

Changing assessment in the European Schools

The European Schools will introduce a new approach to assessment on the secondary cycle from September 2018. This will change the basis of how assessment will be done. The key change is that pupils' assessment will be based on explicit criteria. Pupils' *attainment* will be measured with respect to *subject-specific attainment criteria*.

The new syllabuses describe a *set of competences* and skills that pupils will be expected to learn (a goal). Correspondingly they also define a set of attainment criteria (measures) that define what any given grade requires from a pupil.

To be clear, it is thus *not* relevant to the assessment how well pupils perform *in relation* to their classmates, but only how they perform in relation to the pre-set criteria. In other words, if sufficiently motivated, the entire class could get the highest grade. Or the lowest.

Creating competence-based syllabuses for the European School was initiated in 2007. The change in the assessment is the last step on this path. The introduction is gradual, the cohort in S6 or S7 next fall will stay under the current rules until their graduation. The new assessment will be applied to the cohort in S5, or below, year 2018/19. The first affected Baccalaureate will thus be organized 2021.

This approach, if new to the European schools, is already widely applied across the European national school systems and thus familiar to many teachers coming into the European schools. Nevertheless, its uniform implementation will require an intensive engagement of all the teachers in the system.

One of the very key goals of the changes is to improve how well the pupils understand the goals of the courses, as well as how well they understand their performance vis-a-vis those goals. Such understanding will enable pupils better to master their own process of learning and will place the onus of responsibility for learning on the pupils; teaching will provide 'only' the means to learning.

Apart from the pupil, all other relevant parties, internal and external, will have a better understanding over what the pupil masters given the assessment report. Notably, syllabuses are common to the entire school

system, thus the basis for the assessment will be uniform for the schools and the sections.

Despite the changes in the syllabuses and the (re)definition of the attainment, it has been agreed that *the general level of attainment required for passing should be maintained* in the reform.

The reform of assessment should not be equated with the new *marking scale*, the latter being a part of the former. As the attainment criteria are defined in each syllabus, the set attainment level is explicitly subject-specific. However, the marking scale, will be uniform across the subjects. The scale has two parallel expressions used in different contexts: the coarser letter grades, from A (top) to FX (bottom) and numerical grades, from 0 to 10 with decimal gradation.

Every mark in the scale is given a general definition with respect to the attainment criteria. For example, grade B, or equivalent numerical mark of 8 to 8.9 will correspond to “very good performance” whereas the just sufficient performance (a ‘pass’) will now be denoted by E or 5 and failure by a mark below 5 or F “weak” or FX “very weak”. It is important to note that *there is no simple conversion available from the old mark to the new*. One can say, though, that the higher the mark, the better and that the “old 6” becomes the “new 5”.

Parents and pupils alike should engage in understanding this change. It provides pupils an opportunity to better understand the given assessment, focus the learning and improve.

Further information: We encourage you to contact your teacher and your parent association. The Office of the Secretary General of the European Schools, <http://eursc.eu> , provides direct access to the syllabuses and further guidance. Further information about the project and its evolution can also be found on <http://interparents.eu> .