

Supporting the European School Parent Community Through the Baccalaureate

Summary

Important: Save this information sheet in case/until needed! Working together, your Parent Association and INTERPARENTS aim to support you throughout the Baccalaureate 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 Baccalaureate 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 including the Bac handbook (see below)
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. 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' i.e. non-compliance with the regulations (see down),
 - c) by the pupil him/herself, once s/he is 18 years old; by the parent/legal representative otherwise,
 - d) in writing via the school director.

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Background

This document describes how INTERPARENTS and our member associations endeavour to support the parent community on issues related to the Baccalaureate, particularly during the examination ‘season’ each year. INTERPARENTS is the umbrella organization representing all Parent Associations of the European Schools.

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.

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 organization, INTERPARENTS, aim to help.

Role of your Parent Association and 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.)
- The process is explained in the recording of a BAC related conference (1h37 into the recording) available at <https://webcast.ec.europa.eu/bac-reform-the-4-apeee-s-conference#> . You may also consult 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 Baccalaureate 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.

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 Baccalaureate 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 official document mentioned above.**

The official documents

You find the key documents relevant for Baccalaureate, and referenced below, under the European schools site:

The European Baccalaureate Handbook: A Guide for European Baccalaureate Candidates

→ https://www.eursec.eu/Documents/BAC_Handbook-en.pdf

Regulations for the European Baccalaureate

→ <https://www.eursec.eu/BasicTexts/2014-11-D-11-en-5.pdf>

Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate

→ <https://www.eursec.eu/BasicTexts/2015-05-D-12-en-10.pdf>

Complaints Board and its decisions

→ <http://www.schola-europaea.eu/cree/> .

The official texts (the latter ones) are available in DE, FR, EN.

The handbook is intended as a readable guide to the official texts, a first edition

was recently produced by the Baccalaureate Unit in conjunction with representatives of stakeholders, including INTERPARENTS and by extension, the Parent Associations whom we consulted.

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

Step 1 - Tell us filling in our web form

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/concern (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.)

Step 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 (NB see notes on timeframe in Annex 1) and clarify the procedure if you are considering making a complaint. Also note, that this informal interaction does not constitute a formal complaint.

Step 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 1 and the official document *Arrangements for implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate*, 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.

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 also be transferred to experts in anonymised form, whenever possible. 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 latest three months after the results are communicated. We

retain the right to store statistics of the upcoming issues (excluding any reference to the persons affected).

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/>

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Wishing everyone a smooth and successful Baccalaureate season.

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

Pere Molles-Palleja

President, INTERPARENTS

Annex 1 - Guidance on making an official complaint/appeal

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 of the official texts mentioned above in Chapter The official documents , page 4 . Texts are 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:

- Their original script.
- The total marks awarded by each corrector (first, second and, where applicable) third corrector).
- The details of the marks.
- The examiners' comments.
- The examination paper.
- 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:

- 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.
- The Director is then obliged to make all the documents available not later than three calendar days after receipt of the request.
- The **formal claim** must be lodged with the relevant director within **ten calendar days** of the results being formally communicated to the candidate, notably leaving you - at shortest - only three days to formulate the final complaint text.