



Schola Europaea

Office of the Secretary-General

Pedagogical Development Unit

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Proposal of the ‘Organisation of studies in the secondary cycle’ Working Group

BOARD OF INSPECTORS (SECONDARY)

Meeting on 8 October 2013 - Brussels

JOINT TEACHING COMMITTEE

Meeting on 10 and 11 October 2013 - Brussels

1 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 **Mandate**

The Board of Governors created this working group at its meeting in Oxford of 18-20 April 2012, giving it 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.”

Following this working group's initial report, presented at the Joint Teaching Committee's meeting of 7 and 8 February 2013, and following the opinion on the subject submitted by the latter, at its meeting in Brussels on 16-18 April 2013, the Board of Governors:

*“ - gave a mandate to a sub-group of the ‘Organisation of studies’ Working Group to study conditions for the continuation of sections in secondary;
- was largely in favour of increasing the average size of groups;
- requested the Working Group to continue and deepen reflection on the proposal for years S1-3: to that end, the General Secretariat would produce a sufficiently detailed written summary, so as to be able to direct the working group's work effectively.*

As regards the European Schools' mission, a very broad consensus was reached amongst the members of the Board of Governors on the vision described in 1.3.1, i.e. paying greater attention to pupils not aiming to take the European Baccalaureate. The debate must continue within the Working Group on the cost and the other implications of the certification which would need to be awarded to such pupils.

The Board of Governors requested the ‘Organisation of studies’ Working Group to continue and deepen its reflection, taking on board the observations made, in order to present a comprehensive new proposal, encompassing S1 to S7, which would be put to the vote at the Board of Governors' December meeting.”

1.2 **Principles and objectives of the European Schools' core curriculum**

Article 4 of the Convention defines the core curriculum principles of the European Schools 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 proposals for the new organisation of studies in the secondary cycle, as presented in this document, respect the foundations of European education and reinforce some of its aspects, by setting them in a context of more rational and coherent use of resources.

1.3 Mission of the European Schools

As its April 2013 meeting, the Board of Governors came out in favour of the wording of the mission set out below:

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.

The underlying meaning of these words is as follows:

- The aim of the European Schools is to prepare most pupils/students, from the nursery and primary cycles and throughout the secondary cycle, to reach, after ten years of schooling, a standard of attainment giving them at least an intermediate qualification (school leaving certificate equivalent to the ISCED 2B-C leaving certificate¹ for pupils leaving the system).
- In upper secondary (S6-S7), the European Schools seek to prepare students for the award of a general upper secondary school leaving certificate, i.e. the European Baccalaureate (ISCED-3 level).
- Schooling in the European Schools should therefore be organised in such a way as to offer:
 - a broad education for most students up to ISCED-2, the curriculum and assessment being designed to prepare for that level;
 - a generally oriented education after ISCED-2, the curriculum and assessment being designed to prepare for ISCED-5.

Our system's efficiency would be increased if the school drop-out rate were to be reduced (in line with the EU's objective on education under its 2020 Strategy) and if 90% of the pupils who started in secondary could continue their education up to the upper secondary level or could be awarded a school leaving certificate equivalent to ISCED-2 level, even if the certificate did not necessarily lead on to ISCED-3A-B level studies.

We should aim to provide ten years of proper basic schooling for almost all pupils/students and then provide appropriate preparation for those wishing to go on to higher education (ISCED-5 level).

At the same time, we would be able to provide students leaving our school system after compulsory education (S5) with an appropriate ISCED-2 level school leaving certificate, allowing them access to ISCED-3C level education elsewhere.

2. HERITAGE OF THE 'LANGUAGES' WORKING GROUP

Some mandates from the 'Languages' Working Group still form part of this Working Group's set of mandates:

- 1) teaching of L3 from S1;
- 2) obligation for pupils either to continue studying two foreign languages up to the Baccalaureate or to obtain language competence certification on entering S6;
- 3) the proposals from the 'Classics' Working Groups would be taken on board;
- 4) the situation of SWALS should be evaluated;

¹ International Standard Classification of Education, see <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/isc97-en.pdf> for further information.

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 assessment and embedment.

The proposals which came to fruition within the 'Languages' Working Group have been embedded in the proposed new organisation of studies in the secondary cycle.

3 PROPOSALS FOR NEW ORGANISATION OF THE SECONDARY CYCLE

3.1 Philosophy of the present proposals

- Adapt the studies offer to **students' interests** faced with the modern world's demands.
- Take account of **the opening up of the European Schools system** and of the recommendations made in the different reports: January 2009 University of Cambridge – International Examinations report on the European Baccalaureate, recent reports of the Chairmen of the European Baccalaureate Examining Board, May 2011 Cavada report.
- Propose solutions for greater **rationalisation** of courses in the secondary cycle.
- Present students with **the same offer of courses** for all the European Schools and Accredited Schools and bring together in a single document information which is currently to be found in various places.
- **Guarantee a general education** for all students around the eight key competences for lifelong learning.

