

## INTERPARENTS

**ALICANTE - BERGEN - BRUSSELS I, II, III, IV - CULHAM - FRANKFURT  
KARLSRUHE - LUXEMBOURG I, II - MOL - MÜNCHEN - VARESE**

*– THE ASSOCIATION OF THE PARENTS ASSOCIATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN SCHOOLS –*

### **I. Introduction**

After sixty years of experience, the model of the European Schools remains a unique opportunity to build citizens who, without ceasing to look at their countries of origin with love and pride, become Europeans in spirit.<sup>1</sup> These values have been reconfirmed by the preamble of the staff regulations that will enter into force on 1 January 2014, requiring that multilingual and multicultural education be supported for all children of the staff of the European institutions.

The high academic standards and quality of the European Schools are widely recognised. Students must study ten or eleven subjects to succeed in the European Baccalaureate and are required to study their own language and at least one foreign language to a high level. Despite the large compulsory element in the European Baccalaureate, students are able to build up a programme which reflects their particular interests and strengths.<sup>2</sup> This aspect must be preserved in any future proposal.

The European Baccalaureate entitles admission to any university in the territory of any member state on the same terms as nationals of that member state with equivalent qualifications. To safeguard this entitlement, the secondary cycle structure should accommodate the peculiarities of national university admission requirements in the various member states. This necessitates a flexible system enabling students to make the appropriate choices.

The Board of Governors created this working group to propose a new structure for the secondary cycle in order to improve its flexibility and efficiency. However, the Secretariat General has presented a proposal based on a streaming system (further referred to as "the Proposal") that, on the contrary, reduces the flexibility of the system without any appropriate assessment of the consequences of such a reduction.

It is essential to base a reform like the one proposed on a detailed impact assessment including an adequate number of considered options. Such an assessment should consider first and foremost the pedagogical effects of such a reform; in this context, the particular effects of any proposal in relation to university admissions in all member states need to be carefully examined. The Proposal is driven as much by financial as pedagogical concerns. Yet a proper analysis of the financial impact of the Proposal or any alternative proposal based on the Principle of Proportionality has yet to be released.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Monnet (1953)

<sup>2</sup> The European Baccalaureate. July 2013. UK Department of Education

## **II. Philosophy and objective of the European Schools**

It is impossible to reform the structure of the secondary cycle without a clear view of the underlying philosophy and objectives of the European Schools.

The European School system is first of all a comprehensive system granting admission to all students. It therefore must optimise the educational outcomes for all students, taking into account differing levels of ability and different areas of strength. It is not, and should not be thought of, as an elite school system, as this implies that attention is focused on the brightest students to the detriment of others. All students have the right to be educated through to 18 years of age in a manner that allows them to achieve to the best of their abilities.

The European School system offers a general qualification; it is not a specialist school, as is sometimes quoted. Consequently, it should allow students to make a certain distinction of subjects that reflect their own individual strengths while maintaining a general education through to the European Baccalaureate. Thus it should offer a balanced combination of subjects across a wide curriculum.

The European Schools' mission is to provide mother-tongue education for students whose parents may be required to change their place of work or return to their country of origin. To this end, the system should enable pupils to study a broad range of subjects (particularly the sciences) in their mother tongue with qualified teachers.

## **III. Pedagogical and economic impact of the Proposal**

The Proposal risks undermining the current “generalist” approach, an approach which has thus far been one of the great advantages of the European School system and which has enabled students to choose combinations of science and humanities subjects in keeping with their interests, needs and abilities. Under the Proposal, students are practically obliged to choose a path from as early as S3, some subjects being irrecoverable once they have been dropped. Such constraints are not in line with the mission of the European Schools and are impractical given the nature and mobility of the student body. Other less restrictive alternatives for cost saving should be sought.

The 7-student rule is problematic for many subjects and combinations and will lead, if combined with streaming, to a further narrowing of choices, particularly in small language sections. In certain circumstances, schools should be given the option to lower the threshold to 5 students.

