



European Schools

Office of the Secretary-General

Pedagogical Development Unit

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‘Organisation of studies in the secondary cycle’ Working Group – Interim report and proposals

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Meeting on 16, 17 and 18 April 2013 – Brussels

Members and guest members of the Working Group

Commission	Ms Christiane BARDOUX	guest
Director (Lux2)	Mr Emmanuel DE TOURNEMIRE	
Director (Bru1)	Ms Antonia RUIZ ESTURLA	guest
Inspector (BE)	Mr Pierre BRZAKALA	
Inspector (PT)	Ms Helena COELHO	
Inspector (DK)	Mr Lars DAMKJAER	
Inspector (AT)	Ms Karin ECKERSTORFER	
Inspector (FI)	Ms Tuulamarja HUISMAN	
Inspector (LU)	Mr Edouard RIES	
Inspector (IRL)	Ms Joan SUTTON	
Inspector (BE)	Ms Els VERMEIRE	
Inspector (NL)	Ms Ingrid WIJGH	
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OSGES	Ms Sofia GARDELI	
OSGES	Mr Giancarlo MARCHEGGIANO	
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Teachers	Mr Daniël VANDEVOIR	
Teachers	Ms Maire MAIRTIN	guest
Member BC (FR)	Ms Stephanie SEGUIN	guest

1. INTRODUCTION

This document illustrates a first report of the working group.

1.1 Mandate

The BoG created this working group and gave the following mandate:

for the sake of rationalisation of studies, with particular reference to options. The working group's composition would be based on that of the 'Languages' Working Group, to include drafting of a proposal for the new structure of studies in the secondary cycle, in order to improve its flexibility and efficiency, and for the financial aspects, as specified in the cost sharing debate

1.2 European Schools core curriculum principles and objectives

Article 4 of the Convention defines the core curriculum principles of the European School system:

The education given in the Schools shall be organised on the following principles:

- 1. the courses of study shall be undertaken in the languages specified in Annex II;*
- 2. that Annex may be amended by the Board of Governors to take account of decisions taken under Articles 2 and 32;*
- 3. in order to encourage the unity of the School, to bring pupils of the different language sections together and to foster mutual understanding, certain subjects shall be taught to joint classes of the same level. Any Community language may be used for these joint classes, insofar as the Board of Governors decides that circumstances justify its use;*
- 4. a particular effort shall be made to give pupils a thorough knowledge of modern languages;*
- 5. the European dimension shall be developed in the curricula;*
- 6. in education and instruction, the conscience and convictions of individuals shall be respected;*
- 7. measures shall be taken to facilitate the reception of children with special educational needs.*

The proposal for the new structure of studies in years S1-S3 of the secondary cycle, illustrated in Chapter 5, respects the foundations of European education, and reinforces some of the aspects

1.3 The mission of European Schools

'The mission of the European Schools is to provide a multilingual and multicultural education for nursery, primary and secondary level pupils.' (see www.eursec.org)

Within the WG 2 different points of view were expressed concerning the mission of the European Schools:

1.3.1. Point of view 1

To provide all pupils with multilingual and multicultural broad education of high quality, from early education to secondary school, and to equip upper secondary students for adult life and form a basis for further learning.

Behind these words the following is understood:

- The aim of the ES is to prepare most of pupils/students from nursery and primary cycles through secondary cycle to reach, after 9-10 years of schooling, at least an intermediate qualification (ISCED 2B-C leaving certificate)¹.
- In upper secondary, the aim of the ES is to prepare those students who are aiming at a diploma of end of general upper secondary school, the European baccalaureate (ISCED-3).
- In this respect European schooling would have to be organised in order to:
 - offer broad education for most students until ISCED-2; curriculum and assessment are set up to prepare for the ISCED-2 level
 - general oriented education after ISCED-2; the curriculum and assessment are set up to prepare for ISCED 5.

Motivation for point of view 1

The European Parliament resolution of 27 September 2011 on the European Schools system (2011/2036(INI)) put forward some recommendations on the educational aspects.

Those more closely linked to the overall organisation of the educational offer have been considered in this proposal:

48	Notes that the official 2.7 % failure rate reported by the Board of Governors does not reflect the great disparity in results across the European Schools, where there has for many years been an abnormally high failure rate in the French language section; calls on the Board of Governors to examine the educational and financial causes and consequences of this malfunction, of the failure rate in general and of the on-going high rates of children repeating a year
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¹ International Standard Classification of Education, see <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/isc97-en.pdf> for further info.