3.2 Baseline data

The data on courses created in the secondary cycle in the two years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 showed that a third of the courses organised in the schools have fewer than 11 students.

A more detailed analysis showed that the subjects in which the majority of these courses are concentrated are Non-confessional Ethics/Religion, L1 and Mathematics. The number of option courses in S6-S7 with fewer than 11 students is also large.

The reasons for the large number of undersubscribed courses are different according to the areas:

- The large number of small-sized L1 courses is associated essentially with courses created for SWALS (Students Without A Language Section); because, almost paradoxically, under the rules, those courses can have up to 30 students in a group.

The teaching of L1 is a pillar of our education system; the changes to the rules for the composition of courses/groups (2011-01-D-33-en-8) should ultimately lead to a marked reduction in the number of L1 courses created for a very limited number of students (quite often one or two), thanks to extension of the practice of vertical grouping of two consecutive year groups.

- The large number of small-sized Non-confessional Ethics/Religion courses is associated essentially with the use of L1 for their teaching from S1 to S7 and their wide differentiation: a group/class (even L1) is divided first between Non-confessional Ethics and Religion and then again between the different religious confessions.

Whilst it is understandable that up to a certain age, the use of L1 for these courses is important, from a certain year group and based on parallelism with other subjects, the use of L2 is proposed. In the last two years, a new course, taught in L2, where students would no longer be divided up according to their religious confession or otherwise, is proposed.

- The large number of small-sized Mathematics courses is associated essentially with early horizontal differentiation of this course (as from S4 and up to S7); under the rules currently in force, this course, taught in L1, can have up to 30 students.

If the section has a single L1 group/class, which is predominantly the case, this group is divided in S4 between students who opt for the Math4 course and those who opt for the Math6 course. This means that for the same group of students, who have 4 periods of L1, 10 periods have to be created for the Mathematics courses.

It is worthwhile pointing out that this specific organisation involves only the Mathematics courses in the European Schools, with the result that this subject accounts on its own for 17% of the periods to be created in S4.

This horizontal differentiation is often justified by the need to divide students into homogeneous groups in order to achieve better learning outcomes.

However, horizontal differentiation of Mathematics teaching is far from being a practice common to all education systems at this level; for example, there is no such practice in the International Baccalaureate system: in that system there is horizontal differentiation only in the last two years of studies (which correspond to S6 and S7 in our system).

The results of international studies, whose objective is to guide policy makers, indicate that systems with a low level of early horizontal differentiation achieve above-average results, as a general rule, and show less socio-economic inequality.²

“The common sense expectation that institutional differentiation enhances variation in student performance is not confirmed when inequity and equity are measured by variation in student performance.”³

“In summary, the relationship between quality and the degree of institutional differentiation is in fact negative, contrary to the belief that institutional differentiation promotes quality at the expense of equity. Countries with selective education systems, on average, perform less well than countries with more comprehensive education systems.”³

“There is therefore a relatively strong association between institutional differentiation (...) and an increased likelihood for students of the same age to be enrolled in different grade levels.”³

In *‘Mathematics Education in Europe: Common Challenges and National Policies’*, published by Eurydice, we discover that: *“For example, PISA found that in countries where more students repeat grades, overall results tend to be worse and social disparities tend to be larger. Also, in countries and schools where students are assigned to different tracks/streams based on their abilities, overall performance is not improved, but socio-economic differences are enhanced. In addition, in the education systems where selection takes place at a younger age larger social differences tend to*

² See PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? RESOURCES, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

³ See Results from PISA 2000: SCHOOL FACTORS RELATED TO QUALITY AND EQUITY

be apparent (OECD 2004, pp. 263-264). These tendencies are consistent in every round of PISA assessment and are also valid for achievement in reading and science.”⁴

It is tempting to believe that a reduction in the size of groups would have an obvious positive effect. The same publications refer to the work of Professor Hattie. *“From the evidence of over 300 studies of tracking, Hattie (2009) concluded that that the average effect of size on attainment is small, and this applies in mathematics as well as other subjects. Hattie goes on to say that ‘tracking has minimal effects on learning outcomes and profound negative equity effects’. He concludes by stating that ‘the quality of the teaching and the nature of the student interactions are the key issues, rather than the compositional structure of the classes.’”³*

Reducing the number of students per group seems in actual fact to have a greater impact on teachers’ working conditions and little impact on learning.