The proposed measures on alternative teaching languages will lead to situations in which students will be required to study science subjects in their L3. This is simply unacceptable. The teaching of history and geography in L2 already presents a challenge for students and teachers alike, and the recent study of repeat rates suggests that some of the science subjects are problematic even in L1. The introduction of science teaching in L3 can only lead to increased failure rates. The European School should not compromise the basic science education by denying students their prerogative to be taught in L1.

We stress the need for solutions to be found in the event of significant changes in the languages of teaching. Any decision to extend the use of L2, L3 or HCL should be preceded by an assessment of current state of language teaching across all sections. The assessment should examine differences in the use of streaming, teaching methods, and student performance in subjects taught in L2. The situation of SWALS students in particular merits attention.

If more emphasis must be given to L2, L3 or HCL, the system should be adapted to prepare students for the new challenges. In this context, one might consider an earlier introduction of L3 (potentially already in the primary cycle) coupled with an extended transition period. Interim measures should be implemented to support those students who have already made their language choices under present rules and conditions.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, a reform pushing for more L2/L3 teaching cannot be taken up before ensuring that well-qualified EN teachers are available in the numbers needed. We are concerned about the UK government's decision to discontinue the secondment of teachers.

#### **a. Cycle S1-S3**

1. We support the introduction of L3 in S1.
2. We oppose the **false choice between LAT and ICT** given in S3. This disadvantages those who wish to learn Latin by increasing the possibility that the minimum number of students will not be reached, particularly in the smaller schools.<sup>4</sup> There should be a way to introduce ICT into the observation cycle without endangering other subjects.

#### **b. Cycle S4-S5**

1. We strongly oppose the **modular approach to mathematics** in S4 and S5 (or, according to the alternative proposal, only in S4). In a comprehensive school system with heterogeneous groups, such a proposal is not justified and will reduce the performance and achievement of students with more and less ability alike.
2. We oppose the **consolidated pass mark** for BIO, CHE and PHY as well as for GEO and HIS. While we remain strongly in favour of teaching these subjects as separate subjects (and against the continuation of SCI and HUMSCI beyond S3), each subject needs to be marked separately to provide proper feedback on student performance.

We understand and support the objectives of this proposal, to reduce the number of repeats due to failure in a single one of these subjects. But we believe that the problem of poor marks should be addressed through improved teaching and marking practices, including those in S1-S3 SCI. Rather than consolidating marks, the rules on repeats could be modified such that failure in one science

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<sup>3</sup> Please observe the legal principle of "nulla poene sine lege" in case of a change of rules and system. A student in the existing system must not be penalised by rules coming into force after he has made his language choices for L1, L2, L3 etc. In consequence, a change of the systems must provide simultaneously the opportunity for students to revise their choices made in the past and to adapt them to the conditions and requirements of the new system.

<sup>4</sup> Moreover, those who successfully enrol in Latin, or other options endangered by the 7-student rule, may be compelled to switch from L2 to L3 teaching in the course of their studies

subject in S4 would be compensated by a good mark in another science subject. Thus the mathematical effect of averaging marks could be achieved while avoiding consolidated marks.

We also oppose giving students who don't intend to choose the "science filière" the opportunity to drop PHY or CHE at the end of S4.

### 3. Language of teaching in S4-S5:

We strongly oppose L2, L3 and HCL teaching for mathematics. There is evidence from the International Association for Education that performance in mathematics is strongly linked to the language of teaching.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, we believe that the 7-student rule should not apply to mathematics. Students should be allowed to continue MAT in L1 independently of whether it is MAT4 or MAT6 of any group size.

We agree with giving students an option to follow courses in L2, L3 or HCL instead of L1, but this should in no way affect the number of courses on offer in L1. L2, L3 and HCL options should not serve to deplete already small groups.

For courses other than languages, the allocation of marks should be based on subject competence rather than linguistic ability. Regrettably, there is a tendency for teachers to mark in these subjects based on linguistic competence. This means that the playing field is not level when a subject is taught in L2, L3 or HCL.

### c. Cycle S6-S7

We strongly oppose the "filières" system presented in the Proposal. We recognise that the choice cannot be unlimited, especially in a situation of strained budget resources. However, the system proposed contains a number of restrictions that are not justified by either budgetary or pedagogical constraints. As a general consideration, any restriction in the offer should be appropriately justified.

