

LA NUEVA PRUEBA DE ACCESO A LA UNIVERSIDAD. ¿QUÉ ES LO QUE CAMBIA? ¿CAMBIARÁ ALGO?

THE NEW UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAM. WHAT IS CHANGING? WILL IT CHANGE ANYTHING?

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Resumen

La publicación del Real Decreto 534/2024 fija nuevas características básicas para la prueba de acceso a las enseñanzas universitarias oficiales de Grado. Al amparo de lo establecido en su disposición final cuarta, relativa al calendario de implantación, el nuevo esquema de pruebas se aplicará a partir del próximo curso académico 2024-2025. Es grande la incertidumbre entre la comunidad educativa, con preocupación del profesorado, alumnado y familias por la preparación para estas pruebas y por el desempeño en las mismas. En este artículo examinamos ese nuevo esquema de pruebas de acceso a la universidad (PAU), comparándolo con el actual. En este artículo comenzaremos por ver las características de la futura PAU y analizar estas en relación con la actual EBAU. Una vez hecho ese análisis comparativo, expondremos algunas reflexiones

acerca de las repercusiones y cambios necesarios para que este modelo se pueda aplicar con éxito a nuestro alumnado.

Palabras clave: *EBAU, PAU, Bachillerato, Universidad, LOMLOE.*

Abstract

The publication of Royal Decree 534/2024 establishes new basic characteristics for the entrance exam to official university degree courses. Pursuant to the provisions of its fourth final provision, regarding the implementation timetable, the new test scheme will be applied from the next academic year 2024-2025. There is great uncertainty among the educational community, with concern among teachers, students and families about the preparation for and performance in these tests. In this article we examine this new university entrance examination (PAU) scheme, comparing it with the current one. In this article we will start by looking at the characteristics of the future PAU and analyse these in relation to the current EBAU. Once this comparative analysis has been carried out, we will then offer some reflections on the repercussions and changes needed for this model to be successfully applied to our students.

Keywords: EBAU, PAU, Bacallaureate, University, LOMLOE.

1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW PAU

Royal Decree 534/2024, of 11 June, which regulates the requirements for access to official undergraduate university education, the basic characteristics of the entrance exam and the basic regulations for admission procedures, published on 12 June 2024, establishes the new regulatory framework for the university entrance exams (PAU). The second final provision determines its basic nature and, therefore, obligatory compliance by all Education Administrations (AAPP). The fourth final provision, which regulates the implementation calendar, establishes its application to the university entrance exams to be held from the 2024-2025 academic year onwards.

Chapter II of Royal Decree 534/2024 develops the requirements for access to official undergraduate university studies. If we compare these with those regulated in its predecessor, Royal Decree 412/2014, of 6 June, which establishes the basic regulations for admission procedures to official university degree courses, we can see that there are no major novelties.

The structure of the test will be as follows:

RD 534/2024	Commentary
Spanish Language and Literature II and, if applicable, Co-official Language and Literature II.	Same as at present. See article 3.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
History of Spain or History of Philosophy, to be chosen by the students.	Same as at present. See article 3.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
Foreign Language II, with a choice between German, French, English, Italian and Portuguese.	As at present.

RD 534/2024	Commentary
The specific compulsory subject of the second year of the Baccalaureate of the modality and, if applicable, pathway studied.	Same as at present. See article 3.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
In their admission procedures, universities must consider the grades obtained in at least two subjects. These subjects shall be selected by the universities from among all those that may be assessed in the entrance examination or in the procedures referred to in the previous section.	<p>Currently the wording is quite different, but the meaning is the same (see article 3.2 and 3.3 of Order PJC/39/2024).</p> <p>Those who wish to improve their admission mark may take at least two other subjects. These may be either two subjects of the second year of the baccalaureate, or one subject of the second year of the baccalaureate and the common subject that they had not previously chosen when opting between History of Spain and History of Philosophy in accordance with the provisions of the section on the compulsory phase, provided that they wish to opt for a university that has planned to take into account the qualification of the latter two subjects in its admission processes.</p> <p>Students may also take an examination in a second foreign language other than the one they have studied as a common subject.</p>

The evaluation of each of the exercises and of the test will be calculated in the following way:

RD 534/2024	Commentary
Each of these exercises will be graded from 0 to 10 points to two decimal places.	Same as at present.

