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# Baccalauréat A-levels, Abitur Bachillerato

secondary school  
education certification  
systems in Europe

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# Summary

2 Foreword

## **3 The French *Baccalauréat***

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- 3 Mission of the *lycée*
- 5 Three means of access to the *baccalauréat*
- 7 Access conditions for *baccalauréat* education
- 9 Assessment methods
- 10 Going on to higher education

## **11 English A-levels**

---

- 11 Missions of the English education system
- 11 A-levels access conditions
- 12 Organisation of A-levels
- 14 Assessment and going on to higher education
- 15 Tomlinson Commission findings:  
curriculum for 14-19 year-olds
- 16 The Tomlinson Commission Project

## **18 The German *Abitur***

---

- 18 Objectives of the *Abitur*
- 19 *Abitur* access conditions
- 20 Organisation of the *Abitur*
- 20 Assessment methods
- 21 Going on to higher education

## **22 The Spanish *Bachillerato***

---

- 22 *Bachillerato* principles
- 22 General objectives
- 23 *Bachillerato* access conditions
- 23 *Bachillerato* curriculum and organisation
- 24 Assessment methods
- 25 Going on to higher education

## **26 Trans-national certification systems**

---

- 26 The European Baccalaureate
- 28 The International "Geneva" Baccalaureate
- 30 Towards dual national certification

## **32 Comparative Appraisal**

---

- 32 Some similarities
- 32 Divergences, but attempts at reconciliation
- 33 Issues raised by certification systems

# Foreword

In accordance with the strategic objectives laid down at the Council of Europe's Lisbon meeting in March 2000, the development of a Europe of education and knowledge is under way. Each country must strive to open up its education system to the outside world, in order to promote the mobility of its secondary school pupils and students. There has never been a better time to compare the certification systems that conclude secondary school education in several European countries. This comparative approach is a natural one, given the background of harmonisation of European university degrees (BMD, or Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees) currently in progress. In time, such an approach should make it possible to standardise the level that allows access to higher education or the BMD curriculum.

It is not, however, easy to compare these levels in various European nations. The problem arises firstly from the fact that certification does not have the equivalent symbolic value in every country. It also stems from the fact that, depending on whether the education system is centralised or decentralised, there may or may not be a central founding statute that defines its principles, spirit and economics. In Germany, for example, there are as many conceptions of the *Abitur* as there are *Länder*. All too often, certification at the end of school cannot be studied without placing it in the perspective of the philosophy of the education system in its entirety, of which certification is only one part.

Similarities do, however, emerge. Firstly, certification is intended for young people aged between 16 and 19. Certification is also prepared in establishments whose primary aim is to bring schoolchildren to that level. The symbolic impact of each certification system exists: it is the culmination of a cycle of study and nearly every certification system offers access to higher education.

This comparative study focuses primarily on the certification systems in place in England, Germany, Spain and France, all of which are concerned by the prospect of dual certification and, in time, harmonised European diplomas.

# The French *Baccalauréat*

## I. MISSION OF THE *LYCÉE*

In France, the State defines the broad outline of education policies and the objectives of each level of education. The State also regulates how education is organised, the timetable framework and the curriculum contents. The aim of the *lycée* is to enable all pupils to acquire the knowledge and methods they require in order to go on to higher education studies (general and technological education *lycées*) or join the workforce (professional *lycées*). The *lycée* is also the forum for acquiring a general culture that will facilitate pupils' understanding of the modern world.

These acquisitions must provide pupils, who will later become adults, with the ability to success on their role as responsible, enlightened, critical and vigilant citizens, and to develop the willingness to make an effort, intellectual probity and respect for others' opinions.

All learning must promote intellectual independence, prompt the imagination, develop pupils' interest and curiosity and ensure active participation by encouraging individual and group output of all types.

During a pupil's time at school, the *lycée* is a place for **diversifying** his or her studies. It is therefore important that it should be possible to:

- choose an orientation based on the right decisions, and prepare effectively for higher education or working life
- continuously improve the level of all pupils' education, so that they leave school with certified qualifications
- promote equal opportunity, by taking all kinds of talent into account.

## Three separate curricula

The French *lycée* offers three separate channels to pupils from secondary (middle) schools:

- the **general curriculum** is a three-year course (known as the *seconde* (lower), *première* (upper) and *terminale* classes) and culminates in the general *baccalauréat*
- the **technological curriculum** is also three years long and culminates in a technological *baccalauréat* which combines a general education with training in an overall technological field
- the **professional curriculum** is a two-year course that culminates in the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* (CAP – certificate of professional aptitude) or *brevet d'études professionnelles* (BEP – professional studies diploma) which, after a further two years of study, leads to the professional *baccalauréat* that marks the successful conclusion of more practical training leading to a specific career. However, other three-year professional *baccalauréats* also exist.



## → DEVELOPMENTS IN THE *BACCALURÉAT*

**Created in 1808**, the *baccalauréat* examination was initially sat in the university and was designed as a form of interview between the examiner and the candidate about Greek and Latin writers, rhetoric, history, geography and philosophy. It was followed in 1821 by a *baccalauréat* in sciences, which could be taken in addition to the *baccalauréat* in humanities. The first written examinations took place in 1830, and the *baccalauréat* has continued to develop ever since. New disciplines have been included, to take account of developments in the knowledge and know-how expected from pupils and the increase in school numbers. The examination has developed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. *Baccalauréat* examinations originally concerned only literature, but gradually opened up to scientific disciplines and modern languages, followed by technology and economics.

The examination's structure and organisation have been amended over time.

**Between 1962 and 1969**, several regulatory statutes organised the structure of the examination and these still apply to the general and technological *baccalauréats* to this date:

- two series of examinations are held in succession at the end of the final ("terminale") year, the second group involving oral examinations sat only by candidates who failed to achieve the requisite average marks to pass the first group
- french examinations are taken early at the end of the upper ("*première*") year. These marks are taken into account along with the marks from the first group the following year
- eliminatory marks have been abolished
- a resit session is organised at the start of the subsequent school year for candidates prevented from sitting their exams for reasons beyond their control.

**In 1968**, the technological *baccalauréat* was established.

**In 1983**, two important modifications were introduced.

- the physical education and sports examination acquired the same status as other disciplines
- the second group of examinations was lightened to comprise only two oral examinations in the same two disciplines as the written examinations.

**In 1985**, the professional *baccalauréat* was established.

**In 1993**, the new "ES" (economics and social) series was established, along with the "L" (literary) and "S" (scientific) series, structured around a coherent core of dominant disciplines that are part of the general education provided.

**The 1999** reform of the *lycée* system introduced several innovations:

- new examinations such as the *travaux personnels encadrés* (TPE/managed personal work) (\*) were introduced
- the early examinations now include not only French, but also scientific education at the end of the L and ES lower years and mathematics and information technology at the end of the upper year in the L series. These are subjects which are no longer taught after the upper year.

(\*) Research carried out by a group of pupils generally covering two disciplines and culminating in an output.

## The *baccalauréat*

The *baccalauréat* serves a two-fold function. Not only does it conclude secondary school studies, it also grants automatic access to **higher education**, being the first university grade, an aspect that makes the French university system unique. The *baccalauréat* is a **national** examination that is regulated by the same organisation throughout the country and grants all candidates the same rights, thus guaranteeing republican equality. It comprises final **anonymous** examinations in all of the disciplines taught.

## II. THREE MEANS OF ACCESS TO THE *BACCALAURÉAT*

In line with the three separate curricula in the *lycée*, there are three *baccalauréats*: the general *baccalauréat*, the technological *baccalauréat* and the professional *baccalauréat*.

### The general *baccalauréat*

There are three series in the general *baccalauréat* curriculum:

- **The scientific series (S)** implies capacity for abstract thought, rigour, reasoning and a taste for experimenting. The aim of the scientific series is to instil a genuine scientific culture based on knowledge of, and an experimental approach to, sciences.

It is possible to specialise in several disciplines:

- mathematics
- physics and chemistry
- life and earth sciences
- engineering sciences
- biology and ecology (studied in agricultural secondary schools).

