate-holders to Universities in the member countries*" is updated by national inspectors.

It is worth reiterating that all Member States are contracting parties of the ‘Convention Defining the Statute of the European Schools’.

Article 5 of the Convention obliges Member States to ensure that holders of the European Baccalaureate “*enjoy in the Member State of which they are nationals, all the benefits attaching to the possession of the diploma or certificate awarded at the end of secondary school education in that country*”; and that holders of the European Baccalaureate are “*entitled to seek admission to any university in the territory of any Member State on the same terms as nationals of that Member State with equivalent qualifications*”. By ratifying the Convention Member States have the legal obligation to value the qualifications of the holders of the European Baccalaureate and to treat them on the same terms as their own nationals with the same qualification. This legal obligation goes further than a ‘simple’ recognition of the European Baccalaureate.

Given the above-mentioned observations and in order to ensure also in future a fair treatment of our graduates in line with their qualifications, it is important that Member States take into consideration the fact that with the New Marking System it has become more difficult to achieve the same high mark as under the previous marking system. It is strongly recommended that this fact would be reflected by Member States when establishing the revised equivalence tables.

In this context, it is also worth reiterating that the European Schools should not be regarded as “typical (secondary) schools” in a national system, as the European Schools do not represent a full range of schools and pupils.

The European School system

- is a unique and demanding system, with an academic orientation only,
- is based on competence based syllabi,
- provides high quality teaching and learning to pupils with a strong socio-economic background, which inevitably results in average higher achievements (stronger set of knowledge, competencies and skills).

Various international assessments (eg. OECD-PISA) have confirmed that there is a high correlation between pupils’ performance and socio-economic status (the more socially advantaged, the better pupils’ performance).

The better performance of pupils of the European Schools was regularly detected when the European Schools Luxembourg and Culham participated in OECD-PISA assessments, included in the latest ones in 2012 and 2015 respectively.

I would also like to remind you that we are willing to share with Member States anonymized European Baccalaureate results of all pupils in order to ensure a clear understanding of the distribution of the marks in a given year as a reference. Equally, it is possible for Member States to request the anonymous results of s5 exams since the introduction of the New Marking System.

Given the fact that the amended document *“Equivalences between the European Baccalaureate and the upper secondary leaving certificate of national schools and admission of European Baccalaureate-holders to Universities in the member countries”* should be made available to the pupils in s6, I would be grateful if delegations - which have not done so yet - would finalize their individual review of the document in the light of the guidance provided by this communication and provide the Office of the Secretary-General with input for the new document on equivalence as soon as possible. In case there is no centralized equivalence table for a given Member State, please provide the Office of the Secretary-General with an up to date description of the system and/or procedures for admission to higher education.

Please also bear in mind that due to a limited scope of available results using the NMS, we strongly recommend to foresee a revision of the new equivalence table in the coming year(s) in order to better base them on evidence and up-dated results at the end of the 2019/20 school year and the 2020/21 school year including the results of the European Baccalaureate 2020/21.

For further guidance or in case of questions please contact the European Baccalaureate Unit of the Office of the Secretary-General (email: ES-baccalaureate@eursc.eu).

Yours sincerely,



Andreas BECKMANN
Deputy Secretary-General
of the European Schools

Annex I. Letter of 29 March 2019 (2019-03-D-27).

CC: Secondary Cycle Inspectors
Directors of the European Schools
Directors Secondary Cycle
Representatives of the Directors of Accredited European Schools
President Interparents