<p>The mark for the admission test will be the arithmetic mean of the marks obtained in each of the exercises. The average will be expressed on a scale of 0 to 10 points to three decimal places, rounded off to the nearest thousandth and, in the case of equidistance, to the nearest thousandth.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 9.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.</p>
<p>This mark must be equal to or higher than four points in order to be considered for admission to official undergraduate university studies.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 9.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.</p>

RD 534/2024	Commentary
Each of these exercises will be graded from 0 to 10 points to two decimal places.	Same as at present.
The mark for the admission test will be the arithmetic mean of the marks obtained in each of the exercises. The average will be expressed on a scale of 0 to 10 points to three decimal places, rounded off to the nearest thousandth and, in the case of equidistance, to the nearest thousandth.	Same as at present. See article 9.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
This mark must be equal to or higher than four points in order to be considered for admission to official undergraduate university studies.	Same as at present. See article 9.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
RD 534/2024	Commentary
The university entrance qualification will be calculated as the weighted average of 60 per cent of the average mark of the Baccalaureate, calculated without considering the mark for the subject of Religion, and 40 per cent of the mark for the entrance exam. The mark obtained by this procedure will be expressed to three decimal places, rounded to the nearest thousandth and, in the case of equidistance, to the nearest thousandth.	Same as at present. See Article 9.2 of Order PJC/39/2024 and article 30.4 of RD 243/2022.
It will be understood that the university entrance requirements are met when the weighted score described in the previous section is equal to or higher than 5 points.	Same as at present. See article 9.2 of Order PJC/39/2024.

RD 534/2024	Commentary
Each of these exercises will be graded from 0 to 10 points to two decimal places.	Same as at present.
The mark for the admission test will be the arithmetic mean of the marks obtained in each of the exercises. The average will be expressed on a scale of 0 to 10 points to three decimal places, rounded off to the nearest thousandth and, in the case of equidistance, to the nearest thousandth.	Same as at present. See article 9.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
This mark must be equal to or higher than four points in order to be considered for admission to official undergraduate university studies.	Same as at present. See article 9.1 of Order PJC/39/2024.
RD 534/2024	Commentary
The admission mark will be calculated by adding the weighted marks of the subjects determined by each university to the university entrance qualification, obtained in accordance with the provisions of the previous sections. For this purpose, those that are most favourable for each student will be selected from among these. This mark will be expressed to three decimal places, rounded off to the nearest thousandth and, in the case of equidistance, to the nearest thousandth.	Same as at present. See article 7.4 and 10.1 of RD/412/2014.

With regard to the basic characteristics of each of the exercises, Royal Decree 534/2024 establishes that:

RD 534/2024	Commentary
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RD 534/2024	Commentary
<p>The exercises will have a competency-based design through the application of the assessment criteria set out in the curricula established in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Decree on the minimum teaching of the baccalaureate.</p>	<p>As we will develop in the following section, this is the great novelty. The test refers to the competency-based design of the exercises. It should be borne in mind that until now the design of the exercises was conceptual and procedural.</p>
<p>The exercises will require students' creativity and capacity for critical thinking, reflection and maturity in the written resolution of a series of questions or tasks appropriate to the specific competences assessed.</p>	<p>Until now, the exercises did not require creativity. The cognitive level involved in "creating" is the highest level in Bloom's taxonomy. "Creating" necessarily implies a deep knowledge of basic knowledge and procedures, but it also requires an ability to think and reason. Therefore, teachers should work on these skills throughout the course in order for students to successfully pass this type of exercise.</p>
<p>Each of the exercises will last ninety minutes. There shall be a break of at least 30 minutes between consecutive tests.</p>	<p>As at present. See article 5.4 of Order PJC/39/2024. In this respect, nothing changes with respect to the current tests, but it should be borne in mind that setting competency-based tests requires time for students to think and reason about the answer to the exercise. Therefore, the number of questions or tasks in each exercise will have to be fewer than at present.</p>
<p>In each of the exercises, the total number of open-ended and semi-constructed response questions/tasks must account for at least 70 per cent of the exercise. Otherwise, questions may be open-ended, semi-constructed and closed-ended.</p>	<p>Currently, the total score for open-ended and semi-constructed response questions/tasks must be at least 50%. See article 6.2 of Order PJC/39/2024.</p>

