

1 **A system under attack for being too tough on pupils, not too easy**

2 (original at

3 http://www.economist.com/node/17155766?story_id=17155766)

4 At the end of every academic year, when British school-leavers get their
5 A-level exam results, a chorus rings out about grade inflation and
6 indulgent marking. This year, some 27% of British students who took the
7 exam secured either an A or the new A* grade. Across the channel in
8 France, the worries could scarcely be more different.

9 Some experts there think that lycée (upper secondary-school) pupils work
10 too hard, are graded too fiercely and are victims of a system designed to
11 fail them. In their opinion, overloaded timetable and a focus on learning
12 through failure are causes for concern.

13 Lycée pupils have long days, often from 8am to 6pm. An official report
14 says that, including homework, lycée pupils work an average of 45 hours
15 a week (this in the country that invented the 35-hour week for adults).

16 However, these long hours do not seem to translate into better grades. It
17 is almost impossible to get full marks in the *baccalauréat*, the school-
18 leaving exam invented by Napoleon. This year, just over 30 pupils, or
19 0.006% of those who sat the bac, were awarded 20/20, whereas 8% of
20 British A-level students got the new A*. Only 22% of French pupils scored
21 more than 14/20.

22 No wonder, then, that France's harsh grading system is described as "a
23 veritable wound that has damaging results on morale, self-confidence and
24 student performance". According to a poll, for many French students,
25 school is simply "boredom and dread".

Questions

- 1)The A-level exams and the *baccalauréat* are roughly equivalent to one Czech exam. Which one?
- 2)Explain 'grade inflation' (line 5) in your own words.
- 3)What does the word 'there' (line 9) refer to?
- 4)What does the pronoun 'their' refer to in line 11?
- 5)Why does the article highlight the fact that lycée pupils in France have long days as something particular?
- 6)Paraphrase 'do not seem to translate into better grades' (line 16).
- 7)What are, according to the article, the consequences of the specificities of education at the French lycées?
- 8)What is your opinion on grading? Should grading be fierce or rather lenient? How can a teacher motivate her students?

Vocabulary

ring out (line 5) – to make a sound or noise

indulgent (line 6) – lenient, permissive, soft, tolerant easygoing

long hours (line 16) – a long time spent in an office, factory, or the like, or for work, study, etc.

sit an exam (line 19) – to take an exam, to do an exam

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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