

**ADDITIONAL NOTES TO ACCOMPANY POWERPOINT SLIDE PRESENTATION BY A. ACKROYD AND ROB. MILLER TO THE ADMISSIONS GROUP AT KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON. JUNE 2008.**

**Slide one:** the *OIB* is the only truly bi-lingual qualification involving English in the world. It is offered across all specialisations within the *baccalauréat*. It serves a highly educated and educationally ambitious segment of the population, very similar to that served by the IB worldwide at the moment. In a paper published in 2002, a French government representative in the Ministry's International Relations Department recognised the need for "openness to international concerns." The *baccalauréat* and the *OIB* remain under the control of the Ministry of National Education, Research and Technology, although the country is split up into 28 *académies* which set their own versions of the various papers, except for the *OIB* examinations in history and geography and English, language and literature, which are set nationally for all international students. We will be talking, initially, about the *baccalauréat* in general terms as the conditions of the system apply to both *OIB* and non-*OIB* students.

**Slide two:** overall we are giving this presentation in the hope that we can both inform and have this information passed on. We feel that the *OIB* needs more widespread understanding at the level of both admissions officers and those course tutor academics who inform institutional policies on admissions, thereby matching the level of IB awareness which seems to have grown very successfully in recent years. We also feel that a clear differentiation in marks required for entrance onto courses should be made between *OIB* and non-*OIB* *baccalauréat* students.

**Slides three four and five:** in the French system there is a strong emphasis on abstract thought, with a very high level meta-language in the teachers' *cours magistral* discourse. This is connected to the autonomy and perceived academic authority of the individual teachers. Philosophy is particularly interesting in the examination: it is highly commendable that it is on the curriculum but is the most noticeable example of how there are no prescriptive guidelines for pass rates within the French system: it is possible to have an unusually high percentage of failures in any given subject in any given year with no adjustment and setting of grade boundaries in respect of a mean mark. Philosophy frequently is the lowest grade on even the most successful students' mark sheet and yet the consistency of this being the case over a number of years has not led to reform or to any self-examination at a national, structural level. The study régime is hard and unforgiving.

**Slides six and seven:** overall, the course requires genuine self-motivation: one of the French traditions is based on the notion of clear thinking, rigour and the idea that “*l’homme se forme sur la peine*” that is “man is formed through effort.”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the qualities mentioned here are not primarily nurtured through study skills, dialogue and formative assessment, but assumed as an absolute given from day one of the course. Students have to wake up to this, often in very painful ways as they deal with the content-based curriculum. Within the bi-cultural dimension of the *OIB*, our students do encounter more dialogue on how to learn. But, in general, successful *baccalauréat* students are remarkable in the way that they become strong learners as they meet the highest academic and workload demands.

**Slide eight:** these statistics speak for themselves. We must retain the idea that only a third of the cohort takes the *baccalauréat général*. The *OIB* statistics pertaining to the students whom we are talking about are included in these and the following French statistics. It is necessary to remember that, as with IB students at the moment, the *OIB* cohort is a group of bright, academic and highly motivated students who are excellent higher education prospects.

**Slide nine:** pass rates of the *baccalauréat general* cohort yields a 15% failure rate.

**Slide ten:** with these statistics we enter into the heart of the message: the system of *mentions* is something you are all familiar with and we see that 46% of all *bacheliers* gain one.

**Slide eleven:** variation between series in terms of % of *mentions* awarded. The scientific series has the highest but, when compared to A levels in mathematics, for instance, on the next slide, this is a very low number obtaining the highest grades. Indeed, one of our concerns is that the higher demands in terms of grades made on A level students as the A grade rate increases should not be projected onto any increase in offers which universities might demand of *baccalauréat* students. The social sciences and literary series yield even fewer higher level *mentions* and the same questions of equivalence therefore apply to courses which require expertise and knowledge in these series. We encounter difficulties with medical school and veterinary applications: it is very rare for our students to be considered and yet some of the most outstanding students we have encountered in our careers have ended up with no offers at all when applying for these courses, despite some detailed research and contact with course tutors beforehand and despite anecdotal evidence that science students are well prepared by the *baccalauréat* for high level degrees in Britain.

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<sup>1</sup> elsa-france.org - English language schools association website: paper by Nancy Willard Magaud (ex Inspecteur délégué pour l’Option Américaine, Language and literature), entitled : **Reaching Out: Developing an international dimension within the framework of a national system**

**Slide twelve:** this is the most important of our slides in terms of comparative statistics. Before moving on to more general comparisons between A level and the *baccalauréat*, we wanted to highlight mathematics as we encounter some very high requirements for courses involving mathematics and engineering when what is required at A level is A. We are aware of the growing difficulties in selecting the best As and in differentiating the excellent students, hence the mooted A\* and some universities setting their own entrance exams.

- However, we feel that 16 in mathematics is a much higher demand than a simple A at A level and that a *mention bien* or above (14 or above) overall is statistically much rarer than an A at A level.
- It seems to us that these statistics show that all the series of the French baccalauréat does sort out the more talented from the less because of the low percentages of students who gain the highest level *mention*.
- This difficulty in achieving a confident sense of equivalence leads to the paradox of students coming from the French baccalauréat with stronger methodological rigour than that shown by A level students in, for example, mathematics, yet being asked for 17 in the subject when 43% of mathematics A levels are A grade. **Less than 8%** of science students gain a *mention très bien*. In the light of the low number of *mentions bien* and *très bien*, 15 seems a more statistically appropriate demand for specific A grade type achievement and a 16 seems to us an appropriate, absolute limit for the most demanding and sought after courses at British universities: 48,1 % of all A levels are As and Bs but **only 4.9%** of French baccalauréat students gain a *mention très bien* and **only 18,4%** gain a *mention bien* or higher.
- In relation to this, experiential and anecdotal experience bear out our contention that the French *baccalauréat* is very demanding: we have students leave our bi-lingual programme because of the difficulty of the French system. Typically, this category of student has scored below 11s in French grades yet achieve notable success in the IB, certainly, routinely above 34 in the cases I have experienced.