RD 534/2024	Commentary
A single model exercise will be given for each subject. However, if deemed appropriate, some sections may include the possibility of choosing between several questions or tasks.	Currently, article 5.3 of Order PJC/39/2024 establishes that the student will have to answer, at his/her choice, a number of questions previously determined by the competent body. This number of questions shall be set in such a way as to enable all students to achieve the maximum mark in the test. In order to achieve the maximum number of questions set, all questions must be eligible for selection.
The exercises in the subjects Spanish Language and Literature II, Co-official Language and Literature II and Foreign Language II must be given and answered in the corresponding language. For the rest of the exercises, the education administrations will ensure that students have the possibility of choosing between the official languages of their territories	Same as at present. See article 8.1 of RD 310/2016.
If the questions or tasks require it, students may use auxiliary documents or tools, such as dictionaries, calculators, forms or tables, to complete the exercises in the different subjects.	In this respect nothing changes with respect to the current tests.
All exercises will include information for students on the correction and marking criteria.	In this respect nothing changes with respect to the current tests

RD 534/2024	Commentary
<p>In those exercises in which the questions or tasks proposed require the production of texts by the students, the assessment corresponding to the aspects related to coherence, cohesion, grammatical, lexical and spelling correctness of the texts produced, as well as their presentation, may not be less than 10 per cent of the mark for the corresponding question or task. However, the application of these parameters may be made more flexible in the case of students with specific educational support needs.</p>	<p>This aspect, as set out in the DR, is a novel aspect of the test.</p>

Regarding other aspects of the test, it should be noted that:

RD 534/2024	Commentary
<p>Two calls per year.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 6.1 of RD 310/2016.</p>
<p>Those who wish to improve the mark obtained in the entrance exam may sit the exam again, either in the extraordinary exam of the same academic year or in successive exams. In all cases, the entire test must be taken and the highest entrance qualification obtained will be taken into consideration.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 9.3 and 9.4 of Order PJC/39/2024.</p>

RD 534/2024	Commentary
<p>Once the marks have been published, each student, or their parents or legal guardians in the case of those who are minors, may submit to the chair of the selection board a request for review of the exercises in which it is considered that the general assessment criteria and specific correction and marking criteria may have been incorrectly applied. The deadline for submitting requests for review will be three working days from the day following the day after the publication of the marks.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 10.1 of RD 310/2016.</p>
<p>The exercises for which a request for revision has been submitted will be corrected by a different specialist teacher to the one who carried out the first correction. The latter will carry out an initial review in order to verify that all the questions have been assessed and that there are no material or arithmetical errors in the process of calculating the final mark. If appropriate, the mark shall be rectified, which may not be lower than the mark awarded in the first correction.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 10.2 of RD 310/2016.</p>

RD 534/2024	Commentary
<p>A second complete correction of the exercise will then be carried out in order to verify that the general evaluation criteria and specific marking and correction criteria have been correctly applied. The final mark for the exercise will be the arithmetic mean of the mark awarded after the first correction or, where appropriate, the rectified mark, and the mark awarded in the second correction. In the event of a difference of two or more points between these two marks, a third correction will be made ex officio by two persons other than the previous ones. The final mark will be the one agreed upon by these two persons.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 10.2 of RD 310/2016. There is a nuance in that, until now, in the event of a difference of two or more points between the two marks, a third correction was made ex officio, and the final mark was the arithmetic mean of the three marks. Now, in this case, if there is a difference of two or more points, a third correction will be made ex officio by two people other than the two who previously intervened. The final mark will be the one agreed by these two persons.</p>
<p>Once the review process has been completed, the organising committee shall adopt the decision establishing the final grades and shall notify the claimants. The decision will put an end to the administrative process.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 10.3 of RD 310/2016.</p>
<p>The student shall have the right to see the revised exercises once the review process established in this article has been completed in its entirety, within ten working days from the day following the day of notification of the resolution of the review.</p>	<p>Same as at present. See article 10.4 of RD 310/2016.</p>

2. NEW CURRICULUM, NEW PAU

As we have just seen, Royal Decree 534/2024, a basic regulation, establishes the new regulatory framework for the university entrance exams (PAU), to be applied from the next academic year 2024-2025.