- **The literature series (L)** implies an analytical and synthetic approach, as well as a clear interest in literature, philosophy, languages, history, geography and the arts. The aim of the L series is to deepen the pupil's literary culture based on analysis, study of a work from various perspectives and argumentation. An introduction to philosophy ensures a critical consideration of abstract concepts.

It is possible to specialise in several disciplines:

- modern languages and literature (study of two or three languages)
- ancient languages and literature (study of Latin and/or ancient Greek)
- art and literature
- literature and mathematics.

- **The economics and social series (ES)** focuses on the social and economic environment and current affairs, with a clear preference for history, geography and mathematics. The aim of this series is to enhance the pupil's general economics education, as well as their understanding and analysis of social phenomena.

It is possible to specialise in several disciplines:

- economics and social sciences
- mathematics
- languages.

## **The technological *baccalauréat***

Education in the technological *baccalauréat* alternates between general and technological subjects and laboratory work. Irrespective of the specialisation, general subjects, and in particular scientific subjects, are accorded great importance.

There are eight types of technological *baccalauréat*:

- **The business administration sciences and technology *baccalauréat* (“STG”)**

The STG *baccalauréat* offers an introduction to the economic and legal corporate environment and all of the techniques used in business administration (accounting, information technology), and internal and external communications (administration, sales).

- **The industrial sciences and technology *baccalauréat* (“STI”)**

The STI *baccalauréat* offers seven specialisations related to industrial engineering:

- mechanical engineering
- electronic engineering
- electrical engineering
- civil engineering
- energy engineering
- materials engineering
- optical engineering.

The STI *baccalauréat* also features a specialisation in applied arts that focuses in particular on the study of design principles and techniques (interior architecture, environment, styling, industrial design and visual communication).

- **The laboratory sciences and technologies *baccalauréat* (“STL”)**

The STL *baccalauréat* offers three specialisations:

- laboratory physics and industrial processes
- laboratory chemistry and industrial processes
- biochemistry and bio-engineering.

- **The medical and social sciences and techniques *baccalauréat* (“SMS”)**

Education in the SMS *baccalauréat* offers an introduction to social legislation and the legal, administrative and political framework of the family structure and healthcare and social institutions, operation of the health and social services, the structure and functions of the human body and illnesses, prevention and treatment.

- **The agri-food sciences and technologies *baccalauréat* (“STPA”)**

Education in the STPA *baccalauréat* provides a basic knowledge of and introduction to agri-food industrial processes.

- **The agronomics and environment sciences and technologies *baccalauréat* (“STAE”)**

The STAE *baccalauréat* is specific to *lycées agricoles* (agricultural secondary schools). In the STAE series, the emphasis is on life sciences (ecosystems, flora and fauna) and on enhancing nature and the environment. The program includes biology and ecology, knowledge of rural areas and agronomics.

- **The music and dance technical *baccalauréat* (“TMD”)**

Education in the TMD *baccalauréat* may be pursued only after the pupil has taken a specific lower year (*seconde*), and comprises a combination of classes in the *lycée* and classes in a music and dance academy.

- **Hotel management *baccalauréat***

The hotel management *baccalauréat* may be pursued only after a specific lower (second) year.

The aim of this diploma is to train multi-disciplinary hotel professionals (catering, reception and accommodation).

### **The professional *baccalauréat***

Education in the professional *baccalauréat* focuses on practical tuition based on a **sound grasp of professional techniques** (practical experience in workshops or classrooms, company internships). The vocational nature of the tuition given is very clear, with an average of **18 weeks' internship in companies** spread over the upper and final years, providing experience that will help the future successful candidate to rapidly become operational on the job market. The tuition given does not, however, overlook the pupils' **general education**; they receive tuition in French, mathematics, history and geography, one modern language, physical education and sports, the arts, civics, legal and social affairs, etc.

The professional *baccalauréat* features some 60 specialised subjects (*see page 8*).

## **III. ACCESS CONDITIONS FOR BACCALAURÉAT EDUCATION**

The general and technological *lycée* educates pupils intending to take a general or technological *baccalauréat*. The school curriculum is three years long, generally for pupils between the ages of 15 and 18, and culminates in a general or technological *baccalauréat* examination. The first year is known as the *seconde* (lower) year; the second is the *première* (upper) year and the *terminale* (final) year is when most of the examinations take place. It is only at the end of the *seconde* (lower) year of general and technological education, which is pursued by everyone, that pupils choose which series of the *baccalauréat* they wish to take (one of the three general series or one of the eight technological series). The teachers' council at the end of the year assesses the pupils' school results and issues an opinion concerning their orientation.

Professional *lycées* educate pupils wishing to study for a certificate of professional aptitude (CAP) or professional studies diploma (BEP) followed by a professional *baccalauréat*.

The CAP and BEP diplomas are usually studied for during the two years that follow the *troisième* year of secondary middle school. Short-term (one-year) specially-tailored curricula are made available to certain candidates. Although CAP diplomas are intended primarily to prepare pupils for working life, BEP diplomas are the starting point for a professional or technological *baccalauréat*. Professional *baccalauréats* generally require a two-year course of study after achieving a BEP diploma or, more rarely, a CAP. Study for the professional *baccalauréat* is also being experimented with for young people coming directly from the *troisième* year of secondary middle school. In this instance, the curriculum is set at three years and is not conditional on achieving a BEP or CAP diploma.

## → THE SPECIALISATIONS AVAILABLE IN THE PROFESSIONAL BACCALAURÉAT ARE:

**A**eronautics – Accounting;

**B**odywork – Boiler Work and Metal Structure Construction – Building Shell Construction and Work;

**C**ar Maintenance – Catering – Construction: pricing; Construction: metal-aluminium-glass synthetic materials – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: cabinetmaking – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: clock-making – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: clothing and fashion accessories – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: graphics communication – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: photography – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: stone working – Craftsmanship and Art Professions: upholstery;

**D**esign and Finishings;

**E**lectrical Equipment and Facilities – Electronic Audiovisual Maintenance – Energy;

**F**lexible Materials Production Engineering – Food Professions;

**G**raphics Industries (preparation of printing forms) – Graphics Industries (printing);

**H**ygienne and Environment;

**I**ndustrial Product Study and Definition;

**L**ogistics;

**M**aintenance and Operation of Agricultural Equipment – Maintenance of Household and Group Appliances and Equipment – Maintenance of Mechanical and Automated Systems – Maintenance of Office Automation and Telematics Networks – Marine Cultures – Mechanical Production Engineering;

**P**lastics – Process Industry – Processing Bio-industries – Public Works and Parks and Gardens – Public Works;

**S**ales and Representation – Secretarial Services – Security Professions: national police force – Services – Steering of Automated Production Systems;

**T**ools for Shaping Materials – Trading – Transport Operation;

**U**se of Materials;

**W**ood and Building Construction and Layout – Wood Production Engineering.

The following may take the professional *baccalauréat*:

- candidates who have studied for the diploma at school, in apprenticeships or continuous vocational training
- candidates who can evidence three years of professional activity in a job with a grade at least equal to that of “worker” or “qualified employee” in a field which relates to the end purpose of the diploma applied for.

## IV. ASSESSMENT METHODS

### General and technological *baccalauréat*

The general and technological *baccalauréat* features two series of examinations:

- first group examinations sat by all candidates
- second group examinations, known as “borderline” examinations’, sat by candidates whose average marks in the first group were below 10 out of 20, but equal to or above 8 out of 20.

**First group examinations** include examinations sat in advance at the end of the *première* (upper) year, as well as examinations taken during the final year. Candidates take early written and oral examinations in French at the end of the upper year. Depending on the series, other examinations may also be taken early.

The other examinations in the first group are sat at the end of the *terminale* (final) year, and include compulsory written, oral and/or practical tests depending on the series and optional examinations for optional subjects.

