



PRESS RELEASE

ENTITIES AND PUBLIC POLICIES

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ADMISSION POST-BAC AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION A controversial system calling for reform

Admission post-bac (post-high school admission, or APB) is a public digital platform used by high school graduates to submit applications with a view to entering first-year courses in higher education. It contains two algorithms: an allocation algorithm, which cross-references the preferences of schools and applicants, and a ranking algorithm, which attributes an order of priority to applications to bachelor courses.

The operating methods of APB, which lack transparency and fail to comply with the education code, highlight inconsistencies in the conditions of access to bachelor courses at universities. APB constitutes a useful technical step forward but today is quite rightly criticised and needs to be reformed.

Useful innovation, unsatisfactory results

APB helped to improve the higher education admission process by grouping dispersed procedures in a single location and calendar. It simplifies the applications process for high school graduates and fosters equal access to education. For schools, it optimises the quality of the students recruited and maximises the use of available places, while expanding their recruitment pool. Operating the IT resource costs less than €1 million a year.

But no explicit public decisions have been made concerning the APB system. High school graduates know very little about its exact role or the distinction between the respective decisions of the selecting schools and the algorithms. To make things clearer, a training policy, currently inexistant, and targeted communication are required.

Highlighting inconsistencies in bachelor degree access conditions

The allocation algorithm is particularly adapted to managing admissions for courses with a limited amount of places (referred to in French as *filières sélectives*), but is not adapted to universities, which do not review applications. The algorithm attributes a ranking to each application, serving to exclude applicants whose ranking is superior to the places available. Until the 2016 school year, the ranking was based on criteria that are not compliant with law.

Where the criteria used are unable to decide between applicants, the system resorts to a random draw. The French government was formally notified by the National Commission for Information Technologies and Civil Liberties, CNIL, in particular as regards decision-making with no human intervention and the lack of transparency.

By centralising and harmonising prior practices, APB has shed greater light on the pressures involved in accessing higher education – a problem whose main causes elude the system. This



issue has become more critical given the gradual increase in the number of high-school graduates and the limits set on the number of places in university courses, which has led to an increasingly frequent mismatch between the number of applications and the places available for certain degree courses.

Necessary reform

The failings of APB, stemming not from technical issues but from legal provisions and political decisions, need to be corrected. The regulation criteria enshrined in the education code are ill adapted to undergraduate courses and need to be further specified and supplemented. The allocation procedure requires a clear and robust legal foundation specifying its object, scope and operating methods.

The procedure, coordinated by the French ministry, is based on an IT tool managed by a higher education institution, Institut National Polytechnique (INP) in Toulouse. The relationship between the ministry and INP is governed by relatively few formal guidelines but is characterised nevertheless by closeness, responsiveness and moderate cost, which should be maintained. But it is the state that should be directly responsible for the management of the procedure.

In accordance with the Digital Republic Bill, the government should improve understanding of how the algorithms work and organise controlled and secure access to the source codes and data. This would serve to restore confidence in the tool and develop new functionalities of benefit to users.

Recommendations

The Cour des Comptes has drafted eight recommendations aimed in particular at clarifying legal provisions on access to higher education, improving the transparency of the allocation system and support for the individuals involved, redefining the scope of the system and reorganising its management.

[Read the report](#)

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