To understand the impact of this new PAU, we must analyse the prologue of the RD: "It is necessary to define the basic characteristics of the test which, for this purpose, must be passed by students who hold the Baccalaureate diploma and which, in coherence with the curricular model developed from Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, must necessarily have as a reference the assessment criteria provided for in the curricula established in accordance with the provisions of Royal Decree 243/2022". It is logical and evident that university entrance examinations should always have as a reference point the assessment criteria of the current curriculum and, therefore, worked on by the students. What is new, therefore, is to reflect on the repercussions of applying a PAU that will take the assessment criteria of the LOMLOE curriculum as a reference point.

The curricula of all education laws, with the exception of LOMLOE, have always had, to a greater or lesser degree, criteria that assessed the degree of assimilation of the contents of the curriculum. For example, in the LOMCE, the assessment criteria appeared in the central column of a table in which, on the left, the content to be assessed with that criterion appeared and on the right appeared the learning standard that determined the meaning of the assessment of that criterion. It is true that, since the LOE curriculum, the key competences formally appeared and there was talk of the assessment of the level of performance of these competences, but it was not until the LOMLOE curriculum that we find a curriculum that presents criteria that assess "the level of performance of these specific competences". These specific competences determine, as defined in RD 243/2022, which establishes the minimum teaching requirements for the Baccalaureate, the performances that students must be able to display in activities or situations whose approach requires the basic knowledge of each subject. The specific competences constitute an element of connection between, on the one hand, the key competences and, on the other,

the basic knowledge of the subjects and the assessment criteria. Therefore, we find that the contents (basic knowledge in LOMLOE terminology) are a means and not an end to determine that students are competent in a subject. Despite the widespread belief in the academic sphere that competency-based assessment lowers the level of demand on students, the reality is that a competency-based assessment, in line with the regulations, requires students not only to master the contents of a subject, but also to be able to use them in different contexts to solve new situations that cannot be solved without mastering, internalising and understanding this basic knowledge.

This new system, with competences at its core, has been timidly tested in previous years, especially through soft law. Suffice it to look, for example, at the PAU exams in Spanish History in Galicia from 2013 to the current academic year (<https://www.ciug.gal/gal/abau/exames>).

At this point, it is worth asking ourselves: Are our students prepared for this change, which implies evolving to a competency-based model; and even more, are our teachers prepared to ensure that students learn competentially?

The answer to this question will be found next year if our students finally take the new PAU, designed in accordance with the provisions of Royal Decree 534/2024. In this regard, the pilot tests that some autonomous communities (CCAA), including the Autonomous Community of Galicia¹, have carried out, show that, without a methodological change on the part of teachers, the results obtained by students will be poor. It should be borne in mind that these pilot tests were implemented precisely without addressing the necessary methodological change and this has had a decisive influence on the results. In short, in the words of Professor Monereo: "Tell me how you assess and I will tell you how I learn". Students have always learned to develop the tests they were asked to take, as has been the case, for many years, with the text commentary they have to deal with, for example, in the subject of History of Philosophy. Our thesis is that this

¹ Grupo de trabajo de la Subdirección Xeral de Inspección e Avaliación do Sistema Educativo.

methodological change must be implemented decisively from the first day of class.

Another indispensable player in bringing about this change is the teaching staff, who must assess their students competently from the outset. But the reality is that, except for a small part of this group, especially in the field of foreign languages, they use assessment instruments that have changed little with respect to those that teachers used with us when we were students in an education system governed by the Law on General Education of 1970.

The great challenge that lies ahead is the generalisation of a system in which teachers must necessarily confront students with situations in which they have to think and understand what they are being exposed to, in order to then arrive at reasoning and solutions. It is not a matter of repeating over and over again what has been learned mechanically or by rote, but rather, based on in-depth knowledge of the subject, to reason out how to apply it to a different situation.

It is likely that a significant percentage of teachers will argue that this change cannot be made so quickly, that training and time are needed. It is clear that any change needs time, but this change has already been prepared, through different instruments that we include in the field of soft law. In fact, competency-based assessment has been formally established in our education system since 2006, with the implementation of the LOE. It is also true that training is needed, but more than a few public authorities have allocated large financial resources to competence training, but this has not been translated into real application in the classroom. Perhaps the crux of the matter lies in the lack of a key factor that has not been considered and which may bring about this transformation: determination. A clear will and determination is needed to bring about this evolution and, without a doubt, it is certain that, if a competency-based assessment in the PAU is confirmed, this reform will take place.