Except for sports and physical education, which is the subject of continuous assessment throughout the curriculum, each examination is external, is based on a nationwide subject (the same for all candidates) and is marked anonymously. In **second group examinations**, the candidate takes two oral examinations in the two subjects he or she has chosen from those which were the subject of a written examination in the first group. The jury takes account of the highest mark achieved by the candidate.

In the calculation of the marks that count towards the diploma, **disciplines are weighted differently, depending on the series.**

At the end of the first group examinations:

- if the candidate has achieved a mark lower than 8/20, he or she is referred
- if an average mark of 10/20 or more is achieved, the candidate is deemed to have passed
- if the candidate achieves an average mark equal to at least 8/20 but lower than 10/20, he or she is allowed to take the oral examinations in the second group.

The candidate is deemed to have passed if he or she obtains an average mark of 10/20 in the oral examinations over all of the tests. A “CFES” (secondary school completion certificate) is issued to referred candidates after the second group of examinations.

The grades *assez bien* (“quite good”), for an average of between 12 and 14, *bien* (“good”), for an average between 14 and 16) and *très bien* (“very good”), for an average of 16 or more, are awarded only to candidates achieving their *baccalauréat* from the first group of examinations.

## Professional *baccalauréat*

The professional *baccalauréat* examination comprises seven compulsory tests. Two types of examination exist, depending on the candidate's educational background:

- candidates studying for the *baccalauréat* at school or via apprenticeships are required to take the examination in its global form: they sit all examinations in one session at the end of their course. The diploma is issued to candidates achieving an average mark equal to or exceeding 10 out of 20
- candidates pursuing a continuous vocational education curriculum, correspondence courses and those applying on the basis of their professional experience may either sit the examinations in the global form or choose a progressive form of the examination series.

In the second case, at any one session candidates may sit only some of the exams for the units that comprise the diploma. The diploma is issued to candidates achieving an average mark equal to or exceeding 10 out of 20 after they have sat exams in all the requisite units.

## V. GOING ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The general and technological *baccalauréat* diplomas entitle successful candidates to go on to higher education:

- in universities in which education is open to all the *baccalauréat* graduates of the year with no selective entry process <sup>(\*)</sup>, except for medical, odontological and pharmaceutical disciplines
- in subjects which generally involve candidate selection on the basis of their application, such as Instituts Universitaires de Technologie (IUTs), advanced technician sections, and preparatory classes for the “grandes écoles” (top French university-level schools) and specialist training schools.

The professional *baccalauréat* diploma is intended to assist the successful candidate in finding a job, although it does allow successful candidates to go on to higher education, in particular for a BTS (advanced technician diploma) course.

<sup>(\*)</sup> However, excessive demand in some universities may lead to candidates being allotted a place on the basis of the geographic area to which they belong.

# English A-levels

## I. MISSIONS OF THE ENGLISH EDUCATION SYSTEM

In contrast to other education systems in Europe, the principles and objectives of the education system in England do not attach particular importance to certifying the completion of secondary schooling. In other words, since the aims of the certification process are an integral part of the overall aims of the English education system, the overall aims must be considered in order to understand the specific aims of the certification process. The underlying principle behind the English education system is to offer a broad, balanced curriculum that caters to the age, talent, aptitudes and educational requirements of the pupil. The 1996 Education Act stipulates that the curriculum must:

- promote the spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical development of school pupils
- prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences they will incur as adults.

The values and objectives underlying the school and national curriculums were confirmed by the wording of the 2000 reform act:

*“Since education influences and reflects society’s values, it is therefore important to acknowledge a broad basis of shared values and objectives on which the school curriculum and the work of education establishments is based. There is the fundamental conviction that education is the means which leads to the spiritual, moral, social, physical and intellectual development of the individual and, thus to the individual’s well-being. Education is also the means that results in equal opportunity for all, a healthy and fair democracy, a productive economy and sustainable development. It must encourage self-enhancement, the enhancement of friends and family and of the wider groups to which we belong. It must also reaffirm our commitment to the values of truth, justice, honesty, confidence and a sense of duty.*

*“At the same time, education must make us capable of adapting as individuals and citizens to the challenges of a rapidly changing world, a global economy and society, the new methods of work and leisure and the rapid expansion of communication technology.”*

In addition to these goals, establishments that provide an education beyond the age of 16 also have the more specific aim of preparing students for a subsequent career and for training throughout life.

## II. A-LEVEL ACCESS CONDITIONS

### Current types of establishment

At 16, pupils sit GCSEs <sup>(\*)</sup> (General Certificate of Secondary Education). They may then decide to join the workforce. Those who decide to go on and sit A-levels must then attend one of the following establishments for two years:

<sup>(\*)</sup> Equivalent to the French “*brevet des collèges*”.



- secondary schools and sixth form colleges, which provide a general education
- further education colleges, which provide education with a strong professional emphasis, even though many such colleges also provide a general education
- tertiary colleges, which offer both professional and general education.

There is a sub-section of secondary schools known as “specialist schools” (these comprise ten categories of establishment each offering a specialisation in the arts, economics and business, engineering, the humanities, modern languages, mathematics and information technology, music, sciences, sports and technology). Establishments may be granted this status if they meet specific teaching and financial conditions.

**NB** : A new classification for establishments is planned as part of the five-year plan for education reform. One of the aims is to ensure greater financial independence. Each establishment may be granted the status of a foundation, which makes it eligible for private financing and allows it to pay its teaching staff more. At the same time, an increase in the number of specialist schools is one of the government’s projects to raise the level of schools; 2,000 are expected to exist by 2006. In addition, the number of city academies <sup>(\*)</sup> (schools intended to take over from failing secondary schools in disadvantaged areas, in order to promote success at school) should increase from 13 (in 2002) to 200 in the near future.

### **Establishments’ admission conditions**

These further education establishments are free to devise their own admission system. Pupils are usually admitted on the basis of a school file which indicates their results and personal projects. Passing GCSEs is not an official requirement, although most establishments require pupils to achieve above-average marks in five GCSE subjects to be eligible to continue GCE A-level tuition.

## **III. ORGANISATION OF A-LEVELS**

There is no specific official curriculum for the final cycle in secondary school <sup>(\*\*)</sup>. The Department of Education entrusts the management of exams to external independent organisations (awarding bodies) that sell their curriculums to establishments, along with examination subjects, correction of papers and results management. Establishments select the most suitable curriculums for the level of their pupils from a list provided. The only compulsory subject is religious education (in secondary schools, but not in sixth form colleges).

### **Definition of the A-level**

The A-level, or General Certificate of Education Advanced-level examinations (abbreviated to GCE A-levels), officially designates the “advanced” level achieved

<sup>(\*)</sup> Schools established by private groups whose operating expenses are met by the State.

<sup>(\*\*)</sup> Term used to describe education after the compulsory age of 16.

## → HISTORIQUE DU GCE A-LEVEL

### **The creation of the general certificate of education (GCE) in 1951**

was part of the expansion of secondary education (the school leaving age was increased from 14 to 15, in 1947). It was intended to prevent pupils who had passed individual subjects from failing a certificate in several subjects, as had been the case until then. A further aim was to enable top pupils to cut out the O-level stage (taken at 16 in secondary schools) in subjects they would take at A-level, and thus sit the corresponding A-level directly.

To meet university requirements, the new examination introduced a grading scale (A, B, C, D and E), the main shortcoming of which was to impose artificial percentages for candidates in each level. A further drawback was the fact that the new examination encouraged excessive specialisation, particularly in the sixth form.

**In 1989**, a new examination was introduced for 18 year-old candidates: the Advanced Supplementary (AS). The aim was to broaden the base of knowledge of A-level candidates with a structure that for half of the content was the same as the A-level. The new approach did not, however, meet the acknowledged need for an interim examination between GCSEs and A-level and so the AS never really took off.

**The 1996 reforme** acknowledged the lack of appeal of the AS and proposed a new AS which could be taken either as self-standing certification or as the first step to A-levels.