1. We find the proposed streaming **unnecessarily restrictive**. There are several subject combinations currently popular among students that would no longer be possible.<sup>6</sup> (See Annex I for the clash table.) The unjustified restrictions would work against the plurality and richness of the different university systems, making it difficult to meet the requirements of the various national systems. In particular, many newer programs and qualifications require a balanced combination of humanities and science subjects not possible under the proposed system.

The proposed streaming would also oblige students to make choices too early in their educational careers<sup>7</sup> and to take four-period options that they neither need nor want, increasing the risk of demotivation and failure. The Proposal increases the clash index to 79%. (See Annex II for clash table of the "filières" system.)

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<sup>5</sup> International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. "TMSS 2011 International Results in Mathematics." ([http://timss.bc.edu/timss2011/downloads/T11\\_IR\\_Mathematics\\_FullBook.pdf](http://timss.bc.edu/timss2011/downloads/T11_IR_Mathematics_FullBook.pdf))

<sup>6</sup> For environmental studies, it should be possible to choose BIO4 and GEO4 (or even ECO4); for psychology, it should be possible to choose BIO4, MAT5 and PHI4; for architecture, it should be possible to choose ART, PHY4 and MAT5; for geology, it should be possible to choose GEO4 and PHY4.

<sup>7</sup> Only students who have chosen Mat+ in S4 can opt for the "science filiere".

2. We strongly oppose the **introduction of HUMSCI and SCI** in S6 and S7. These subjects are unknown in a majority of member states and are not recognised by university admission authorities.

We are concerned that with the introduction of HUMSCI and SCI, the level of teaching would suffer. In most member states teachers are not trained in both geography and history or in a combination of biology, chemistry and physics. In our opinion, problems in the teaching of SCI in S1-S3 have exacerbated failure rates in the separate scientific subjects in S4. To have two (or three) teachers teaching the same subject would create another set of difficulties.

3. We oppose the **discontinuation of two-period subjects** in S6 and S7. We strongly believe that GEO, HIS, BIO and possibly PHI should be available as two-hour options for all students. There is no evidence that the elimination of two-period subjects will result in any cost savings. (On the contrary, the statistics provided in Annex 3 demonstrate that two-period subjects are more popular and have bigger class sizes than the equivalent four-period subjects.)<sup>8</sup>

4. In the case of the “**science filière**”, we do not agree that MAT5 and two scientific subjects should be compulsory. Such a restriction is unnecessary<sup>9</sup> and would only further increase the failure rate in sciences. In our opinion, MAT5 is useful but not necessary to study either BIO4 or CHE4. This is confirmed by the statistics: 40% of the students that chose BIO4 and 19% of the students that chose CHE4, also chose MAT3.<sup>10</sup>

5. All students should be allowed to continue a **Language 4** taken in S4 and S5 in order to achieve at least an intermediate competence by the end of their schooling. We see no reason to restrict linguistic options for students in the “science filière”. Multilingualism is a political priority of the European Commission and an educational priority of the European Schools.

6. Finally, we do not agree with the proposed **reform of religion/ethics**. As a result of the increase of religion by one hour, many students would be compelled to drop more essential four-period options.

Moreover, one of the strong points of the religion and ethics classes, as pointed out by the teachers themselves, is that they provide a space for students to freely discuss issues in their mother tongue without concern for a mark. By introducing examinations and marks, the proposed reform works directly against this rationale.

To conclude, there is as yet no evidence of cost savings in the Proposal. On the contrary, a preliminary estimation done by the parents association of one of the European Schools suggests that due to the elimination of two-period courses in S6 and S7, the Proposal could lead to an increase of the costs of around 300,000 EUR per year. We again call for an impact assessment covering all the financial and pedagogical ramifications of the proposed reform.

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<sup>8</sup> Neither is there any evidence that the elimination of complementary courses will result in any savings. The average size of the groups in many complementary courses is bigger than in some four-period courses.

<sup>9</sup> Most UK universities (where a majority of our students end up) require only two scientific subjects at a higher level (i.e. our 4 period options). For example, for biology they require BIO + 1 science, which could be: MAT, CHE, PHY, GEO or ICT. For engineering they require only MAT and PHY.

