

OUTSIDE CLASSROOM, INSIDE (WITHIN) THE EEB1 COMMUNITY

Preliminary analysis of the current situation and on-going activities (projects, trips, clubs, competitions etc)

APEEE Pedagogical Working Group “Projects & Trips in Secondary”

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1. Introduction

Parents believe that learning outside the classroom to complement the mandatory school curriculum has important value added for our children's education through which students acquire new knowledge and experience. These also improve students' opportunities and chances to be accepted when applying for study places at universities. This is recognised also in the European School system where learning outside the classroom and appropriate activities outside the school are considered to make a significant contribution to the development of the key competences (Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in the European Schools)¹.

These activities also build and strengthen the EEB1 community as they connect and reinforce the interlinkages between students, teachers, school management, staff and parents. The diversity of activities and the successes of our students and teachers can make each of us proud to be part of the EEB1 community.

Parents very much appreciate all the work done in organising those activities. In the current context, after almost two school year of disruption due to the COVID-19 crisis, parents consider it important that on-going activities are kept and new initiated. Therefore, the APEEE Pedagogical Working Group "Project&Trips in Secondary" started exploring and mapping the kinds of activities offered at the EEB1, how these initiatives work, what obstacles they face, how they can be supported, what scope there is for including these in the Project Weeks or in other formats or arrangements.

We engaged in fact-finding meetings with teachers involved in some of the school's showcase projects, initiatives, and trips, and gathered information via parent class representatives. Meetings with teachers took place in a virtual setting between February and March 2021 (List of teachers interviewed in the Annex 1). Importantly, this report in general excludes the extracurricular activities organised by Cesame, for which participation is subject to a fee and which only minimally involve the teachers. Instead we are looking at activities that can be linked in some way with the formal curriculum.

This report aims at setting the ground for engaging all school stakeholders in a reflection on the organisation of projects and trips in the next school year. APEEE would propose a Secondary Education Council Working Group and we would welcome other stakeholders to join.

2. Inventory/overview of activities at the EEB1²

An attempt was made to map various activities at the EEB1. This list is far from being exhaustive because it draws on the knowledge of a limited number of parents and teachers that we were able to contact. The activities can be very diversified and include cross-curricular projects, sometimes carried out during the Project Weeks in the schools, as well as participation in study trips and other programmes. They typically do require a fee or a contribution to participate, but they may require payment of costs (e.g. for trips). This section also presents some of the activities organised by Césame, which aim at creating a sense of community.

¹ <https://www.eursc.eu/BasicTexts/2018-09-D-69-en-1.pdf>

² Overview is mainly based on pre-Covid19 activities.

We classified activities in groups/categories depending on at which level the organisation takes place and who takes the initiative:

- a) **Level/Cycle Programmes, initiated by the European School (ES) system**, sometimes targeting a certain level, which in turn are divided into:
 - **European School Programmes** involving all European schools such as Eurosport, the Festival of Arts and Music in the European Schools (FAMES), the European Schools Science Symposium (ESSS) and the Model European Council (MEC). Eurosport and ESSS qualifications start with some 50 students at the level of EEB1 and end up with 10 to 30 students participating in the final event at the European school level. For ESSS, these are selected through an open competition, and for Eurosport through several months of trials by the PE teachers. FAMES is more selective and involves some 8-10 students selected by Arts and Music teachers of each School. Generally, MEC involves 5-10 students from our school.
 - **School or Brussels-based European School Programmes.** Some of the EEB1 initiatives may be level-wide programmes involving up to 300 students, such as the EEB1 S2 Eurospace Trip, S4 Bio Camp, or the S6-S7 day-trips to Ypres and other historical locations. Others may be open for participation at several levels, like the week-long “Orangerie de la Poesie” held for many years. Other programmes may be organised by one or jointly by several European Schools, like Mini-Eurosport or PhiloDay.
- b) **S6 Trips**, generally one-week cultural trips, but also providing leisure time for students. These trips involve basically the whole level and are a European School system tradition.
- c) **Work Experience**³, traditionally an optional one- or two-week programme for S5 or S6 students, though required for those not taking the S6 Trips. The school has recently made these mandatory for S5 students.
- d) **Subject Projects/Trips**, promoted generally by single or small groups of teachers, involving one or a few classes at a time, generally having a pedagogical aim.
- e) **Competitions, which are run within Member States or at the European Union level in various subjects:** Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Languages, or other subjects, in which EEB1 students can take part if the teachers are willing to encourage and guide the students and organise logistics. There are various possibilities on offer in the “outside world” that EEB1 could pick up on.
- f) **Clubs:** activities which gather students around a common interest along the year. An example is the Rainbow Club or the Coding Club. Another example is the choir that brings together around 50 students who perform publicly at various occasions.
- g) **Césame (APEEE Services)** provides various activities for students against a fee or a contribution. Nevertheless, they are managing some initiatives that go beyond individual students' interests and promote the EEB1, such as ESB Octopus (the swimming team of the four European Schools of Brussels through which students can represent the five European Schools of Brussels in international swimming competitions), the School Orchestra of the EEB1 (the Symphonic Orchestra of EEB1 and the Chamber Orchestra), other musical groups and ensembles that regularly perform in school events, and even the EEBI Chess Teams.