### **A reform of the A-level system was introduced in September 2000.**

It is now based on a system of modules, in which candidates are no longer assessed by means of a final examination at the end of the course, but instead may make sit units for which the marks count throughout their progress in the cycle. All upper secondary school pupils now take AS's and subsequently, if they are ready, move on to the more demanding A2 in order to complete their A-levels.

in a given subject and is studied for during two years in the final school cycle (lower and upper sixth forms), generally between the ages of 16 and 19. Each subject is assessed and results in an A-level. A pupil generally prepares 3 A-levels over a two-year period. The organisation of the A-level allows some degree of flexibility. The pupil is free to choose and combine his or her subjects according to taste (either general or professional education), as far as is allowed by the school's timetable and the range of subjects it offers.

### A two-stage diploma

The A-level comprises two parts: the GCE AS and the A2. The GCE AS-level is a level of performance achieved at the end of the first year. It accounts for half of a complete A-level, but is also a separate qualification in its own right.

In the **first year**, the pupil can study for up to five AS level subjects.

In the **second year**, pupils study three of these subjects in more depth and to a higher level (A2). Since September 2000, the GCE AS (GCE Advanced Subsidiary qualifications) has offered pupils a broader range of subjects (*see page 13*).

The GCE AS-level comprises cumulative units, more specifically three of the six units that must be passed to achieve a complete A-level. If the GCE AS-level is successfully passed, pupils can pursue a second year of studies or choose to join the workforce. Those choosing to continue their education prepare for the second half of their A-levels (the A2). The latter comprises the last three cumulative units. The combination of a GCE AS and an A2 is a complete A-level.

14

+	AS (Advanced Subsidiary)	50 % of the A-level
	A2	50 % of the A-level
=	<b>complete A-level</b>	<b>100 %</b>

## IV. ASSESSMENT AND GOING ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Most cumulative units culminate in an examination. Some are assessed by means of continuous assessment. Each subject is graded according to a scale from A, which is the highest score, to E, the lowest. A U grade (unclassified) means failure. It is therefore possible to achieve an A-level in one subject and not in another.

University admission is conditional on gaining at least three A-levels. The higher the score, the greater the likelihood of being admitted to a top-level university. To be accepted at Oxford or Cambridge, at least three grade "A" (\*) A-levels are required. Three D grades would lower the candidate's chances of success. Each higher education facility has its own admissions procedure.

With a success rate nearing 100 %, the examination is deemed insufficiently selective and illuminating, notably by universities and employers. A draft reform is pending, on which a commission headed by Mike Tomlinson is currently working.

(\*) One should avoid mistaking the A in A-level (which means "advanced") for the grade A, a high mark which can be achieved.

## V. TOMLINSON COMMISSION FINDINGS: CURRICULUMS FOR 14-19 YEAR-OLDS

### **Purpose of the reform**

The English A-level is on the verge of transformation; the working group in charge of reforming education for 14-19 year-olds has been working on developing a new system since June 2003. The new system would make it possible for all pupils to choose a coherent, recognised curriculum that reflects their needs, aspirations and centres of interest, whilst enabling them to progress at their own rate.

Government proposals would provide pupils with the following guarantees:

- the possibility of choosing their subjects from a range of general and professional courses and apprenticeships in the workplace (continuing education)
- early specialisation should be abandoned in favour of basic education in fundamental subjects
- the possibility of switching from one section to another, depending on taste and aptitude
- motivation for the best school children to sit examinations earlier than their peers
- an extended range of professional qualifications to have the same value as the GCSE
- a clearly defined scale of progress supported by a suitable framework of diplomas.



## → THE TOMLINSON COMMISSION PROJECT

Students would study for a diploma on four possible levels: introduction, proficiency, intermediary and advanced.

Each diploma level comprises:

- a core of compulsory subjects (mathematics, communication skills, ICT, extended project, educational and artistic activities, career project)
- a second core of subjects inherent to the chosen course (professional specialisation, further study in compulsory subjects, another subject chosen by the pupil)
- skills common to both cores (all knowledge, skills and experience required for the pupil's future career, such as personal and social development, independence, etc.).

The design of the new diploma, the structure of which is closer to a university or professional diploma than a GCSE or A-level, would offer several advantages:

- it would reorient schooling towards basic education and prevent young people leaving the school system with major gaps in their basic knowledge
- examinations would be assessed differently, depending on the subjects and courses taken. The proportion of work submitted <sup>(\*)</sup> would be limited to a personal project (experimental work in sciences, press-book in applied arts, dissertation, etc.)
- pupils aged over 16 would have a wider choice and could choose between
  - a range of specialist diplomas designed to provide a basis for progress with learning axes that cover the range of options in professional and general education
  - open diplomas that allow the pupil to select a combination of subjects and broad subject matters to be mastered.

Many subjects in the new diploma stem from current curriculums and qualification systems. At each level of the examination, the modules are designed to cover the previous level, which would enable each pupil to work at his or her own pace and would cut down the number of pupils dropping out or starting too early. Each student could enter the curriculum at the level that suits them, and could follow the course without necessarily sitting the diploma.

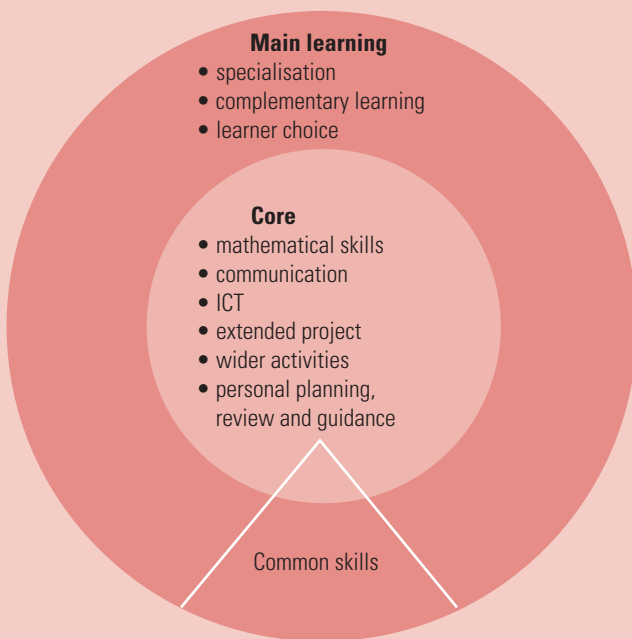
<sup>(\*)</sup> A-levels have been criticised for attaching too much importance to homework.

The system also stipulates that pupils should spend time on educational and artistic activities with their family, in their neighbourhood, or in training or a professional activity. All results would be documented in writing

Some subjects in the curriculum would be assessed on the basis of continuous assessment by the subject teacher, who has a sound understanding of the student's abilities, whereas other subjects would be assessed by means of a final examination.

The reforms required in order to adopt this diploma would be scheduled over several years to ensure a smooth transition. This system is already being experimented with in England and should ensure that pupils are better equipped to join the workforce or complete their education.

### Curriculums are organised as per the diagram below for each level of diploma



# The German *Abitur*

## I. OBJECTIVES OF THE *ABITUR*

The federal State in Germany has no authority in education <sup>(\*)</sup>. At the most it guarantees religious education and the existence of private schools. Authority for education and culture is exercised by the *Länder*. Cultural and education policy in the *Länder* is coordinated by the Permanent Conference of Education and Cultural Affairs ministers (KMK).

L'enseignement secondaire supérieur comprend :

- general education
- professional education
- joint education combining general and professional education.

The current organisation of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* (final cycle of secondary school preparing for the *Abitur*) is based on a reform regulated by the 1972 agreement signed by the Permanent Conference of Education and Cultural Affairs ministers. This reform was originally intended to promote pupils' independence in learning, prepare them for scientific "educational probity" and foster the development of their personality. Between 1993 and 1999, the Permanent Conference redefined the aims and objectives of the schooling provided in the final cycle of the *Gymnasium*:

- the cycle is intended to ensure that pupils achieve the certification that allows access not only to higher education but also to professional training
- it is designed both to consolidate basic knowledge in each subject and to prepare pupils for further study with a view to beginning a university education; at the same time, the teaching dispensed must meet the principles of the Basic Law and the constitutions of the various *Länder*
- it must enable pupils who so wish to specialise in the field of their choice
- it emphasises further study of skills and knowledge in German, mathematics and foreign languages <sup>(\*\*)</sup>
- it must favour a multi-disciplinary approach and reinforce awareness of the links between disciplines
- it must encourage pupils to develop contacts outside Germany. Study trips and exchanges with establishments in other countries help achieve this aim
- it is designed to prepare pupils for the job market and the business world. Accordingly, information concerning professions and career advice is given, and the skills required in order to pursue careers are developed.