<sup>10</sup> See: pp. 86-90 of Document 2013-78-en-3-Annexes.pdf

#### **IV. Our proposal for S6-S7**

As a show of good faith, we have prepared an alternative proposal for S6 and S7 that combines rationalisation with flexibility.

This proposal is based in the following principles:

- To fully respect the current European Bacculaureate rules; there has been no mandate to change these, nor has the Bacculaureate working group been convened to discuss any changes to these rules;
- To grant free choice to students within the possibilities offered by the timetable while respecting the rules on compulsory subjects and on the minimum and maximum numbers of periods (29 to 35 hours);
- To maintain two-period subjects, thus increasing the flexibility of the system and broadening the educational offer;
- To maintain complementary and laboratory courses, subject to the rules on the minimum group size. Schools should have the autonomy to decide on the offer of complementary and laboratory courses;
- To provide religion or ethics as an optional course without exam;
- To make L3 and L4 available for most students (if needed even by allocating extra time slots);
- To introduce a cross-curricular project (contingent upon a clear explication of the proposed teaching and evaluation methodology);
- To allow subject combinations which can be modified according to the needs of each school.

This proposal would result in fewer clashes than the streaming proposal (see Annex IV).

**Cycle S6-S7**

1-4	<b>L1</b>			
5-7	<b>L2</b>			
8	<b>Cross-curricular project</b>			
9-11	<b>MAT5</b>		<b>MAT3</b>	
12-13			Complementary subject	
14-15	<b>HIS2</b>			
16-17	<b>GEO2</b>			
18-19	<b>PHI2</b>		<b>BIO2</b>	
20	REL/ETH			
21-24	CHE4	<b>GEO4</b>	PHI4	<b>ART</b>
25-28	<b>HIS4</b>	BIO4	<b>MUS</b>	
29-32	PHY4	<b>ECO4</b>	<b>LAT</b>	
33-36	<b>ICT</b>	<b>GREEK</b>	<b>L3</b>	
37	MAT+, L1+, L2+	Lab	L4	ONL
38				
39				
40				
Physical Education (2 periods)				

In blue, subjects in L2/HCL.

In bold, (semi-) compulsory subjects (the usual derogation rules apply for Bio2, Geo2, His2 and Phi2).

Philosophy 2 is not compulsory for students choosing Bio2, Religion or Ethics.

A preliminary estimation completed by the parents association of one of the European Schools suggests that, as a result of the rationalisation of the complementary and religion courses and of the introduction of the cross-curricular project in S6, this proposal could lead to cost savings of around 477,000 EUR per year.

However, any cost savings achieved through the reform of the secondary cycle should be put in perspective. A preliminary analysis done by the parents association suggests that the annual cost savings achieved through the creation in Brussels of a single Lycée for S6 and S7 would be around 3.7 million euros per year. The annual increase in costs resulting from the creation in Brussels of a fifth school according to the standard model would be around 1.2 million a year.

## **Conclusion**

- The streaming system proposed restricts student choice without any evidence of economic or pedagogical benefit. In so doing, it jeopardises the future prospects of European School students.
- Any reform to the structure of studies at the European Schools should be accompanied by an appropriate **impact assessment** which analyses both the financial and pedagogical consequences of the reform. The impact assessment should include an analysis of the ramifications of teaching subjects in L3 and HCL.
- We must safeguard the best features of the current “generalist” approach, an approach which has thus far been one of the great advantages of the European School system.
- Any reform should be introduced gradually, giving students the possibility to modify their language choices, level of mathematics, etc. and families time to reconsider their commitment to the European Schools.



