

Supporting the European School Parent Community Through the Bacallaureate

SUMMARY

Important: Save this information sheet in case/until needed! Working together, your Parent Association and 'INTERPARENTS' aim to support you throughout the Bacallaureate Season. As representatives, we see the great care taken to ensure that all goes smoothly and to rectify any faults discovered. Considering the number of exam papers sat by European Bacallaureate candidates, problems with the exams are rare. Nevertheless, as parents, you might want to be prepared 'just in case' and consider the following actions you can take in the event of a reported problem with an examination:

1. **Talk to your child to establish the facts** as soon as possible after any examination which has given cause for concern and **consult the official texts & Handbook** starting with: https://www.eurasc.eu/Documents/BAC_Handbook-en.pdf
2. **Share with us your concern (as soon as possible)** if something appears to be wrong with the examination paper or management of the exam: Instructions at <http://interparents.eu/bac/>. We play no part in any official process of investigation, possible remediation or appeal but we will collate comments from parents, analyse them as best we can, follow up and maintain a channel of communication on what happens to concerns affecting groups of pupils. Our aim is for any corrective action deemed necessary to be taken **prior** to the results being published.
3. **Consider communicating with your school** management to discuss informally your options (note that your child's teachers may not be able to discuss details, depending on the nature of your concern.)
4. **Lodge a formal complaint/appeal** if warranted. This can be introduced ONLY:
 - a. within **ten calendar days** of the results being formally communicated to the candidate
 - b. in the case of a **prejudicial 'procedural irregularity'** (non-compliance with the regulations) <https://www.eurasc.eu/en/Office/official-texts/basic-texts/en>
 - c. by the **pupil him/herself, once s/he is 18 years old** (otherwise by the parent/legal representative)
 - d. **in writing** via the **school director**.

Join our roster of (impartial) language and subject 'experts' that we can call upon in case of need! Please volunteer via your local INTERPARENTS representative or via <http://interparents.eu/roster/>

Dear fellow parents,

This document describes how INTERPARENTS and our member associations endeavour to support the parent community on issues related to the Bacallaureate, **particularly during the examination 'season' each year.**

In all examination systems, things can go wrong and errors sometimes go undetected. For example, a graphic in a question might not be sufficiently legible, a question might be slightly 'off-syllabus' or an instruction might be open to different interpretations etc.. If you attended/followed online the conference organised by Parent Associations in Brussels in February 2017, you may recall the detailed explanation (given by the Head of the Bacallaureate Unit of the Office of the Secretary General of the European Schools) of the

multi-step preparation of the Baccalaureate exams and the measures built in to ensure quality control.¹ Despite all the care taken, however, typographical errors and other faults can be missed from time to time.

When spotted by the examining authorities of the European Baccalaureate, these errors can be (and mostly have been) addressed immediately. Nevertheless, they can be alarming to Baccalaureate candidates and their parents who, understandably, want to make sure that any problem they have encountered has been noticed and is being addressed. This is where your Parent Association and its parent organisation, INTERPARENTS, aim to help.

Role of your Parent Association & INTERPARENTS

The European Baccalaureate is the culmination of years of work by pupils. We understand that the results obtained can be crucial to our school leavers for gaining access to university or other future education. We believe that it is critical, therefore, that this final phase of schooling and evaluation is **just, efficient and transparent**. In pursuit of these goals, we use our influence and position within the governing structure of the school system:

Ongoing activity -- INTERPARENTS brings together representatives from each member association who follow issues related to the Baccalaureate throughout the year. We have regular, informal dialogue with key parties (including the Head of the Baccalaureate Unit and subject inspectors) and we contribute formal input through the twice-yearly meetings of the Joint Teaching Committee of the European School System and a preparatory working group on the management of the Baccalaureate called the 'Baccalaureate Observatory Group.'