³ Work experience in the European Schools (Ref.: 2016-02-D-6-en-1)

Paradoxically, an initial mapping of these activities showed that **secondary students from the EEB1 do not participate or participate only in a limited way in some of the EU initiated activities** that are available to students of the European Schools and in which students from other European Schools regularly and successfully participate. Few examples to include are: [Juvenes Translatores](#) (a competition organised by the European Commission to reward the best young translators in the European Union to promote language learning), [European Statistics Competition](#) (a competition organised by Eurostat and volunteering National Statistical Institutes addressed to secondary education students with the purpose of encouraging students to get familiar with statistics and official statistical sources), and [eTwinning](#) (the European Commission platform for collaboration among teachers, students, schools, parents, and local authorities from different countries to work together and organise activities for their students).

3. Emerging findings - Key factors of success⁴

In the rich exchanges with the teachers, we found out that virtually all types of initiatives suffer from a few common challenges, obviously to varying degrees: start and continuity of initiatives, teachers' and students' engagement, management and implementation of activities (organisational aspects) and funding.

a) Ensuring continuity in teachers' and students' engagement

The turnover in the EEB1 community is high. This is built in the system itself due to the maximum time set for the secondment and rules about the management of posts occupied by the locally recruited teachers (cost-sharing agreement). In this context accumulated knowledge and experience can more easily get lost without a dedicated actions to preserve it (e.g. manuals, handbooks, structured approaches for sharing of good practice) and support to newcomers or teachers that would like to start a new initiative (e.g. one-stop-shop contact providing overview of projects, criteria, common templates or instructions, and steps to start an initiative).

Continuity may be less a problem for the **initiatives that are carried out regularly for all European Schools** as these initiatives are documented centrally and guidance is provided (see Annex 2). This allows new teachers to get acquainted with the school traditions in a structured way. Such guidance isn't generally available for other activities.

Teachers' engagement is crucial. The success of some of these initiatives relies heavily on the commitment and dedication of individual teachers. Several respondents noted the significance of teachers voluntarily engaging in those activities according to their interests and availability. Preliminary findings point among other things to the importance of recognizing teachers' work (e.g. reduced number of teaching hours to allow work on the projects). In some subject areas (e.g. STEM) there are a lot of ideas and possibilities in the "outside world" but there is no clear prioritisation, strategy and coordination at the school/section level. In a few cases, parents regretted that for some of the activities offered by Member States, their children could not participate despite their interest, because registration can only be done by the school or a teacher.

⁴ This section doesn't cover activities organised by Cesame.

Students' engagement depends on their interest and awareness of the activities. Students do not necessarily see these extra-curricular activities as an added value to their education and later life. Therefore, they do not engage in activities, even when there are no financial costs involved. The interest and motivation are often higher for activities including trips. On the other hand, many students are not aware of opportunities as they are not widely advertised. The APEEE support in informing parents is appreciated by teachers, as well as parents, in particular of lower secondary students (S1-S3).

Increasing students' participation in the future would be desirable, although it would clearly require the involvement of a greater number of teachers.

b) Management and implementation of activities (organisational aspects)

One of the very pressing teachers' needs is for organisational support especially on **logistics and accounting**. It seems that teachers do not receive substantial support by the school administration, notably on administrative tasks (managing the money, organising the logistics, etc). APEEE Transport support in organising bus transport was appreciated. Teachers may also feel financially responsible, as it often falls on them to collect the funds from families and manage the budget.