49	<p>Calls, once again, on the Board of Governors to work on providing alternatives for those students who drop out of preparation for the European baccalaureate, and to consider the creation of a school-leaving certificate other than the baccalaureate for students who wish to specialise in vocational courses; argues that any new certificate must undergo impact assessment and that it must be ensured that it adds value to existing qualification frameworks</p>
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Even though tables of equivalence are available, the ES curricula seem to prove far more academically-oriented than those in many member states. The founders of the system might have sought natural selection before the Baccalaureate years. Statistics prove that problems occur in S4-S5 especially. In the ES system, pupils are expected to study 12 or 13 subjects at a high academic level, whereas in some countries pupils can be awarded an upper secondary leaving certificate with a narrower selection of subjects.

According to the current common understanding within 27 EU Member States, most students should have received a sound basic full time education, after 9-10 years of schooling, by the age of 16 (see Eurydice, Compulsory Education in Europe, 2011/2012), whereas the main objective of the European Schools has been to reach Baccalaureate level.

Efficiency would increase if the school drop-out rate were -to be reduced (in line with the Europe 2020 Education target) and 90% of the pupils who started in secondary could be awarded some sort of certificate of ISCED-2 secondary studies, even if not necessarily leading on to ISCED-3C studies.

The mission of our education system could, therefore, be improved slightly in this respect.

We could aim to provide 9-10 years of proper basic schooling for nearly all pupils and then provide appropriate preparation for those pupils who wish to go on to ISCED-5 higher education.²

We should be able to provide students leaving our school system after compulsory education with an appropriate school leaving certificate which would facilitate their access to ISCED-3C education.

1.3.2. Point of view 2

To provide all pupils with multilingual and multicultural general education of high quality, from early education to secondary school.

Behind these words the following is understood:

- The aim of the ES is to prepare pupils/students from nursery and primary cycles through secondary cycles to reach the European baccalaureate.
- The European schooling is a holistic pedagogical project from nursery to secondary and aims at the ISCED-3 level. The curriculum and the assessment are set up to prepare all students for the European Baccalaureate.
- Students who leave the ES successfully at the age of 16 are entitled to a leaving certificate.

Motivation for point of view 2

²From “Key Data on Education in Europe 2012”, Euridyce, Section 1 - Structures: “*Across Europe, compulsory full-time education lasts for a minimum of 8 years, however, in the vast majority of countries, its duration is between nine and ten years.*” and “*A general trend towards longer compulsory schooling to guarantee the acquisition of core competences has been observed in almost all education systems since 1980. The various reforms that have been undertaken include the extension of compulsory schooling with the aim of reducing early school-leaving rates and, in a few cases, to ensure that all students obtain a certificate of basic education.*”

Repeating rates are discussed in different education systems nowadays. They often are the result of different issues and can be resolved when each issue is tackled in an appropriate way. The ES have started different processes of harmonisation, improvement of grading, assessing, etc...Also ES curricula have been adapted to new pedagogical insights. These arrangements should be given more time to prove their efficiency.

The question is if high repeating rates should lead to a system that excludes students because of a weaker performance at a certain moment in their schooling. This is in contradiction to the efforts that are made in most European countries to support students to jump from a lower pathway to a higher one (see also the philosophy of the Bologna process).

We should be careful not to drop our students at the age of 16 in a vacuum of schooling. Our schooling is quite particular and it will not be easy for those students to find an appropriate new school in which they will be able to go on where they stopped in the ES or to consolidate what they have learned in the ES.

If in some countries pupils can be awarded an upper secondary leaving certificate with a narrower selection of subjects than what is expected in the ES, we should also consider this option. In the ES system, pupils are expected to study 12 or 13 subjects at a high academic level. But what is the use of providing high academic education at a secondary level as it will be provided (repeated) in higher education?

We should make sure that the ES curricula are as academically-oriented as those in most member states but not more. In S4-S5 especially time should be provided to catch up when more time is needed. This would imply a modular organisation of independent learning monitored by teachers.

Rather than splitting up our schooling in two stages we should make sure that our secondary education prepares for the academic content but does not provide it. The quality of the performance of students is to be valued not the quantity.