(\*) There is, however, a federal ministry the "BMBF" in the same way as for culture.

(\*\*) At the same time, the following subjects are compulsory: music, arts, social sciences, natural sciences, technology, physical education, and, depending on the *Land*, religious education or a replacement subject.

The aim of the *Abitur* (as indicated by its official name, the “*allgemeine Hochschulreife*”) is to enable the school graduate to access all fields of higher education. In recent years, an effort has been made to ensure equivalent ratings between professional and general education diplomas. Thus, professional training curriculums increasingly often result in certification diplomas, which are usually awarded by general education establishments.

## II. ABITUR ACCESS CONDITIONS

### Organisation of compulsory education up to the age of 16

Compulsory education between the ages 10 and 16 is provided by four types of establishment:

- the *Hauptschule* provides basic tuition for five years (levels 5 to 9) that must enable pupils to continue a professional education program (generally as a sandwich course)
- the *Realschule* provides tuition for six years (levels 5 to 10) reconciling general and pre-professional education – in particular via the sandwich or (*duales System*), which is very widespread in Germany – with a relatively broad range of official disciplines for the last two years of the curriculum
- the *Gymnasium* provides tuition for nine years<sup>(\*)</sup>, culminating in the *Abitur*. Schooling is divided into three cycles
  - the lower cycle (*Unterstufe*), which covers levels 5, 6 and 7
  - the middle cycle, which covers levels 8, 9 and 10 (*Mittelstufe*) after which pupils may leave secondary school and pursue an apprenticeship or second cycle of education in a technical or economics upper school
  - the final cycle (*Oberstufe*) for levels 11, 12 and 13.
- the *Gesamtschule* is a comprehensive establishment which combines the three previous courses.

In each establishment, the two years of lower secondary schooling (levels 5 and 6) are also an orientation cycle (*Orientierungsstufe*), after which pupils, generally aged 12, are directed towards one of the four types of establishment.

### Access conditions for the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* (final cycle)

After the tenth class in the *Gymnasium*, pupils (normally aged 16) may enter the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* for the last three years (11, 12 and 13), which are the highest levels in the *Gymnasium*. Students spend three years there (between ages 16 and 19) and sit the *Abitur* at the end of their third year. Admission to the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* is subject to achieving a completion certification awarded at the end of the tenth class in the *Gymnasium* and testifying to sufficient results in all subjects. It is, however, equally possible to achieve this certification and enter the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* after following an equivalent curriculum in the *Gesamtschule*.

<sup>(\*)</sup> A reform of the length of secondary schooling is currently under way.

### III. ORGANISATION OF THE *ABITUR*

Whereas the first year in the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* is an introductory phase, the next two enable pupils to further their knowledge with in-depth study. Each is split into basic classes, a sort of common core syllabus (*Grundkurse*) and advanced courses (*Leistungskurse*), with more intensive classes. The basic syllabus is designed to ensure that pupils acquire a broad general culture, whereas advanced classes provide additional in-depth knowledge to prepare the student for a university course.

Classes are divided into three fields:

- language, literature and art (for example, German, foreign languages, fine arts and music)
- social sciences (for example, history, geography, philosophy, social and political sciences, economics)
- mathematics, natural sciences and technology (for example, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, information and communication technology).

Each of these three fields must be represented in each pupil's school file until completion of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe*.

Although pupils can choose their subjects within each field, German, one foreign language and mathematics are compulsory subjects for all pupils. Religious education (or a substitute subject) and sports are also generally compulsory.

### IV. ASSESSMENT METHODS

The final year of the *gymnasiale Oberstufe* culminates in the *Abitur*, which must include at least four and no more than five subjects.

The subjects are defined from a common core (*zentrales Abitur*), either by the Education and Cultural Affairs department in each *Land* or by teachers in the establishments (in which case they must be approved by the school system authorities in each *Land*)<sup>(\*)</sup>.

Examination papers are not anonymous. Teachers mark their own pupils' exam papers, and these are then corrected a second time by another teacher in the same establishment.

Candidates must evidence knowledge in compulsory subjects and more advanced knowledge in two subjects taught as advanced subjects.

The three fields of subjects listed in section 3 (language, literature and art, social sciences, mathematics, natural sciences and technology) must be represented in the examination. In the first field, German or a foreign language must be submitted by the candidate.

The rule is that the candidate must sit a written examination and occasionally an oral in three subjects, two of which were taught at an advanced level, whereas a simple oral test is required for the fourth subject.

<sup>(\*)</sup> In light of Germany's poor results in the PISA surveys, the second option is tending to disappear in favour of the first.

Written	Two advanced subjects
Written or occasionally oral	One subject
Oral	One subject

Depending on the legal requirements in each *Land*, a fifth subject may be assessed on the basis of an oral or written examination, although the specific skills which must be evidenced in writing can also be introduced in the examination: this can be a dissertation or the results of a multi-disciplinary project. The specific skill is supplemented by a discussion of the project in question.

Successful *Abitur* candidates are awarded an entrance diploma for general higher education (*Allgemeine Hochschulreife*). The diploma is awarded after twelve or thirteen years of schooling. A current reform is implementing twelve-year schooling in nearly all *Länder*, as was already the case in several eastern *Länder*. The diploma also stipulates the pupil's results from the qualification phase onwards (the two levels prior to the *Abitur*), in addition to the examination results. The *Allgemeine Hochschulreife* is awarded to students achieving an average grade of 4 on a grade scale ranging from 6 (lowest score) to 1 (highest score), i.e. 280 points.

Harmonisation of assessment procedures and conditions in all *Länder* is ensured by means of a procedure implemented by the Permanent Conference of Education and Cultural Affairs ministers (KMK).

## V. GOING ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Since the *Abitur* is not a specialist baccalaureate, the successful graduate may, in principle, enrol in the university of his or her choice. There is, however, a *numerus clausus* for many courses such as medicine, pharmacology, biology and psychology. Places at such universities are therefore contingent on achieving an average mark in the baccalaureate that is set each year by the ZVS (*Zentrale Stelle zur Vergabe von Studienplätzen*, the placing authority for German universities. This institution is responsible for allocating places in universities where demand exceeds supply.

The *Abitur* also makes it possible to pursue vocational training and be admitted to a *Fachhochschule* (a university for applied sciences).



# The Spanish *Bachillerato*

## I. BACHILLERATO PRINCIPLES

According to the 1990 groundwork law (B.O.E. dated 4 October) concerning the organisation of the education system (LOGSE), the *Bachillerato* is a non-compulsory part of secondary education beyond the age of 16. It is intended to round out compulsory secondary education (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*/ESO) and prepare pupils for university studies, higher vocational training and, ultimately, the job market. Article 25 of the LOGSE states that the *Bachillerato* must help students acquire intellectual and human maturity as well as the knowledge and skills to ensure that they can fulfil their social functions in a competent and responsible manner.

The *Bachillerato* comprises two years of schooling and four different syllabuses. It therefore differs from the overly generalistic approach on which it had been based since 1970.

It is organised around the principles of unicity, diversity and flexibility:

- **principle of unicity:** the *Bachillerato* is unique, even though there are four syllabuses, and it results in one unique diploma
- **principle of diversity:** diversity implies that pupils can choose from various orientations; the choice must relate to the aptitude, interests and preferences of each pupil
- **principle of flexibility:** the options chosen for the *Bachillerato* must be reversible. The second year must provide more options than the first. The basic subjects in each syllabus may be chosen as options in other syllabuses, and it is possible to change syllabus during the process.