“Information from curriculum and other steering documents demonstrates that in half of all European countries mathematical subject content is the same for all students, regardless of ability level.”⁵

That being said, since horizontal differentiation in Mathematics is a practice long embedded in our system, it is not proposed here that it be purely and simply abandoned. In S4, the first year of the pre-specialisation cycle, all students would take the same Mathematics course, but some of them, wishing to prove their interest in broadening and deepening their knowledge of Mathematics, would be able to opt for a more advanced 3-period course, provisionally called ‘Mat+’. It would be an intermediate step before differentiating between the Math4 and Math6 courses in S5. The pedagogical advantages of such a structure have been indicated.

Students would also benefit from greater flexibility to move if appropriate from one level to the other of the Mathematics course. Those who might have opted for the Mat+ course and who might be experiencing too many difficulties would easily be able to drop it and remain in their ‘standard’ Mathematics course. Conversely, those who might not have opted for the Mat+ course and might realise their interest in Mathematics belatedly would be more easily able to add it to their curriculum without having to change their ‘standard’ Mathematics course.

In order to understand better the impact of such a measure on the sections, small and large, a simulation has been produced on the basis of the current school year’s figures.

If this proposal were to be accepted, the maximum size of Mathematics groups in secondary year 4 would be limited, as would also be the case for the scientific subjects.

⁴ Mathematics Education in Europe: Common Challenges and National Policies - Eurydice

⁵ See Results from PISA 2000: SCHOOL FACTORS RELATED TO QUALITY AND EQUITY

3.3 Proposed new organisation of studies in the secondary cycle (see ANNEX I)

Annex I describes the proposed new organisation of studies in the secondary cycle.

In practice, this new organisation would be phased in as follows:

- From September 2014 for years S1 to S3. In S3, the Latin option would still exceptionally be allocated 4 periods for the 2014-2015 school year;
- From September 2015 for S4;
- From September 2016 for S5.

With reference to the proposal made for S2 and S3, INTERPARENTS objects to the choice between Latin and ICT which would be imposed on pupils. INTERPARENTS hopes that the ICT option will not be introduced at the expense of other courses. In this model, the pupil would be able to choose the two options at the same time.

Similarly, COSUP, the Staff Committee, INTERPARENTS and Mr Brzakala, the Belgian secondary cycle Inspector, who is responsible for Mathematics, are opposed to the proposal for the teaching of Mathematics. They prefer the current approach, i.e. two separate courses – Math4 and Math6 – to the modular approach proposed for S4 alone.

With reference to the proposal for reorganisation of years S6 and S7, the Working Group recommends that the impact of the proposals made for years S6 and S7 on the European Baccalaureate's validity and its recognition by Universities should be the subject of an external analysis, commissioned from a university centre or a network of university centres.

Although INTERPARENTS acknowledges that pupils cannot have unlimited choices, it is opposed to this approach, which seeks to bring about root and branch reform of the system in force. It would be more advisable to build on the existing system and enhance it via the current multidisciplinary approach, which is much liked, particularly by Universities. INTERPARENTS therefore wishes flexibility to be retained.

4 CRITERIA FOR THE CONTINUITY OF SECTIONS IN THE SECONDARY CYCLE

In response to the mandate given to it by the Board of Governors, the 'Organisation of studies' Working Group also addressed the issue of the continuity of language sections between the primary and secondary cycles in the European Schools.

The vertical grouping of pupils is much easier to implement in the primary cycle than in the secondary cycle. This means that when a section has a very limited number of pupils, whereas in the primary cycle the average size of courses can be increased by grouping pupils vertically, in the secondary a large number of courses taught in the section's L1 with groups in which there are very few pupils are to be found.

For that reason it is proposed that the following criteria be adopted.

4.1 Language sections currently in existence in the secondary cycle

When during school year n , the number of students from P5 to S6 is under 50, the language section will not continue beyond primary year 5 as from the following school year ($n+1$). The section will be phased out: first year group S1 in $n+1$ and subsequently the next year group, each consecutive school year, until the secondary cycle of the language section has been closed down.

The section's students will therefore gradually acquire the status of SWALS.

4.2 Language sections currently in existence in the primary cycle but not in the secondary cycle

When the number of pupils from N1 to P5 is under 50, the language section will not continue beyond primary year 5.

5 PROPOSALS

It is proposed that the Board of Inspectors (Secondary) and the Joint Teaching Committee should recommend that the Board of Governors approve:

- a) the proposal for reorganisation of secondary studies from S1 to S5 described in points 1.1 and 1.2 of Annex I to this document and the proposed calendar for its implementation described in point 3.3 of this document ;
- b) the proposal that a mandate be requested of the Board of Governors to commission an external analysis of the impact of the proposals made for years S6 and S7 on the European Baccalaureate's validity and its recognition by Universities;
- c) the proposal made for continuity of language sections from the primary cycle to the secondary cycle, as set out in points 4.1 and 4.2 of this document.