## **Annex I**

Combination of options in S6 and S7 for Brussels and Luxembourg, in percentage.<sup>11</sup>

%	Phy	Che	Bio4	Eco	L3	Geo4	His4	Art	L4	Phi4	Mus4	Lat	Total
Phy		65	28	13	38	11	11	6	5	1	0	0	178
Che	66		39	4	36	8	13	2	9	4	0	2	183
Bio4	33	46		3	32	8	14	7	18	17	1	2	181
Eco	26	8	5		57	27	22	2	13	9	0	0	169
L3	23	22	16	17		13	28	10	26	18	1	2	176
Geo4	22	15	14	27	43		12	11	17	12	2	3	178
His4	16	18	17	15	65	9		9	29	32	2	7	219
Art	18	6	19	4	54	18	21		17	28	2	0	187
L4	7	12	21	9	57	12	27	7		19	0	4	175
Phi4	1	7	24	8	50	10	38	14	24		3	1	180
Mus4	6	6	13	0	50	19	31	13	0	38		0	176
Lat	36	0	7	36	7	7	36	0	64	14	7		214
Total	254	205	203	136	489	142	253	81	222	192	18	21	2216

<sup>11</sup> Percentage of students that chose a subject listed in the row that also chose a subject listed in the column. Source: our own elaboration based on Document 2013-78-en-3-Annexes.pdf, Annex 3: clash table and Annex 4: list of combination of options in S6-S7 for Brussels and Luxembourg, subject by subject.

## **Annex II**

Clash table for the streaming proposal, showing the percentage of students who would not be able to take subjects combinations they wish.<sup>12</sup>

%	Phy	Che	Bio4	Eco	L3	Geo4	His4	Art	L4	Phi4	Mus4	Lat	Total
Phy						11		6	5	1	0	0	23
Che				4		8	13	2	9	4	0	2	42
Bio4				3		8	14	7	18	17	1	2	70
Eco		8	5					2	13	9	0	0	37
L3													0
Geo4		15	14					11				3	43
His4		18	17						29				64
Art	18	6	19	4		18						0	65
L4	7	12	21	9			27						76
Phi4	1	7	24	8							3		43
Mus4	6	6	13	0						38		0	63
Lat	36	0	7	36		7		0					86
Total	68	72	120	64	0	52	54	28	74	69	4	7	612

<sup>12</sup> Based on Annex I. Source: our own elaboration based on Document 2013-78-en-3-Annexes.pdf, Annex 3: clash table and Annex 4: list of combination of options in S6-S7 for Brussels and Luxembourg, subject by subject.

### Annex III

Table showing the average size of the classes in S6 and S7.<sup>13</sup>

	All schools			Brux et Lux		
	Groups	Students	Average	Groups	Students	Average
Art 2	9	83	9.2	4	51	12.8
Art 4	13	196	15.1	7	121	17.3
Bio 2	68	777	11.4	44	568	12.9
Bio 4	48	493	10.3	28	307	11.0
Geo 2	65	1 312	20.2	40	900	22.5
Geo 4	22	238	10.8	11	157	14.3
His 2	66	1 219	18.5	40	810	20.3
His 4	26	355	13.7	15	245	16.3
Mat 3	67	836	12.5	40	554	13.9
Mat 5	69	775	11.2	42	530	12.6
Mat +	19	132	6.9	12	98	8.2
Mus 2	4	19	4.8	1	9	9
Mus 4	5	29	5.8	2	16	8
Phi 2	77	1 265	16.4	49	852	17.4
Phi 4	30	298	9.9	20	217	10.9
2 periods	289	4 675	16.2	178	3 190	17.9
4 periods	144	1 609	11.2	83	1 063	12.81

<sup>13</sup> Source: our own elaboration based on documents Savings 2 + 2.pdf and Savings Mathematics.pdf provided by the Secretary-General of the European Schools.

#### **Annex IV**

Clash table for the "alternative proposal", showing the percentage of students who would not be able to take subjects combinations they wish.<sup>14</sup>

%	Phy	Che	Bio4	Eco	L3	Geo4	His4	Art	L4	Phi4	Mus4	Lat	Total
Phy				13								0	13
Che						8		2		4			14
Bio4							14				1		15
Eco	26											9	35
L3													0
Geo4		15						11		12			38
His4			17								2		19
Art		6				18				28			52
L4													0
Phi4		7				10		14					31
Mus4			13				31						44
Lat	36			36									72
Total	62	28	30	49	0	36	45	27	0	44	3	9	333

<sup>14</sup>

Source: our own elaboration based on Annex I.