Another challenge is **timetable and time of activities**. For some activities that would require rehearsing or practicing regularly during the year, it is difficult to find such time, unless it is done during the lunch break, that is mostly only 45 min. However, even the organisation during the lunch-breaks is difficult due to conflicting timetables (e.g. different lunch-time breaks per secondary cycles) or changes to timetables after the activity starts. Activities starting after the end of the school day suffer from the heavy dependence of students on the school bus services to get to and from the school.

c) Funding

Also the problem of funding has been highlighted. [APEEE financial contributions](#), especially in the pilot phase of the projects, are very much appreciated.

d) Other

The language of activities can make them less available to students. This is the case for different competitions (e.g. mathematics), where EEB1 students should normally participate in the qualifications in national Belgium competitions. Those are normally held in French and are therefore less available/attractive for students who do not learn French as their L1 or L2. Nevertheless, there are some activities available to students in their dominant language (e.g. mathematics competition in Polish or language competition in Slovenian).

4. Project Week: past and future

a) Background

Project Weeks were created to offer the possibility of doing activities related to the curriculum which could not be done in the classrooms. Originally, there were three project Weeks in the school year, in late-October, mid-February and late-March, each directly preceding a school break. While Project Weeks could include activities carried out both outside and inside the school, a big majority of the projects organised were trips taking place outside the school. It was clear that Project Weeks also had an element of expediency, as they allowed the school to cluster disruptive trips that might lead to both student and teacher absence and then plan these weeks in a more flexible manner. Of course, the format worked primarily for trips and projects that had no external schedule imposed. Project Weeks were theoretically aimed at all secondary students but in practice it was mostly S4-S6 students who benefitted. This also meant that it was the S1-S3 students who often suffered from the most teacher absences.

In 2018 the secondary management started a reflection on how to improve the pedagogical value of activities offered and to ensure that everyone would be able to have an access to a minimum number of activities. The school's all-in-all-out approach envisaged for the 2019-2020 was motivated by two elements: 1) to reduce the lost teaching hours; and 2) to make sure that every student gets the opportunity to do something different in that time--both objectives were supported by parents. It was planned to have one full Project Week at the end of March (in conjunction with S6 Trips) plus two days in October and one day in February. Though teachers were encouraged to present projects for these weeks, the March Project Week in particular was to be centrally organised to ensure full coverage. Any project which fell outside the formal Project Week dates would also be reviewed.

b) Observations

As part of our exchanges with teachers, we asked about the **relevance of Project Weeks** to the activities that they organised. We learned that a majority of the activities organised by those interviewed did not fit well into the Project Week format. This was in many cases an **issue of timing**. Often the dates of the external competitions, tournaments or performances were outside the control of the school, or the trip was seasonal, and in some cases it was tied to the availability of a particular venue. In addition, quite a few activities were less than a week. Teachers also **tended to prefer activities that were smaller, related to a single topic, theme or class**--activities that allowed them to work closely with students over time whether in or out of class. And as the school moved toward a more centralised vision, teachers did not understand how their initiatives would fit in or what the implications would be for their initiatives--even long-standing ones.⁵ The general feeling was that the new-style all-in-all-out Project Weeks would not "capture" most current projects and initiatives, but they hoped might be something that could happen in addition to them.

⁵ This reflected in some sense concerns we have heard from parents that the all-in-all-out model might reduce the diverse offer driven by teachers' interests (which allows smaller groups of students to delve deeply into topics of interest), with one-size-fits-all activities undertaken by 300 or more students at a time. While there is a place for these sorts of activities (e.g. S2 Space Trip, S6 Culture Trips), parents also worry that this may become the dominant model.

It also emerged from these discussions that while Project Weeks were ostensibly intended for all project-type activities, by now they have become more associated with off-site projects or trips. In fact, the **school currently organises very few projects and programmes that take place strictly in-house**, and fewer still that are able to take advantage of the Project Weeks. (The very small number of school-supported student clubs is also notable in this regard.) This possibility could be more exploited, particularly given that the European School Programmes (Eurosport, MEC, ESSS, FAMES) are designed to drive on-the-ground initiatives that have an impact on more students.

c) The way forward

The majority of the outside school activities were suspended over the last two school years because of COVID-19. It is thus a good moment to review the scope and purpose of Project Weeks--and in particular to assess whether the current model is fit-for-purpose and to learn from good practices of other European Schools, like for example Alicante that presented their activities in *Project Week Magazine 2021*.⁶

In sum, Project Weeks should be examined more closely to make sure that several often conflicting objectives are taken into consideration. Any arrangement proposed should:

- build on programmes and activities that have a high pedagogical value and relate to the European School curriculum
- focus on programmes and activities have a value-added on top of regular course work, whether this be undertaking independent work or developing new skills or exploring topics more in depth or gaining new perspectives or asking critical questions
- connect students to the outside world allowing them to compete and showcase their talents on the world stage
- harness the inspiration and on-the-ground knowledge of teachers and students and give support and recognition for organising
- include a variety of formats, whether this is a trip or a learning programme, an atelier or an independent study exercise
- seek a general coverage of student population, i.e. all students should have opportunities to undertake activities during their school career
- minimise absences of teachers and students during any given period⁷
- ensure that activities remain affordable and accessible for all students

This reflection might also include consideration of the end of the school year and BAC oral examination period as a possible moment for a Project Week, in line with the Board of Governors' recommendation.⁸

⁶ <https://www.flipsnack.com/escuelaeuropeaalicante/new-flipbook-1jq1s5pvxn.html>

⁷ During the last school year there were no activities, yet the absences remained an important issues. This shows that the impact of trips and projects on absences shouldn't be overestimated and that minimisation of absences shouldn't be the main objective of Project Weeks.

⁸ The Board of Governors grants the European Schools the possibility of suspending lessons in the secondary cycle during the days required for the BAC oral examinations at the end of the school year and **replacing the normal lessons with replacement activities**. The [APEEE position](#) is that if and when the school uses the possibility of suspending S1-S6 lessons during the days required for the BAC oral examinations, the school

5. Conclusions

The potential for learning outside the classroom in the EEB1 is not sufficiently exploited.

There is insufficient overview and awareness of the activities going on in the "outside world" and even of the on-going activities at the EEB1 that could be exploited by EEB1 students. We believe that these challenges could be addressed only in close cooperation of all stakeholders, for example through the creation of an *ad-hoc* Working Group. This would help define priorities, provide support to grassroots initiatives and to exploit external opportunities. It would also help to ensure that students across sections and levels are able to benefit from a wide array of activities and programmes. Finally, it would help to rethink the purpose, format and timing of the Project Week.

Some improvements that seem necessary and can be solved in a relatively straightforward fashion are the introduction of e.g. online school calendar with events and activities, an IT tool to allow teachers to register activities, or channels/forum to communicate and disseminate information on the organisation and results of activities (e.g. SharePoint, APEEE NewsFlash, school website, educational advisor network).

There is a need to make a stronger case to students about the value of projects to their education and later life in order to encourage their participation not only in trips but also in educational projects that take place on campus. This could be done in cooperation with the Careers Guidance and Educational Advisors.

Teacher engagement is crucial. Their voluntary involvement can be enhanced by removing or reducing obstacles and providing guidance and support in the key steps in developing an initiative, management of money or logistics, working within timetables, as well in the recognition of the time spent by teachers. One way to strengthen the schools' administrative support could be through the "Revision of Financial Regulation Working Group" (Office of the Secretary General of the European Schools). Another way could be to clarify how Project Weeks can be used to support their initiatives.

should offer replacement activities of educational/pedagogical nature and with concrete links to the school curriculum.

Annex 1 - Meetings with teachers

- Munucle, Model European Council, Rainbow Group and Zambia work: Agnes Thomas, Dimitri Nicolaidis, Jeroen Masson (1 February 2021)
- FAMES and Choir: Andrea Kovacs, Christian Habermann, Joanna Musko (8 February 2021)
- ESSS/Science Festival/BioTrips: Dorottya Csonka, Jesper Frederiksen, Mina Farris and later Krisztina Krausz, (10 February and 24 February 2021)
- Eurosport: Jose Carlos, Kinga Frackiewicz (11 February 2021)
- STEM: FabLab, the CodingClub, UKMT, Belgian Maths and Physics Olympiads, Arnaud Jutier, Peter Cady, Fabrice Castres (18 March 2021)

Annex 2 – Sources

- Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in the European Schools (Ref.: 2018-09-D- 69-en-1), <https://www.eursc.eu/BasicTexts/2018-09-D-69-en-1.pdf>
- [Common Framework for 'Events' organised by the European Schools - 2019-12-D-36-en-4](#)
- [EUROSPORT Handbook - 2014-09-D-49-en-3](#)
- [FAMES Handbook - 2018-05-D-16-en-3](#)
- [Handbook for the European Schools' Science Symposium \(ESSS\) - 2019-01-D-52-en-2](#)
- [Guidelines for school outings and trips organized by the nursery and primary departments of the European Schools - 2002-D-54-en](#)
- [Guidelines for school trips organized by the European Schools](#), (p. 7ff), Board of Governors Decisions (ref. 1999-D-5710-EN), also published on the [EEB1 website](#)
- [EEB1 Internal rules for school trips and long excursions \(secondary\)](#)
- [Project Week Magazine 2021](#), European School of Alicante