During the Baccalaureate Examination 'season' -- When questions and concerns arise about one of the hundreds of examinations sat by pupils, your Parent Association and INTERPARENTS stand ready to provide support. Please understand that INTERPARENTS and our member associations do not have an *official* role in analysing or redressing any faults that may have occurred. However, our assistance in recent years has been openly appreciated by various involved parties, assistance which we are motivated to continue, if/when needed. Previously, this has included:

- collating and forwarding to the Baccalaureate Unit, in a timely and coordinated fashion, any relevant observations and concerns received from our membership about specific examination papers or incidents occurring at the exam centres.
- attempting to analyse these concerns in the light of our knowledge of the exam system, our experience of previous problems and any relevant syllabus. This may enable us to form a general picture of a potential problem, identify patterns and possibly to make additional comments to the Baccalaureate Unit and maybe also to the Chair of the Baccalaureate Examining Board (a post rotated annually with the Presidency of the Schools) and/or the appropriate inspector.
- maintaining a dialogue with the authorities on the progress of a problem (from identification through to resolution/any remedial action), including representing the views of our membership on such issues as the importance of meeting key deadlines for university applications.
- relaying information back to the parent community (and requesting additional/explanatory remarks if needed.)

¹ You can refresh your memory of this explanation of the process by re-watching the recording at <https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/bac-reform-the-4-apeee-s-conference#> (go to 20h15, about 1h37 into the recording) or consulting the slides presented at <http://interparents.eu/docs/> user 12*40, password 480

- discussing and informing concerned parents, through our network, of options for possible further action (including navigating the Complaints Procedure and what the possible outcomes are within the authority of the Complaints Board <http://www.schola-europaea.eu/cree/>.)
- further analysing problems and their resolution after the Bacculaureate session has concluded for this year and feeding the results of our deliberations into relevant fora, with the aim of helping those in the governing structure to learn from problems and avoid similar situations in future.

We are mindful that for this year's Bacculaureate, there have been a number of changes which could or should have an impact on the incidence of problems occurring or their resolution. For instance:

- From this year, Bacculaureate examination **papers will be scanned and uploaded to a central site which will be accessible to all markers through a standard online interface.**
- Following a change in the rules to address some problems observed, from this year, **candidates who were previously entitled to a translated copy of their paper** (because they were taking the exam in their L2 or L3 instead of their L1 or L2) **will now have access only to a dictionary during the exam.**
- We are happy to say that several **quality-control measures** have been introduced or expanded this year, notably '**External Auditing**' of a greater number of draft examination papers prior to their finalisation.

More details of these measures and relevant communications produced to support candidates can be found in Annex 1 of this document: 'What's New?'

When you have a concern following an examination...

If your child comes home following an examination with a concern about it, do take time to gain an understanding of the nature of the problem. Having talked it through, if you conclude that your child encountered a problem which was possibly due to a fault in the paper or in how the examination was run, then it could be worth investigating further at the level of the Examining Board and Bacculaureate Unit responsible for management of the examination overall. It is important then to act promptly. (There is very little time between the examinations being sat and proclamation of the final results in which to address issues, analyse them, inform and consult the various actors in the process and attempt to find satisfactory outcomes.)

We provide the following notes and suggestions in good faith, in the hope that you will find them useful; they are based on our experience and understanding of how the system works. This text is therefore not a comprehensive guide nor an official document. For more information, you can consult the following (in DE, EN & FR):

1. '**The European Bacculaureate Handbook**' – Intended as a readable guide to the official texts, a first edition was recently produced by the Bacculaureate Unit in conjunction with representatives of stakeholders, including INTERPARENTS (and by extension, the Parent Associations whom we consulted.) https://www.eurasc.eu/Documents/BAC_Handbook-en.pdf
2. Latest versions of the official texts of the '**Regulations for the European Bacculaureate**' and '**Arrangements for implementing the Regulations...**'² <https://www.eurasc.eu/en/Office/official-texts/basic-texts/en> (scroll down to European Bacculaureate)

² For 2017 the official basic texts are:

- Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European Bacculaureate (Applicable for the year 2017 European Bacculaureate session: 2015-05-D-12-en-9) <https://www.eurasc.eu/BasicTexts/2015-05-D-12-en-9.pdf>
- Regulations for the European Bacculaureate (Applicable from the year 2017 European Bacculaureate session: 2014-11-D-11-en-4) <https://www.eurasc.eu/BasicTexts/2014-11-D-11-en-4.pdf>

Characterising a problem

If there has been a ‘**procedural irregularity**’ (any infringement of the rules governing the BaccaLaureate and its implementation) which may have been ‘prejudicial’ to a candidate’s performance (affected it negatively) then remedial action at the level of the BaccaLaureate Unit/examining board may be taken automatically without anybody having to make an official complaint. (A range of compensatory measures are at the disposal of the subject inspector and Chair of the Examining Board.) However, it is generally worth parents/their representatives alerting these authorities to any potential procedural irregularity in case it has not been picked up already.

