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- THE ASSOCIATION OF THE PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS -

PRESIDENT

Brussels, 2 July 2008

Mrs Ann Puntis
Chief Executive
University of Cambridge
International Examinations
1 Hills Road, CB1 2EU
Cambridge, England

Dear Mrs Puntis:

Subject: External Evaluation of the European Baccalaureate

May I thank you and your colleague Monsieur Roger-François Gauthier for our meeting on 11 June last. I would like to summarise the main points of our discussion about CIE's evaluation of the European Baccalaureate and its eventual reform. I recall that you had also received beforehand the Interparents working document dated 27 February 2008 about this matter. When we met, I endeavoured to focus on those aspects that are relevant to the Terms of Reference of your contact.

I. Strengths of the European Baccalaureate and European education?

In response to your principal question, I recall the following main points:

- 1. Multilingualism:** The defining characteristic of European education is multilingualism. Most students take Mother Tongue as First Language, a second Vehicular Language (DE/EN/FR) a third language and even a fourth language option. A significant part of the secondary curriculum is taught in Second Language. This combination is beneficial and unusual in Europe.
- 2. Mother Tongue** first language education is provided for all students. This is a critical factor in their mobility, their ability to re-integrate into national education systems and facilitates the professional mobility of their parents.
- 3. The Breadth of the curriculum.** The European Baccalaureate maintains a broad range of subjects up to year seven. Although this is not untypical for the Baccalaureate curricula in many European countries, it is in sharp contradistinction to the situation in British secondary education. The range of the curriculum is a distinct educational and economic advantage from the point of view of the students subsequent academic and professional careers.

4. The Sciences and Mathematics: Related to the previous point, European education includes a significant component of mathematics and science teaching throughout the secondary cycle up to the Baccalaureate. Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology are taught thoroughly and the highest level of Mathematics in the European Schools compares very favourably with any other secondary school system in Europe.

5. The social aspects of the European Schools: In addition to the formal content of the curriculum and the European baccalaureate examination, the multi-cultural context of the European Schools is a significant additional feature of European education. Extra-curricula activities, sports, educational journeys, etc. are conducted in mixed mother tongue groups. Subjects taught in second language are usually conducted in mixed classes as well.

The graduates of this system manifest a degree of cross-cultural capacity and understanding that is not typical of most other educational systems in Europe.

6. Professional and economic considerations: In my experience, there is a significant and growing market for multilingual, professionally qualified, young women and men in Europe. The economic, political and social reasons for this evolution are self evident. Indeed it is quite unusual to be able to employ professionally qualified people who are fluent in three languages. I consider that a significant expansion of European education would contribute to supplying this demand in the context of the future development of the European economy.

II. Existing problems and scope for improvements?

You also sounded me out on eventual problems and improvements for European education. I recall that I mentioned the following points:

- 1. Other international languages:** The emphasis on European languages and particularly the traditional EU vehicular languages tends to squeeze out the possibility of teaching other international languages such as Chinese and Russian.
- 2. Harmonisation in Second Language teaching:** We reviewed the problems arising from distinct levels of teaching in different Second Languages and subjects taught in Second Languages. I suggested that these difficulties – of which I gather you are already aware – tend to undermine the normal balance between the language sections and give rise to discriminatory situations particularly with respect to selective university entrance.
- 3. Recognition by Universities in the Member States:** Although formally recognised by virtue of the Convention, there is chronic evidence that universities in certain Member States, applying selective entrance, are not applying consistent criteria to the European baccalaureate. For instance, I mentioned the absence of a Tariff for the European Baccalaureate in the British UCAS system.
- 4. Alternative certificats:** The fact that the European Schools focus almost exclusively on the European Baccalaureate has had the result that they do not offer an appropriate alternative to students who are not equipped to follow the full baccalaureate curriculum, even in the largest European Schools. This is a long standing and well documented problem that has not really been resolved.

III. Reform of the European Bacculaureate?

Specifically, with regard to the eventual reform of the European Bacculaureate, I stressed the importance of the balance between evaluation of class-based tests and externally marked examinations, and the balance between written examinations and oral examinations. The rationale for this position being described in the Interparents working paper referred to above. Indeed, oral examination of second language and subjects taught in second language is concomitant with the multilingual dimension of European education.

Regarding the costs of administering the European Bacculaureate, I recalled that there is apparently scope for reducing related travel and meetings through on-line work and document distribution.

IV. Reform of the European Schools?

The European Bacculaureate is a long-standing qualification going back to the 1960's. It will extend well into the future. This calls for at least maintaining and if possible improving the educational quality of the qualification. From this point of view, Interparents is committed to the quality of the European Bacculaureate offered in the future by proposed Type II and Type III schools. This includes matters such as the cross-language role of the Inspectorate in the recruitment training and evaluation of teachers, and the scope of native language teachers of second languages and other subjects.

Needless to say, Interparents is engaged in other aspects of the reform of the European Schools, which for present purposes fall outside the scope of the evaluation of the European bacculaureate itself.

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May I thank you again for giving me the opportunity to speak with you. I trust that you and your colleagues working on this important study will find this summary of our discussion useful. I would be grateful if you would forward a copy of this letter to Monsieur Gauthier.

I would of course also be glad to answer any further questions should the need arise.

Yours sincerely,

-/ signed /-

Christopher Wilkinson.

cc: Monsieur Roger-François Gauthier.
Madame Sofia Gardeli
Madame Carine Steen-Lingier, Vice-President, Interparents