2. HERITAGE OF THE “LANGUAGES WORKING GROUP”

Some mandates from the ‘Languages’ Working Group are still part of the new WG’s set of mandates:

- 1) the introduction of L3 from S1.
- 2) pupils would be obliged to continue studying two foreign languages up to the Baccalaureate or language competence certifications could be required on entering S6
- 3) the proposals from the ‘Classics’ Working Groups would be taken on board
- 4) the situation of SWALS should be evaluated
- 5) the cross-curricular project should be included in the Baccalaureate curriculum. The result of the pre-pilot phase was very positive. However, there would still appear to be a need to define evaluation and embedment.

The proposals which came to fruition within the ‘Languages’ WG have been embedded into the proposed new structure of studies in the first three years of the secondary cycle.

3. FINDINGS AND PROPOSALS

Some findings are presented below, with the proposals which would originate from them

Finding 1) Religion/Ethics: numbers show that the problem is caused by the division of the class into different groups (Ethics and Confessional Religions are still taught in L1, as far as possible, at all levels)

Proposal 1: Restrict the number of periods of Ethics/Religion in years S1-S3 to one.

Finding 2) L1: not surprisingly many L1 courses are created for fewer than 11 pupils; many of these are the L1 course created for SWALS; a significant number of courses (66 out of 402) are taught to small classes and are not SWALS courses.

Proposal 2: Operate more often, if not systematically, vertical grouping of L1 courses with a limited number of pupils.
This would imply slight amendment of 'Revision of the Decisions of the Board of Governors concerning the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools' 2011-01-D-33-en-7.

Finding 3) The large number of small L2 groups reveals a different problem: the same small numbers will also affect history, geography and economics groups, all courses taught in L2. A solution to this 'automatism' could be sought for the future.

Proposal 3: Systematic vertical grouping, when possible, of courses taught in L2 with very limited numbers of pupils.
This would imply slight amendment of 'Revision of the Decisions of the Board of Governors concerning the organisation of studies and courses in the European Schools' 2011-01-D-33-en-7

Finding 4) A distinction is often made between small and large schools: it would be rather more appropriate to focus on large and small sections. A class with only five pupils in a year group has all courses taught in L1, all with the same reduced number of pupils, whether in a small or in a large school.

Proposal 4: Add a new mandate aimed at 'revisiting' the concept of 'language group', alongside the existing sections. In the language groups, only L1, Mathematics and possibly another subject in L1 could be offered. In the past, the concept of group has been used when new countries have joined the EU, when pupil numbers did not justify the creation of a section.

The great political relevance of such a measure means that it will not yet be integrated into the proposal; attention will merely be drawn to the issue for the benefit of the BoG, which might possibly decide to give a new mandate for further study.

4. PROPOSAL FOR NEW ORGANISATION OF THE FIRST THREE YEARS OF THE SECONDARY CYCLE

The main differences are highlighted in red. The current structure of studies is appended for comparison.

S1	1-5	6-9	10-14	15-16	17-19	20-22	23-26	27	28	29-30	31-32	Compulsory courses
	L1	Mat	L2	L3	EP	HS	Sc	Ict	R/E	Art	Mus	

In S1 number of periods would stay 32; all periods stay compulsory and include two periods of tuition in L3.

Comment: It should be noted that these two extra periods of L3 are aimed at better achievement for pupils only, since the final level of achievement in L3 would remain the same; this measure could then be considered as a measure to reduce failures in L3.

S2	1-5	6-9	10-13	14-16	17-19	20-22	23-26	27	28	29-30	31-32	Compulsory courses
	L1	Mat	L2	L3	EP	HS	Sc	Ict	R/E	Mus	Art	
	+2	Optional courses										
	Lat											

In S2 the minimum number of periods would become 32, while the maximum would stay 34; periods 1-32 are compulsory.

S3	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-25	26	27-28	29-30	Compulsory courses	
	L1	Mat	L2	L3	EP	HS	Sc	R/E	Mus	Art		
	+2	+2	Optional courses									
	Lat	Ict										

In S3 the minimum number of periods would become 30, while the maximum would become 32; periods 1-30 are compulsory.

Comment: ICT in S3 becomes also optional.

This proposal has been discussed and agreed in among the Working Group with these two exceptions:

- 1) The Belgian Inspectors and the Representatives of Teachers could not support the reduction of Religion/Ethics to one period per week.
- 2) The Representatives of Teachers could not support the proposal without a consulting their colleagues.