- Such procedural irregularities range from an individual examination question being faulty in some way, to some kind of incident occurring in the exam room resulting in the examination being delayed/halted, for instance.
- They do not cover situations in which a teacher seems not to have covered the syllabus in class or the school bus was delayed, causing a candidate to be late, for example.

In exceptional cases, if there is no agreement that a procedural irregularity has occurred or disagreement over the scale of its impact on candidate performance, then the launch of an official complaint could be justified. However, making an official complaint is not rapid nor necessarily straight forward.

Parents often find that it is not immediately clear to them whether, or not, the problem or concern reported by their child constitutes a ‘procedural irregularity.’ *(Concerns related to content of the exams are quite common. Some pupils do perform worse than they expected and this in itself often raises concern about level of difficulty of the exam. There are no direct rules defining the level of difficulty, but underperformance across the board would be a cause for concern. So too would be uneven patterns of mark distribution. Sometimes, the formulation of the questions allows for multiple interpretations. Other times, the translation from the original or vehicular language seems to be problematic.)* These are examples of where INTERPARENTS may be able to help clarify the situation, sometimes with **help from volunteer parents who are language and/or subject ‘experts’**. Please **volunteer** via your local INTERPARENTS representative or using the link at the end of this document if you can help scrutinise papers on request and do not have a conflict of interest, (e.g. your child is not taking that particular exam.)

Steps you can take

1. Tell your Parent Association and INTERPARENTS by filling in our web form

By contacting us as soon as possible, you can help the efforts we make on behalf of parents to analyse and assess the size and nature of common problems and finally find solutions.

Fill in our new web form to contact **simultaneously** both INTERPARENTS *and* your local representatives who have been designated to work on BaccaLaureate issues by your Parent Association (PA). Go to

<http://interparents.eu/bac/>

Problems that are most efficiently addressed through INTERPARENTS are the ones which concern larger group of pupils. It often is beneficial therefore to react in concert with other parents/pupils.*

However, even problems apparently affecting single pupils may be indicative of wider and important issues so we still want to hear from you in such cases (for example, those who have ‘special arrangements’).

* You can submit the form as an individual parent on behalf of your child. Alternatively, one parent can fill in the form on behalf of a group. However, to avoid duplication and confusion, please do not do both!

Specifically, using this form to communicate with us will:

- automatically log your question/concern³ (which will facilitate forwarding of concerns and enable us to include you in the list of recipients of any possible future relevant communication.)
- enable us to categorise concerns/problems by school, subject etc. so please fill out all the fields.

Everything you submit will go to your PA as well as INTERPARENTS and at the same time. So, by filling in this form, your PA will be kept informed and be equipped to deal promptly with all concerns for which an intervention at the school level would be more appropriate. (Of course, this does not stop you also communicating with your PA directly through the usual channels as well, just in case. It's really important that your PA is informed of any concerns if they are to help you.)

2. Contact your school

If you have a major concern, contact your school to discuss it informally. (For groups of parents with the same issue, your Parent Association may be able to facilitate this contact.) As teachers are also the first markers of papers, your child's teacher may not be able to discuss details with you, depending on the issue. However, the school management should be able to answer questions, address simple problems for the remaining exams, tell you about how and when you can gain access to your child's written answer paper with supporting documentation (see notes on timeframe in Annex 2**) and clarify the procedure if you are considering making a complaint. (NB: This informal interaction does not constitute a formal complaint.)

3. Possibly make a formal complaint/appeal

The informal options for raising concerns are exhausted by the time the BaccaLaureate results are published. At this stage, if no corrective measure has been authorised in response to an issue identified, only a successful appeal/complaint will affect the BaccaLaureate grade/s of an individual candidate. From this point forward, the process is formal. If you need to go down this route, don't delay; be aware that **adherence to the rules and deadlines is vital**. (See Annex 2 and 'Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European BaccaLaureate'⁴ especially Articles 6.5 and 12.)