However, there is a major risk in the implementation of this new PAU. It is likely that many public authorities will continue to propose conceptual tests, claiming that they are competency-based. It would not be the first time that we have seen tests that claim to be competency-based, when in fact they are purely conceptual questions. For this reason, if we really want to bring about change, it is necessary to be vigilant so that a test that is not a competency test does not pass as a competency test. The main stumbling block lies, firstly, in the fact that a not inconsiderable percentage of teachers believe that the education they received is the best possible and the same as that needed by the students of today's world; and, secondly, perhaps the leaders of the Public Administrations of different autonomous communities will use this new model to once again oppose an issue which, beyond the obedience to the norm that any democratic system should promote and guarantee, should be analysed with technical criteria. "Today's students have immediate access to information, they live in a global, interconnected and constantly changing world, they live in liquid modernity", in the words of Zygmunt Bauman. It is this student body of 2023 that must learn to understand, to think and to live together. We often hear that our students do not have good reading comprehension skills and that they do not know how to think; the surprising thing is that those who make this criticism do not put their students in a position to understand a document, a graph, a study and then use their knowledge and their reasoning skills in other contexts.

Finally, the new PAU, which is called upon to close the circle of competency-based assessment, definitively overcoming purely memoristic systems, must be analysed bearing in mind the legal imperative of the LOE: "Article 1. The Spanish education system, configured in accordance with the values of the Constitution and based on respect for the rights and freedoms recognised therein, is inspired by the following principles: b) Equity, which guarantees equality of opportunity for the full development of the personality through education; c) The right to education, which guarantees equality of opportunity for the full development of the personality through education; d) The

right to education, which guarantees equality of opportunity for the full development of the personality through education, which guarantees equality of opportunity for the full development of the personality through education.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Students, teachers and the education system itself face a new challenge with the new PAU, with a competency-based design. It is possible that the change will not be direct but gradual, with different exercises including competency-based, conceptual and procedural questions. However, it is essential that the percentage and marking of questions of one type or another should be the same in all the autonomous communities in order to avoid differences between them. It would be logical to evolve towards an exclusively competency-based model, because this is the one that will provide our students with the tools to live in a constantly changing and evolving world. Our students need to be equipped with a good understanding and mastery of the fundamentals of each subject, enabling them to understand and adapt to this dynamic world. Designing competency-based tests requires a context that is both engaging and useful; it requires putting students in a position to develop their competence in linguistic communication, both comprehensively and expressively. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure that learners acquire an understanding of the concepts and procedures in order to be able to use them in new contexts.

The tests of the future PAU should make it possible to visualise students' abilities in different information input and output formats (text, graphs, tables, illustrations, etc.) and to offer the information to students as they will encounter it in real life. This means that the learner has to have more information than he/she

needs in order to be able to select the information he/she needs. It also means that the information will be shown in context.

It is true that RD 534/2024 has not addressed an issue that seems fundamental to guarantee the homogeneity and validation of the test at national level. In order to have this guarantee, the legislator could opt for two mechanisms: 1) to carry out a single test throughout Spain, which is neither possible nor advisable with the current scheme of the State and the Education Administrations; and 2) to establish a framework for the development of the tests by the different autonomous regions in which the percentage of questions of different cognitive levels in each exercise is established. Another aspect that is surprising is that the duration of each exercise is still ninety minutes. If we carry out competency-based exercises, it is necessary to give students more time so that they can reflect and mobilise all their knowledge.

Finally, we argue that students can embrace this change, but they need teachers, from the first day of class, to promote their students' learning so that they understand and master the fundamentals of each subject and are able to understand and solve new situations. Teachers of each subject are subject specialists and therefore have a deep understanding of the subject, which enables them to focus their teaching on developing competences rather than simply memorising content. Teachers must be committed to this approach; only in this way will our students be in a position to successfully face the new PAU and the learning that they will have to face in the future in order to participate fully in society and achieve full personal and social development. This is the only way to guarantee quality and equity, a legal imperative of the current education law.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to conclude by expressing our gratitude for their help and advice to Iván Carlos Area Carracedo, president of the Comisión Interuniversitaria de Galicia (CIUG), and to Azucena Arias Correa, teacher and guidance counsellor.

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