**NB :** The groundwork law concerning the quality of education (*Ley Orgánica sobre la Calidad de la Educación*/LOCE)<sup>(\*)</sup> adopted on December 19, 2002, stipulates that the following are among the skills that must be acquired from this education:

- development of self-motivation
- regular practice in reading, studying and discipline, which are vital means of learning and promoting personal fulfilment
- the ability to express oneself correctly in public
- development of an entrepreneurial spirit (creativity, flexibility, a spirit of initiative, self-confidence, a critical approach, team work and innovation).

<sup>(\*)</sup> The application of this law was suspended for two years by the new government formed after the parliamentary elections on 14 March 2004 (Royal Decree dated 28 May 2004).

## II. GENERAL OBJECTIVES

Objectives are stated in terms of skills and remain the same irrespective of the syllabus chosen. Article 26 of the LOGSE highlights the skills the *Bachillerato* must help develop in the pupil:

- a thorough grasp of Spanish and the other official language in the autonomous region in which the pupil lives
- proficiency in a foreign language
- critical analysis of modern life
- proficiency in basic scientific and technological knowledge and skills specific to the chosen syllabus
- strengthening of the student's personal, social and moral maturity to enable him or her to act in an autonomous and responsible manner
- an ability to take part in the development and improvement of the pupil's social environment
- development of the pupil's artistic and literary sensitivity
- practice of physical education and sport.

## III. BACHILLERATO ACCESS CONDITIONS

In Spain, education is compulsory until the age of 16, and is provided for children aged 12 to 16 by ESO (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*). The four years of CSE are organised into two phases, each lasting two years.

At the end of CSE (age 16), pupils achieving the requisite average grade in each of the subjects in their phase are awarded a secondary education certificate (*Graduado en Educación Secundaria*), which guarantees access to the *Bachillerato* or a specific professional education at the intermediary level (*Formación Profesional Específica de grado medio*).



## IV. BACHILLERATO CURRICULUMS AND ORGANISATION

Tuition in the *Bachillerato* is provided by private or public secondary education establishments, which are known as *Institutos de Educación Secundaria* (IES) if they are public sector establishments.

Age is the criterion for admission to classes, which are capped at 35 pupils per class. All establishments are required to provide basic tuition comprising the compulsory national syllabus.

There are four different series in the *Bachillerato*:

- arts
- natural sciences and healthcare sciences
- humanities and social sciences
- technology.

The syllabus is divided into:

- common core subjects (compulsory)
- specific subjects for each type of *Bachillerato*
- optional subjects.

Basic professional education is part of the *Bachillerato* curriculum.

The core syllabus is drawn up on a national level, although each autonomous region must adapt the curriculum to its specific economic, cultural and social context and must design its own assessment methods and criteria and offer optional subjects. The core syllabus must not exceed 55 % of the school timetable in autonomous regions where there are two official languages, or 65 % of the timetable in other regions. This explains the differences from one community to the next in pupils' timetables, as well as the optional subjects available. The core syllabus spread over one or two years includes physical education (35 h), philosophy (140 h), history (70 h), Spanish language and literature (210 h), the official language and literature of the autonomous region (210 h), a foreign language (210 h) and religious education/study activities <sup>(\*)</sup> (70 h), along with six specialisation subjects (70 h each). In addition, each optional subject offered requires 70 h of teaching.

## V. ASSESSMENT METHODS

The main assessment characteristics apply on a national level, even though each autonomous region draws up its own assessment criteria in relation to its curriculums whilst the criteria themselves are defined in greater detail within each establishment. Assessment is continuous and must apply to all subjects in the level concerned. It must also take account of pupils' schooling maturity with regard to *Bachillerato* objectives and their ability to pursue higher education.

24

Each assessment concerns a single subject; marks are awarded on a scale of 1 to 10 (5 being the minimum mark required to pass). If pupils fail a subject, they may sit a special remedial examination in June or September. Pupils are assessed by a group of teachers coordinated by the tutor (equivalent to the department head in the French system) and are supervised by the establishment's orientation department.

First year pupils who fail in two or more subjects must take the year again. Similarly, those failing more than three subjects in the second year must re-sit the year. However, if they fail three or less subjects, they may sit the remedial examinations. In total, a pupil may not spend more than four years in the *Bachillerato* cycle.

<sup>(\*)</sup> Study activities are intended for pupils who do not receive religious instruction (catechism).

## VI. GOING ON TO HIGHER EDUCATION

Successful *Bachillerato* students are awarded the *Bachiller*. The diploma stipulates the series chosen and the average mark obtained. Only students who achieve the average mark or higher in all subjects are awarded the diploma <sup>(\*)</sup>.

The *Bachiller* diploma entitles the student to go on to higher vocational education. To be admitted to university, pupils must also sit an examination known as the *selectividad*. Grades achieved during the two years of the *Bachillerato* are taken into account when calculating the grade from this examination.

The LOU (*Ley Orgánica Universitaria/university groundwork law*) of June 2001 stipulated, in principle, the elimination of the *Selectividad* from the 2004-2005 year onwards. Universities were therefore to establish their own conditions of admission for candidates awarded the title *Bachiller*. However, the enabling decrees for this law have not been published, and the admission conditions for higher education remain unchanged.



<sup>(\*)</sup> The December 2002 LOCE specifies that to obtain the *Bachiller* diploma, the pupil must not only achieve the average mark in all subjects in the selected syllabus, but must also pass the *Prueba General de Bachillerato* (General Baccalaureate Examination). This measure has been suspended (it should have come into effect at the beginning of the 2005/2006 school year).

# Trans-national Certification systems

**As part of the current process of harmonisation of European diplomas, we felt it would be appropriate to include the international “Geneva” baccalaureate and the European baccalaureate with the four certification systems referred to above, even though their weighting is less and the number of candidates concerned is low. The Geneva baccalaureate is of interest because it is recognised by a growing number of European universities, whereas the European baccalaureate is of interest because the establishment of twelve European schools was intended, in the aftermath of the Second World War, to contribute to the “advent of a united and prosperous Europe”.**

## I. THE EUROPEAN BACCALAUREATE

### European schools

#### • Presentation

European schools are official educational establishments under the joint authority of the governments of the member states of the European Union. They are regulated by an intergovernmental protocol concerning the “Status of the European School”, signed in Luxembourg by the six founding members<sup>(\*)</sup> on 12 April, 1957.

The first European School was established in 1953. They are currently twelve in number: Alicante (Spain), Bergen (Netherlands), three in Brussels, Mol/Geel (Belgium), Varese (Italy), Karlsruhe, Munich, Frankfurt (Germany), Culham (United Kingdom) and Luxembourg, with approximately 19 000 pupils in total. The student body has grown continuously as a result, in particular, of the extension of the European Union. They currently offer a total of 11 languages (Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish).

#### • Aims

The objective of the European Schools is to provide multilingual, multicultural and multi-denominational education to children in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools. The words of Jean Monnet stipulate the end purpose which is engraved in the cornerstone of each European School: *“Raised in contact with each other, freed from their earliest age of any prejudice which may divide them, initiated in the beauty and values of different cultures, they will come to realise their solidarity as they grow up. Whilst retaining their love for and pride in their homeland, they will become in spirit Europeans, fully prepared to achieve and consolidate the work undertaken by their fathers towards the advent of a united and prosperous Europe.”* These schools are intended for the children of European civil servants, as well as on a fee-paying basis for children whose parents wish them to benefit from a European education in terms of language and culture.

<sup>(\*)</sup> More specifically, in 1994 the intergovernmental protocol was superseded by the Agreement on the status of European Schools.

## • Education

The European Schools provide tuition under the auspices of the national inspectorates of the fifteen member States concerned to date. Tuition is based on specific curriculums, which are unusual in that they are bilingual. Foreign language education in non-language disciplines is compulsory in one of the three “vehicle” languages, i.e. English, French or German. Each school features several language sections depending on the nationality of the children attending. The same curriculum for all sections is drawn up by a commission of inspectors.