The formal appeal process **takes time** and results, at most, in the **offer of a retake** of the examination concerned. It should be noted that it is very unusual for such retakes to be offered before September; such a delay in obtaining a final result can affect a school leaver's chance to take up a university place in the same year. This point is well understood by all parties. INTERPARENTS considers it totally unacceptable for a school leaver's academic opportunities to be compromised through no fault of their own and that retakes are only acceptable as a measure of last resort. Happily, in recent years at least, other compensatory actions have mostly been taken **prior** to the communication of final results. These actions are selected from a range of options which are standard to examination systems and are decided on finally by the Chair of the BaccaLaureate Examining Board in consultation with the relevant inspector and BaccaLaureate unit.

³ Data protection: INTERPARENTS strictly respects the sensitive nature of any communication it receives related to BaccaLaureate matters and data protection regulations. The comments you give us may be shared only with the BaccaLaureate Unit of the Office of the Secretary General of the European Schools, named representatives of Parent Associations and with subject/language 'experts' we consult, all of whom will be asked to refrain from further sharing of the information you give us. To the best of our ability, we will take steps to ensure no personal data will be shared outside INTERPARENTS and your Parent Association; information will be transferred in anonymised form. On the rare occasions in which this would not be sufficient, we will ask for the permission to share your personal data before data transfer. Personal data collected via the online form will be deleted six months after the conclusion of the BaccaLaureate session 2017.

⁴ For the 2017 European BaccaLaureate: 2015-05-D-12-en-9 <https://www.eursec.eu/BasicTexts/2015-05-D-12-en-9.pdf>

Experts and expert roster

INTERPARENTS tries, with assistance of its member associations, to keep a registry of 'experts' within the parent community to help assess issues related to specific subjects and/or translation-related matters, if and when needed. Anybody interested in supporting this effort (and who does not have a 'conflict of interest' such as having a child sitting the particular exam in question) is encouraged to put forward their interest via <http://interparents.eu/roster/>

Wishing everyone a smooth and successful Bacculaureate season.

With many thanks from the INTERPARENTS team for supporting us to support you,

Sarah Conyers Barber
President, INTERPARENTS

Annex 1: European Baccalaureate - What's new this year?

We are happy to report that a number of **quality-control measures** have been introduced or expanded for the 2017 Baccalaureate session, notably '**External Auditing**'⁵ of draft examination papers prior to their finalisation. Known also as '**University Observation**', this task has been "performed by independent experts (chosen by the Chair of the Baccalaureate Examining Board) with experience in the field of assessment or elaboration of secondary school-leaving examinations or entrance examinations to higher education studies." This year, the expanded list of subjects selected for University Observation comprises: Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics 3P, Mathematics 5P, Physics and German Language 3.

Sometimes, **candidates take a subject in a language other than that envisaged for the subject** e.g. their L2 or L3 instead of L1 or L2, depending on the subject. (This happens mostly as a result of there being insufficient pupils at a school wanting to take the course in the normal language prescribed for the subject.) Previously such candidates could request a translation of their exam paper but it was observed that this added to the time required to read the exam paper and sometimes confused the candidate if there were slight differences in phrasing between the two versions of the paper. This led to a **rule change: only a dictionary is now made available to such candidates and no translated version of the paper**. This Baccalaureate session of 2017 will be the first year of implementation of the rule change.

Finally, as you are probably aware, from this year, Baccalaureate examination **papers will be scanned and uploaded to a central site which will be accessible to all markers through a standard online interface**. The benefits of the system should include better standardisation of the marking process, easier justification of marking, the possibility of random assignment of scripts to markers, better security and enhanced analysis opportunities. INTERPARENTS has been supportive of the *aims* of the project and has tracked the progress of the project closely over the course of the last couple of years with the objective of ensuring adequate safeguards are put in place to avoid problems during the *introduction* of the new system. Everyone is aware that it is essential that pupils' transition to university cannot be compromised and special attention must therefore be paid to the elements which could potentially have an impact on that (including timing of the completion of marking so that the Baccalaureate results can be announced on time). INTERPARENTS therefore asked all its member associations in March to check on the progress of local preparations in the schools. Additionally, in response to concerns we have voiced on your behalf, **for this first year, the new process will take place "in parallel to the former analogue system"**. In other words, the first marking will still take place on the original school site, while second marking will take place in dedicated marking centres—allowing the markers in both cases to pilot the new system while also having physical copies at hand in case of bugs or glitches in the process. The INTERPARENTS reps of your PA has more information on this if you are interested.

