

An INTERPARENTS perspective on the Introduction of New Secondary Assessment Tools including 'Marking Scale'

Learning and assessment in the European Schools are changing in a way which will have a significant impact on your children, especially if they are currently in S4 or below. The change should be positive, provided it is managed carefully. A key vote will be taken at this April's meeting of the Board of Governors¹ on how and when the final step in this programme of change will be introduced. Please read on and let your representatives know your opinion.

A fundamental shift in approach to assessment is underway

Since 2007, the European Schools have been shifting towards a '*competence-based pedagogical approach*'. That is to say, teaching and learning are focused increasingly on desired learning outcomes expressed in the form of acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes. This change in approach should lead to a more unified and shared pedagogical basis for assessing pupils across the entire system, up to and including the Baccalaureate. It should also increase the transparency of assessment and thereby help pupils understand better why a particular grade is given and how they might improve their grade, a critical element in supporting pupils' self-assessment. As part of this decade-long project, subject-specific '*attainment criteria*' are being developed for *every* syllabus and, in April 2015, a new '*marking scale*' was approved to provide a readily understandable expression of the different degrees of attainment achieved by pupils with respect to the criteria. A change in scale also enables problems with the existing scale to be addressed. (More detail on this is obtainable from your PA and a 'backgrounder' document.)

Clearly, successful introduction of the marking scale would entail much more than a simple rescaling of marks or switch in grade nomenclature. It will mark the culmination of a fundamental shift in the European School approach to assessment which will profoundly affect the daily work of teachers and require an understanding of the meaning of the new marks to be developed also by pupils and by universities with the assistance of the national inspectors.

Where are we in the process?

At this time, '*attainment descriptors*' have just been approved to help teachers translate the attainment criteria into marks on the new scale. Most syllabuses have now been updated to include attainment criteria, although this is not yet the case for the maths and science syllabuses. Centrally organised introduction sessions for teachers have begun and decentralised training on applying the new scale and approach to assessment in the schools is being planned.

A phased introduction is crucial

The Board of Governors (BoG) originally approved a phased implementation of the new assessment tools **beginning with S1-S5 in September 2017, adding S6 in 2018 and S7 in 2019, with the first Baccalaureate using the scale in 2020**. This would enable trouble-shooting of problems in the first year of implementation, for teachers and pupils to become familiar with the relationship between the attainment criteria and descriptors and for them to adapt to the new marking scale before it is used for communication to universities. Specifically, this would enable pupils to gain an understanding of their own real progress and to make critical life decisions about university courses based on those grades. We recognise that such decisions begin in S5 with the selection of options based on their interests but also their grades and often on the grades likely to be required for university courses they are considering.

This phased introduction is now in question

This April (2017), the BoG will be asked to decide on a request to allow the schools an extra year to train teachers and give them sufficient practice in their own subjects before the marking scale is introduced in the classroom for pupils' formal evaluations. INTERPARENTS appreciates the rationale both for schools to get hands-on experience of the scale as soon as possible but also for building in more time for teachers to develop the necessary shared understanding of the objectives and how assessment will work in practice. However, as we embark on the final phase of this important and long-anticipated step-change in assessment, this extra training/embedding time should definitely not come at the expense of a carefully phased introduction.

The preparatory '**Joint Teaching Committee**' is **recommending to the BoG that the New Secondary Marking Scale be introduced in September 2018 for S1 right up to S6. This would mean that the final deadline of Baccalaureate 2020 (agreed by the BoG in April 2015) could be respected but *not* the agreed phased implementation starting with S1-5.** INTERPARENTS is very concerned about the switch-over to the new scale applying to pupils at any higher level than S5 in the first year for the reasons cited above (even if that postpones the first Baccalaureate to 2021.)

¹ The Board of Governors (BoG) is the highest decision-making body in the European Schools www.eursec.eu/en/Office/bodies