### **European baccalaureate access conditions**

Students who have completed at least the last two years of secondary schooling in a European School under regular conditions may enrol for the European baccalaureate examinations. The enrolment conditions and fees are set by the High Council.

The High Council comprises the minister or ministers responsible for national education and/or international cultural relations of each of the contracting parties, a member of the European Communities Commission, a representative appointed by the Staff committee and a parent representative.

### **Specific features and curriculums of the European Baccalaureate**

The European baccalaureate can be studied for in European Schools.

The diploma is awarded on behalf of the High Council at the end of the seventh year of secondary schooling in a European School. It testifies to the completion of secondary studies in a European School under conditions laid down by the High Council.

Examinations for the European baccalaureate concern disciplines taught in the sixth and seventh years, and in particular:

- the pupil’s first language (most often their mother tongue)
- a first foreign language (one of the three “vehicle” languages)
- one or more options selected by the student
- one of the components in humanities: history or geography
- a scientific subject.

Students must sit at least four, but no more than six, written examinations. The number of oral examinations must be between three and five.

Written examination subjects are selected by the chairman of the jury from among subjects submitted by the secondary education inspectorate members. The jury comprises a chairman, a deputy chairman, examiners from member States appointed by the High Council, the school’s head teacher and final-year teachers appointed according to terms laid down by the High Council.

### **Assessment and going on to higher education**

To assess candidates’ results, the examination jury takes the following into account, according to the conditions laid down by the High Council:

- Final examinations
- A preliminary grade based on prior results.

Final examinations are part written and part oral, and are graded from 0 to

10 – 10 being the highest score. Each examination is weighted.

The pass mark is an average of 60 % for all subjects. The High Council may also set minimum marks to be achieved in specific subjects.

The European baccalaureate ensures admission to all universities in the European Union. In their own country, graduates enjoy all the advantages of the diploma or certificate awarded at the end of secondary education. They do not, therefore, have to apply for an equivalent.

The European baccalaureate may be awarded in one of the four main languages of the European Economic Community. In virtue of the agreements that exist, it is deemed an equivalent to thirteen years of schooling in the United Kingdom and Germany, whereas in France it is deemed the equivalent of the secondary school baccalaureate (i.e. twelve years of study).

## THE INTERNATIONAL “GENEVA” BACCALAUREATE

### The IBO and its aims

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) is a private, non-profit foundation established in 1968 and has an “*educational*” vocation<sup>(\*)</sup>. It is recognised by the Council of Europe and enjoys a consultative status with Unesco. Its executive is a Foundation Council comprised of 16 trustees. The head office is located in Geneva, Switzerland, research facilities are located in Bath, England and services concerning study and assessment programs are located in Cardiff, Wales.

The aims of the IBO are to “*develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.*”

*“To this end, the IBO works with schools, governments and international organizations to develop curriculums of international education.*

*“These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right<sup>(\*)</sup>.”* The IBO therefore strives to instil in the student a system of personal values “*that will guide pupils throughout their lives within the local community and in their role as a citizen of the world<sup>(\*)</sup>”.*

1 367 schools which have purchased the license are authorised to offer International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. These establishments, known as “*IB world schools<sup>(\*)</sup>”*, boast a total student body of some 200 000 in 116 countries. Nearly 80 % of pupils assessed each year by the IBO are awarded a diploma.

The diploma curriculum is the name given to the education product for which each IB school must purchase the license. It is a “*rigorous<sup>(\*)</sup>”* pre-university syllabus culminating in examinations and intended for “*highly motivated<sup>(\*)</sup>”* pupils aged 16 to 19 entering the final two years of secondary education. Curriculums are designed as a global two-year study plan available in English, German and Spanish. Pupils from the first secondary school course in an IB school may be admitted, although pupils from very different backgrounds may also be accepted in accordance with the admission criteria applied by each school.

<sup>(\*)</sup> Source: IBO internet site

## Objectives and curriculums

The objective of the international baccalaureate cannot be divorced from the global mission statement and philosophy avowed by the IBO. The discipline allocation method is intended to guarantee a **balance** for each pupil between scientific and language and/or literary education. It stipulates that pupils focusing on sciences should be proficient in at least one foreign language, while arts and languages students should be familiar with laboratory procedures.

### • Three major components

The diploma curriculum borrows from many national educational systems such items as are considered the best, without leaning towards any given approach. In addition to components that comprise the strengths of every conventional syllabus, the curriculum also offers three important components:

- theory of knowledge: an interdisciplinary course intended to stimulate critical thinking about knowledge and experience acquired both in the classroom and outside
- creativity, action, service: activities intended to develop team work. Pupils can, for example, take part in theatre or musical productions, sports activities or community service
- a 4 000-word essay: each pupil is given the opportunity to develop in-depth a subject in which he/she is particularly interested.

### • Six study fields

Six study fields are taught in parallel and concern both arts and sciences. Candidates must select a discipline in each of the six fields. At least three, but no more than four, of these disciplines must be submitted for the Higher Level (HL), while the others must be submitted at the middle level (ML). HL courses account for a recommended 240 hours of education, while ML classes account for 150 hours. Some subjects must therefore be studied in-depth, whereas others can be addressed on a broader basis.

The six study fields are the following:

- **Field 1:** Langue A1
- **Field 2:** Second language (Latin and classical Greek are also offered)
- **Field 3:** Individuals and societies
- **Field 4:** Experimental sciences
- **Field 5:** Mathematics and information technology
- **Field 6:** Arts.

## Assessment and going on to further education

IBO teachers and examiners work in partnership thus providing pupils with the chance to demonstrate what they have learned in various ways. Grades reflect the level of knowledge and skills set by standards which are applied in the same way to all schools.

The IBO ensures that the responsibility for all assessments concerning the quality of candidates' work is borne by over 4 400 examiners recruited worldwide and coordinated by head examiners who are international authorities in their own fields. Nearly 80 % of pupils assessed each year by the IBO are awarded their diploma. Examinations take place in May in the northern

hemisphere and in November in the southern hemisphere. Candidates may sit an examination three times. Successful candidates have been admitted to some 1 745 universities, notably in the English-speaking world, in over 110 countries <sup>(\*)</sup>

### III. TOWARDS DUAL NATIONAL CERTIFICATION

With regard to international certification at the end of secondary schooling, the French education system currently offers the *baccalauréat* with International Option (*Option internationale du baccalauréat/OIB*) after schooling in the international section.

The diploma, a complete baccalaureate, does however have two-fold competition abroad, from the European baccalaureate and from the International baccalaureate. Although there is no indication of falling interest in the IBO, which is studied for by 10 000 pupils, there is still a growing demand for trans-national certification of completion of secondary school. France, for example, is studying the implementation of dual national certification which would be recognised in each of the two partner countries in this experiment. The *AbiBac*, which has been developed since 1994 as part of a Franco-German partnership is one of the main driving forces behind this thinking (*see opposite*).

The dual national baccalaureate that France intends to put in place in collaboration with its partners is designed as a response to these developments. The effect would be to:

- promote student mobility at a European level by ensuring reciprocal university admission for students (with the objective for 2010 of three million students in the Erasmus program)
- stimulate subsequent introduction to professional life and employee mobility
- make certification of the end of secondary education part of the European harmonisation drive concerning higher education diplomas (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral degrees).

The dual national certification system would be based on a genuine dual-culture education, and would be devised on the basis of a curriculum, a definition and examinations that would be **jointly defined**. The approach selected could include a common core and a specific section. The principles on which such dual certification would be based would be simplicity, reciprocity, mutual trust and maintenance of the specific features of domestic examinations.

Dual national certification would be intended for all candidates who believe they have the requisite language proficiency, particularly for pupils in European and international sections, along with pupils attending schools in France's network of foreign establishments.

<sup>(\*)</sup> Figure to be verified, as it differs according to the source.