During the exams themselves, to quote the Head of the Baccalaureate Unit: **"For pupils, NOTHING changes. They just need to write their examinations as always."** Nonetheless, you will hopefully already be aware of a series of Newsletters issued by the Baccalaureate Unit to support the introduction of 'online marking' (*you can download these from <http://interparents.eu/docs/> user: 12*40, password: 480*) and also a new Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanBaccalaureate/> launched by the Baccalaureate Unit, complete with a video on how candidates should fill in their personal details at the beginning of each bi-fold exam answer paper etc. : <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0jybl9S8CrgD4Snw8Rh9TQ>

⁵ 2017-01-D-1-de/en/fr-1 see page 14/118 onwards, which explains that:

The external auditing will consist of the analysis of the following elements: Syllabus of the subject, Draft examination paper, Marking scheme and grid, Correction instructions and/or suggested answers. The following elements may also be taken in consideration: Proposals sent by teachers, Sample Pre-Baccalaureate examinations from different schools, Previous European Baccalaureate examination papers and Statistical data on previous results. A 'fit for purpose' report will be issued. In the case that the draft examination paper is considered not fit for purpose the report will also contain detailed explanations and offer alternatives and recommendations.

Annex 2: Guidance on making an official complaint/appeal

(NB: We provide the following notes and suggestions in good faith, in the hope that you will find them useful; they are based on our experience and understanding of how the system works. This text is therefore not a comprehensive guide nor an official document. For more information, please consult latest versions ⁶ of the official texts <https://www.eursc.eu/en/Office/official-texts/basic-texts/en> (scroll down to European Baccalaureate), available in DE, EN & FR.)

Pre-emptive action taken by the Examining Board to compensate for any problems discovered with exams usually obviates the need for individuals to launch a complaint or appeal. For the rare cases where an appeal might be necessary, the following pointers are based on key elements excerpted from the 'Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate' especially Articles 6.5 and 12:

- In accordance with article 6.5.10, candidates (or their legal representatives, if they are minors) have the **right to view and get a copy** of:
 - o Their original script.
 - o The total marks awarded by each corrector (first, second and, where applicable) third corrector).
 - o The details of the marks.
 - o The examiners' comments.
 - o The examination paper.
 - o The marking scheme.
- Appeals must be made purely on the basis of a **prejudicial 'procedural irregularity'** (non-compliance with the regulations/implementing arrangements.)
- Appeals should be formally lodged (signed) by the **pupil him/herself once s/he is 18 years old** (or by the parent/legal representative for minors) although needless to say, parental support is helpful.
- There are **no 'class actions'** permissible. All formal appeals/complaints must be introduced by individuals. (However, a decision regarding a general procedural irregularity may be applied to all candidates whose examinations suffer from the same procedural irregularity.)
- The complaint/appeal should be made **in writing** via the **school director** to the Chair of the Examining Board.
- The timeframe for putting together a complaint or appeal is very tight so an early start is advisable:
 - o The **written request** for the original exam script and supporting documentation listed above must be made to the **Director of the School** not later than **four calendar days** after the candidate has been informed of the examination results.
 - o The Director is then obliged to make all the documents available not later than **three calendar days** after receipt of the request. (**see point 2. on contacting your school)
 - o The formal claim must be lodged with the relevant director within **ten calendar days** of the results being formally communicated to the candidate.

⁶ For 2017 the official basic texts are:

- Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate (Applicable for the year 2017 European Baccalaureate session: 2015-05-D-12-en-9) <https://www.eursc.eu/BasicTexts/2015-05-D-12-en-9.pdf>
- Regulations for the European Baccalaureate (Applicable from the year 2017 European Baccalaureate session: 2014-11-D-11-en-4) <https://www.eursc.eu/BasicTexts/2014-11-D-11-en-4.pdf>