5. PROPOSAL FOR GRADUAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW ORGANISATION OF THE SECONDARY CYCLE

Implementation of the new structure for years S1-3 could be applied all at once from the 2013-2014 school year.

6. PROPOSALS

The preparatory committees are requested to express their opinion on:

- 1) the general aim of increasing the average size of groups (see Annex, point 1)
- 2) the proposal for new organisation of the first three years of secondary cycle (see 4)

support the requests for:

A) a mandate to study conditions for the continuation of sections in secondary (see. 3, proposal 7; sub-group of the 'Organisation of secondary studies' WG)

OPINION OF THE JOINT BOARD OF INSPECTORS:

At its meeting of 6 February 2013, the Joint Board of Inspectors (JBI) scrutinised the proposals put forward in point 6 above by the 'Organisation of studies in the secondary cycle' WG (2013-01-D-78-en-1):

The discussions focused primarily on the proposal set out in point 1), on which the JBI did not reach a consensus.

The JBI nevertheless recommended that the WG should continue its work on the proposals put forward in the document and supported the request for a mandate to study the conditions for the continuation of sections in secondary.

In the event of agreement, the JBI requested that implementation should start as from September 2014.

The JTC was informed of the JBI's opinion during its meeting.

OPINION OF THE JOINT TEACHING COMMITTEE:

At its meeting of 7 and 8 February 2013, the Joint Teaching Committee (JTC) scrutinised the following proposals put forward by the 'Organisation of studies in the secondary cycle' WG in document 2013-01-D-78-en-1:

- 1) the general aim of increasing the average size of groups (see Annex, point 1);
- 2) the proposal for new organisation of the first three years of the secondary cycle (see point 4).

The JTC was also invited to support the request for a mandate to study the conditions for the continuation of sections in secondary (see point 3, proposal 7; subgroup of the 'Organisation of studies in the secondary cycle' WG).

After the discussions, the JTC did not reach a consensus but recommended that discussions on the question be continued by the Budgetary Committee and the Board of Governors.

The JTC wished, however, to make the following recommendations:

- Were the system to be implemented, it should not happen until September 2014 at the earliest.
- The financial and social consequences entailed by the proposals should be evaluated before they enter into force.
- The JTC also recommended that the WG should continue its work on the other proposals put forward in the document and supported the request for a mandate to study the conditions for the continuation of sections in secondary.

The Joint Teaching Committee hereby brings this document, including a financial statement on the impact of the proposal concerning secondary years 1, 2 and 3, to the Budgetary Committee's attention and invites it to recommend to the Board of Governors that it take a position on the proposals put forward in document 2013-01-D-78-en-2 and on the JTC's recommendations.

OPINION OF THE BUDGETARY COMMITTEE

At its meeting of 19 and 20 March 2013, the Budgetary Committee scrutinised the interim report and proposals of the 'Organisation of studies in the secondary cycle' WG and the opinions of the JBI and the JTC.

The Budgetary Committee acknowledged the WG's importance and recommended that its work should continue.

It wished the debate at Board of Governors level to give a clear indication of what the European Schools' mission actually is.

The Budgetary Committee also recommended that the Board of Governors should approve proposals 1) and 2) and the new mandate request, as set out in point 6 of this document.

FINANCIAL SHEET

Financial impact S1-3

There are some important elements of uncertainty linked to pupils' options: how many pupils will opt for extra offers (Lat in S2; Lat or ICT in S3).

So calculations could be only roughly performed, based on past year pupils' choices, done under different conditions.

S1:

-1 period Rel/Ethics; 180* courses created

-1 period L1; 100 courses created

+2 periods L3; 100 courses created

In total some 60 periods less, equivalent to around 180.000 euro of savings

S2:

-1 period Rel/Ethics; 170* courses created

-1 period Act Comp; 10 courses created

+2 periods Lat; 70 courses created

In total some 20 periods less, equivalent to around 60.000 euro of savings

S3:

-1 period Rel/Ethics; 150* courses created

-2 periods Lat; 70 courses created

In total, some 270 periods less, equivalent to around 800.000 euro of savings.

In this estimate it is considered that same number of pupils will opt for the ICT optional course as they did this school year.