## → THE *ABIBAC*: SUCCESSFUL DUAL CERTIFICATION

Since 1994, some fifty secondary schools in France and Germany offer the dual award of the French *baccalauréat* and the German *Allgemeine Hochschulreife*, more generally known as the *AbiBac* (from *Abitur* and *Baccalauréat*). These establishments feature 'bilingual sections with a Franco-German profile' and form a network based on the principle of twinning two establishments, one in France, the other in Germany, that leads in particular to the joint design of projects implemented through exchanges.

The *AbiBac* is intended for all pupils in series L, ES and S who are proficient in German.

Curriculums jointly devised by the relevant authorities in both countries stipulate teaching in literature in the partner language, in addition to the language timetable. In history and geography, teaching is carried out entirely in the partner language.

For the examinations, candidates sit **four examinations in the partner language**:

- a written examination in literature
- an oral examination in literature
- a written examination in history
- a written examination in geography.

The examination subjects are devised by the French and German authorities. Dual examination correction is carried out by French and German teachers.

In order to be awarded dual certification, the pupil must meet the requirements for the domestic examination and must achieve the average mark required in the four specific examinations. The *AbiBac* provides full admission entitlement in French and German universities.

Establishments offering *AbiBac* tuition are currently present in 13 areas governed by French regional education authorities and seven *Länder*. The objective set in 2004 is to extend this option to all French regions and German *Länder*.

# Comparative Appraisal

## I. SOME SIMILARITIES

Although the similarities shared by the certification systems are few in number, they are nevertheless vital:

- candidates are aged on average 18 or 19
- certification generally takes place after two or three final years of the secondary school system
- certification concludes secondary school, more often than not entitling successful candidates to go on to higher education, and is therefore a right of passage towards adulthood.

## II. DIVERGENCES, BUT ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION

### In assessment

The average number of examinations varies from three (England) to eleven (European baccalaureate). The weighting of continuous assessment varies greatly (from its exclusive use in Spain, to very minor use in France).

One may, however, note the effort made in some countries to align with the organisation of certification systems in neighbouring countries. For example, Spain has considered reintroducing the final examination (the *Prueba General de Bachillerato*, rescinded in 1990) in its groundwork law on the quality of education (LOCE) dated 23 December, 2002, which is currently suspended. This measure would accompany a partial continuation of continuous assessment. In England, the range of subjects available to students has been extended since September 2000 to compensate for excessive specialisation, and now notably includes professional subjects. Subsequently, the report by the Tomlinson Commission has even recommended dropping A-level specialisation.

### In syllabuses

Although core subjects such as mathematics, the national language, history or the sciences, can be seen in all baccalaureate syllabuses studied, there are divergences with regard to other subjects and in the range of options available (which can be vast for the international baccalaureate, or more restricted in England) <sup>(\*)</sup>. Germany and England stand out in providing religious education. Vocational aspects are increasingly prevalent in all baccalaureates. In France, the professional baccalaureate makes it possible to combine general and professional education. One of the aims pursued by the Tomlinson reform in England is to meet employers' requirements by introducing subjects that develop pupils' know-how. In Spain, the groundwork law is also aimed at strengthening the spirit of enterprise through creativity, flexibility, initiative, critical reasoning, team work and innovation.

<sup>(\*)</sup> A change is planned under the Tomlinson Commission.

International and language aspects are among the main features of the European and international baccalaureates. Both of these examination systems offer a wide choice of languages and options (eleven languages offered by the European baccalaureate). Furthermore, curriculums are devised around European and international issues and highlight “community” aspects. Non language-related disciplines are taught in a foreign language, in particular in the European baccalaureate.

### **In institutional organisation**

The organisms authorised to draw up the curriculums differ from one country to the next. Such authority is generally exercised by the public sector and depends on the institutional structure of the country: the State in France, the *Länder* in Germany, the State and autonomous regions in Spain. The English system stands out in that curriculums are devised by external bodies accredited by the State (awarding bodies). In the European baccalaureate, centralised organisms draw up the curriculum.

### **In prospects**

Generally speaking, the baccalaureate provides a direct entitlement to university admission, although there are specific features. In France, the baccalaureate is considered to be the first diploma awarded by the higher education system. Elsewhere, certification tends to conclude secondary education and constitutes a requisite, albeit not sufficient, condition for university admission. In England, university admission is conditional on obtaining at least three A-levels and the higher the grades, the greater the chance of attending a prestigious university. Finally, Spain is unusual in that students must sit a university entrance examination in addition to the *Bachillerato*.

Lastly, there are three families of certification:

- *baccalauréat* and *Bachillerato*, which have a similar number of subjects and organisation (in particular the series) although their assessment methods are completely different (very minor role of continuous assessment in France compared to exclusively continuous assessment in Spain)
- *Abitur* and A-levels, which have a similar number of subjects and organisation (specialisation in three or four subjects)
- European and Geneva baccalaureates, which have similar language aspects and a similar general approach (“community” aspects).

## **III. ISSUES RAISED BY CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS**

### **England**

As noted by the Tomlinson Commission, the current A-level system is insufficiently selective, does not provide a sufficiently broad core of knowledge and prevents universities and employers from identifying the level of their applicants with certainty. Furthermore, a very low value is placed on vocational education and too many pupils drop out of the school system without qualifications.

The Tomlinson Commission faces a two-fold problem:

- **qualitative** issues: how to retain the ‘advanced’ aspect of A-level education in a limited number of disciplines, whilst ensuring a satisfactory level of general knowledge?
- **economic, political and social** issues: how can A-level education be bolstered and at the same time remain open to as many pupils as possible, in order to keep 16-19 year-olds in school?

## Germany

Even though the KMK works on harmonising education content and organisation from one *Land* to another, the system suffers from a lack of standardisation which explains, for example, the fact that there are as many *Abitur* certification systems (16) as there are *Länder*. The scarcity of basic institutional statutes is indicative of Germany’s reticence to stipulate in a programme the principles of its education system in general and of the *Abitur* in particular. Such disparity in the *Abitur* system may well raise issues concerning the equality and homogeneity of a diploma which, although it bears the same name in all *Länder*, is a reflection of different realities.

This weakness has, however, recently been perceived, and some *Länder* are hoping to find a solution with the introduction of the *ZentralAbitur*. Subjects are defined on a *Land* level, and no longer in each secondary school.

## Spain

Spain has evidenced the desire to reform the *Bachillerato*, in particular by adding an examination to the current decisive feature, continuous assessment, in line with other European certification systems. This is one of the objectives of the 2002 groundwork law concerning the quality of education (*Ley Orgánica sobre la Calidad de la Educación/LOCE*).

Several provisions in the LOCE concerning the *Bachillerato* are currently under detailed review by the new Spanish government and will be applied only after a national debate has been held. This applies to:

- the compulsory choice between religious instruction and a new discipline (society, religion and culture)
- a partial redefinition of continuous assessment for the *Bachillerato* and the implementation of an examination (*Prueba General de Bachillerato*) required to obtain the *Bachiller* diploma
- abolition of the *selectividad* (university entrance examination).

As regards the latter point, the creation of a new certification system could close this debate and would be of greater concern to universities.

## France

The high number of subjects studied (ten or eleven) and the interplay of its many options make the French baccalauréat the most cumbersome of certification systems and the most complex to organise, as well as being the most expensive.

Its critics wonder whether the assessment system on which it is based does not attach too much importance to the formal exercise, at the risk of not

properly assessing the skills acquired.

Furthermore, the issue of the efficiency of an education system that does not provide all graduates with a genuine opportunity to succeed in their first year of higher education is regularly raised.

### **The European Bacculaureate**

Its exorbitant cost and the small number of schools involved (12) help maintain the elitist and experimental nature of this bacculaureate system, making it above all a symbol of a political vision and will. The European Union does not plan to create more European schools.

### **The International Bacculaureate**

This is first and foremost a commercial product aimed at a restricted public. Although international openness and the importance of languages in education are undeniable assets, the principles asserted by the International Bacculaureate Organisation "tolerance", "compassion", "multiculturalism", "openness to others" and "theory of knowledge" appear to be consensual values rather than genuine educational principles.