The French baccalauréat statistics quoted here can be found on <http://media.education.gouv.fr/file/06/1/5061.pdf>

The IB statistics can be found in the Statistical Bulletin on <http://www.ibo.org>.

**Slide fourteen:** this equivalence chart is one representative example of how the schools encourage students to match their abilities to the requirements of courses in British universities.

- The majority of offers made reflect this equivalence but two things need to be said.
- We would emphasise that 14, overall, in the OIB is equivalent to 3 As.
- We are also keen to provoke some reflection on whether more universities should differentiate their offers to *OIB* students from those made to students following the straightforward *baccalauréat*.

**Slide 15:** many of these have already been alluded to, but the main point for us is to say that fourteen overall represents, statistically, A level achievements of the highest order and we are confident that students who achieve this grade within the *OIB* framework, will be successful on the highest level courses on offer in British universities. Clearly, offers may demand higher achievement in individual subject areas linked to degree choice, but do remember that 16 in any individual subject is already statistically far more difficult to obtain than a grade A is, in general.

**Slide 16:** this takes us into a more detailed look at the bi-lingual and bi-cultural structure. The exam is taught in international state lycées in France and abroad and the structure applies to various other European countries and to America. Perhaps the most remarkable fact is that, in the pursuit of bicultural and bilingual education, the French government hands over the methodology, examination process and assessment to “foreign” countries, something one might not easily imagine within the context of the cliché of French centralisation. Cambridge inspectors are in charge of maintaining the standards in the two subject areas. They also ensure quality and comparability with A level and are highly experienced in the administration and assessment of A level in these same areas. Some of the comments made by them are the following:

As regards History/Geography, it is the University of Cambridge's International Examinations (CIE) History/Geography inspector's opinion that:

- a) **Equivalence.** The CIE's A grade threshold sits at about 14 or 13\* for the OIB, i.e. rather lower arithmetically out of 20 than might be expected, given UK thresholds. The standard for OIB, in terms of UK A Level examinations lies somewhere between AS and A2, but nearer to A2 than AS overall for H-G, both in terms of content and the skills required. These observations on standards are based upon the inspector's perspective from conversation with senior colleagues and over 20 years of examining at this level internationally.
- b) **Relevance.** H-G has a lot to offer for 21st century living. Students not taking History or Geography forward as a subject at university are enriched by having studied major issues such as decolonisation, development and globalisation as a context politically, economically, socially and environmentally; issues which will have passed many of their English contemporaries by. Those taking History or Geography may have a narrower basis of learning (content) than students from UK schools who have done an A Level in either subject, however it is important to emphasise the subject's **synopticity** and the element of what QCA term '**stretch and challenge**' especially in the essay questions, parts (c). The OIB H-G is stretching and challenging in a number of ways; for example in terms of producing extended writing and the issues about which candidates need to be informed and offer reasoned judgements.

The oral element in the English course is more challenging than any element of A level English.

A full account of the OIB and its structure in both English, language and literature and history and geography can be found in the handbook on the ASIBA website, an organization set up to support the development of the OIB:

<http://www.asiba.info/oib-handbook.htm>

**Slide 17, 18 and 19:** the level of general culture, genuine engagement with academic ideas and knowledge are very high in the students who succeed on this course and their adaptability to styles, techniques and, of course, different languages in learning is well to the fore. Although the total number of students in France who follow the course is small, numbers are increasing and (slide 19) the level of influence that the option can have on the overall grade is huge, emphasizing the risk that students take in the name of cultural and educational enrichment.

**Slide 20:** Notice the grades already awarded by the time that you receive the application. The French grades can be erratic and do not necessarily offer an accurate prediction of final overall grades, although they can indicate, obviously, high literary and linguistic fluency and understanding of French. Travaux Personnels Encadrés (TPE). Introduced by the then Minister of Education, Jack Laing in 2000, TPE is a long-term group project for the students in 1ere. The project is determined by the students within the themes prescribed to each 'series' and it needs to be interdisciplinary (eg. history and economics: art and mathematics). The groups, working throughout the year (supervised by two teachers from different disciplines) plan their work, research their selected subject, conduct interviews or experiments and finally produce a document (written or multi-media) of their findings. The final evaluation, which is integrated into their bac mark, is based upon their work practice, their production and a five minute oral for each individual. Their mark out of 20 carries a coefficient of 2 on those points over the average of 10. Further information can be found on <http://www.cndp.fr/secondaire/tpe/pdf/tper2000.pdf>.

**Slides 21 to 28:** we need to do little more than put up these slides and highlight one or two points as we go. Their directness is meant to be the finishing point of what we wish to say and emphasise.

**Further websites and references:**

<http://www.fdei.org>

New site of the 'Fondation pour le Développement de l'Education Internationale

<http://www.ciep.fr>

Centre international des études pédagogiques

<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

Education pages have interesting articles about results in A levels

<http://www.jcq.org.uk/national%5Fresults/alevels>

Good for A level results and % of students gaining each grade

<http://www.elsa-france.org>

English language schools association website where paper by Nancy Willard Magaud (ex Inspecteur délégué pour l'Option Américaine, Language and literature), entitled: **Reaching Out: Developing an international dimension within the framework of a national system.**