* Religion and Ethics courses are sometimes vertically grouped, so some courses less are counted as for possible savings

ANNEX - PREPARATORY DATA AND THEIR ANALYSIS

The OSG has produced different tables on:

- repeats
- combination of options in S6 and S7
- data on courses with a limited number of pupils

They are all appended to the document. A short commentary on main findings is given below.

1. Data on courses with limited number of pupils

Data can be found in Annexes 1 and 2

All courses, created in 2011-2012 and in all schools, with up to 10 pupils are listed.

Then courses have been grouped by subject.

It is a fact that many courses have up to 10 pupils.

In the 2011-2012 school year a total of 8817 courses were created across all European Schools, 2409 of which had up to 10 pupils, more than 27%.

In the 2012-2013 school year a total of 9161 courses were created across all European Schools, 2549 of which had up to 10 pupils, again more than 27%.³

The average size of groups in the European Schools was 16 in 2011-2012, while the maximum size of groups ranges between 25, 28 and 30. In Europe the average class size is 25, while in most the countries the maximum size is 28.⁴

A general aim might be to increase the average size of groups or, in other words, limit as much as possible the number of groups with a number of pupils very considerably lower than the maximum size.

2. Table on combination of options in years S6 and S7

Data can be found in annexes 3 and 4

This study has been restricted to S6-S7 (in those years pupils have more freedom to choose their options) and to large schools only (in small schools fewer options can be created). The sample comprises around 900 pupils.

If there were a need to streamline the system, this table could show how options are currently frequently combined.

Analysis of the data can help in finding courses to be organised in parallel, in order to minimise the structural impact on pupils' choices. Courses organised in parallel in the timetable cannot both be present in a pupil's timetable.

³ Learning support and special education needs courses are not included in the calculation

⁴ 'Key Data on Education in Europe 2012', Euridyce

3. Data on repeats

Data can be found in Annexes 5 to 10

The number of pupils having to repeat fell from 2.7% in 2010 to 2.2% in 2012.

One point requiring attention is the differences among schools.

The conclusion to be drawn from this table was that the 'Repeats' Working Group had done its job and the schools have started taking the recommendations on board.

Most of the repeats are in secondary, whereas in most of the schools repeats are exceptional in primary.

Some pupils seem to be already lost from S1 onwards (6-8 failures).

Nevertheless, a considerable number of failing pupils in years S1-S3 have up to four failures and for these pupils there would appear to be scope for an improvement in their schooling which should not be so difficult to achieve.

It is clear that the subjects which these pupils have failed the most are mathematics and science, while the differences in the percentage of failures that can be detected among the other subjects are not so large. In some subjects failures are really exceptional.

The most critical subjects in S4 and S5 seem to be physics/ chemistry/ mathematics/ biology.

Also relevant is the percentage of pupils failing L1.

All these are compulsory courses.

Again, for pupils with a limited number of failures, physics/ chemistry/ biology/ mathematics are the courses they failed the most.

Many pupils failed three of these scientific subjects: then pupils only needed to fail one other subject to have to repeat the year, without discussion, according to the rules in force.

In S6, the same pattern could not be found: most probably because pupils' curriculum in year S6 becomes much more flexible and some sort of selection has already occurred. .

The distribution of failures is therefore more regular across all the subjects.

When the number of failures in mathematics with that in L1 is compared, in years S1-S6, it is found that it is double. L1 is a subject offered to the whole class and mathematics is offered at two different levels from S4 onwards, so the class is split into two groups and normally has fewer pupils.

Despite the fact that the class is divided, the results are not only no better, but in fact significantly worse.

Annexes to the annex:

- Annex 1a: List of courses with limited number of pupils–by course
- Annex 1b: List of courses with limited number of pupils –by number of students per course
- Annex 2: Courses in the system with fewer than 11 pupils S1-S6
- Annex 3: Clash table: combination of options in S6-S7 for Brussels and Luxembourg
- Annex 4: List of combination of options in S6-S7 for Brussels and Luxembourg, subject by subject
- Annex 5: Data on failures P1-S6 2010-2012 per school
- Annex 6: All failures in S1-S3
- Annex 7: All failures in S4-5
- Annex 8: Pupils with limited number of failures in S4-5
- Annex 9: All failures in S6
- Annex 10: Failures in L1 and mathematics for all pupils from S1-S6
- Annex 11: Current organisation of the secondary cycle