

## 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

The Board of Governors created a 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 an orientation (specialisation) 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.

The mandate of the working group was:

*"The Board of Governors took note of the reflection on the measures taken on the resolution of the European Parliament on the European Schools system and gave:*

...

*2. a mandate for the setting up of an 'organisation of studies in the secondary cycle' working group, 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."*<sup>1</sup>

### II. Pedagogical and financial 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. The proposal does not build on the experiences acquired by the schools themselves, does not take into account the choices the students made in previous years even though all the relevant data are available. Neither the proposal improves the flexibility and the efficiency of the system.

The 5/7-student rule is problematic for many subjects and combinations and will lead, if combined with orientation, to a further narrowing of choices, particularly in small language sections.

The proposed measures on alternative teaching languages may lead to situations in which students will be required to study science subjects even 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.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.eursec.eu/fichiers/contenu\\_fichiers2/1789/2012-04-D-9-en-3.pdf](http://www.eursec.eu/fichiers/contenu_fichiers2/1789/2012-04-D-9-en-3.pdf)

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 the orientation system, 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>2</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. The clash between **LAT and ICT** in S3 should be and may be solved simply by bringing the maximum number of periods to 33 or 35 as this is the case already in S1 and S2. That would solve the inconsistency between the choices in S3 and in S4 and S5 (whet LAT and ICT are not clashing).

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

1. We strongly oppose the **modular approach to mathematics** 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 abilities alike. Modular approach is very uncommon in MS and has been opposed by the Maths Inspector in the Working Group.

### **c. Cycle S6-S7**

We strongly oppose the **“orientation” system** presented in the Proposal. We recognise that the choice cannot be unlimited, especially in a situation of strained budget resources. However, the existing system already limits the possible combinations of the optional courses in a flexible way performing a pre-screening of choices and proposing a suitable timetable for the students. If changes are required by the BoG they cannot result in further substantial decreasing of the options.

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<sup>2</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.

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 specialisation system **unnecessarily restrictive**. There are several subject combinations currently popular among students that would no longer be possible. (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 university courses require a balanced combination of humanities/arts and science subjects, like law, sustainable development, education, archaeology, architecture, psychology or geology not possible under the proposed system.

The proposed orientation system would also oblige students to make choices too early in their educational careers<sup>3</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 “orientation” system.)

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. There is no proof that a baccalaureate exam in HUMSCI would be in any country accepted as a substitute for a baccalaureate exam in history or philosophy.

We are also 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 PHI should be available as two-hour options for all students (also for purposes of recognition of the baccalaureate exam in different member states where history and/or philosophy are obligatory subjects). 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 4 demonstrate that two-period subjects are more popular and have bigger class sizes than the equivalent four-period subjects.)

4. **History** should be considered a core subject and studying history should be compulsory for all. The working group had no mandate to change the status of History.

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 not to offer L4 for students in the science and economic orientations and at the same time offering Latin in all orientations<sup>4</sup>. We cannot accept either that L4 clashes with HIS4 (forcing an L4 student to choose PHI4) when until now one third of students choosing HIS4 chose also L4. Multilingualism is a political priority of the European Commission and an educational priority of the European Schools.

6. The proposal contains clear mistakes like proposing options HIS4/ICT/ONL in the Economic specialisation and stating in the text that History is compulsory for students choosing Economic specialisation.

7. It is not acceptable that **ONL** clashes with Chemistry, ICT and History as they are core options that should be also available to students with an ONL.

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<sup>3</sup> Only students who have chosen Mat+ in S4 can opt for physics.

<sup>4</sup> In 2013 only 7 from the 1439 students took written baccalaureate in Latin across all the ES

8. We oppose to the discontinuation of **complementary courses**. There is no 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.

9. The impact on the **teaching staff** has neither been analysed. In case several classes should be formed there is a danger that there will be not enough teachers (especially in L2) to teach the same subject at the same time. There are no provisions in the proposal to tackle this problem.

10. It is necessary to analyse the subject clashes across the years in order to avoid the inconsistencies that are present in the proposal.

To conclude, there is as yet no evidence of cost savings or pedagogical benefit in the Proposal. We again call for an impact assessment covering all the financial and pedagogical ramifications of the proposed reform.

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.

## **V. Conclusion**

- The orientation 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, pedagogical and social consequences of the reform, together with the analysis of the existing system (including the impact of Document 33) and alternative proposals. The impact assessment should include an analysis of the ramifications of teaching subjects in L3 and HCL. Parents, teachers and students should be involved as members of the steering group of the impact assessment and the analysis should include several alternatives, as Interparents' proposal.
- 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 4-period options in S6 and S7 for Brussels and Luxembourg<sup>5</sup>

%	Phy	Bio4	Che	L3	L4	His4	Ge4	Ph4	Eco	Lat	Art	Mus	N
Phy		209	401	232	42	49	69	25	86	1	39	2	654
Bio4	209		366	200	109	79	72	77	19	1	39	6	604
Che	401	366		203	62	49	59	26	29	5	20	3	670
L3	232	200	203		266	281	180	171	179	5	108	16	1020
L4	42	109	62	266		156	78	89	44	1	48	1	499
His4	49	79	49	281	156		78	145	94	9	56	6	508
Ge4	69	72	59	180	78	78		48	88	1	48	6	355
Phi4	25	77	26	171	89	145	48		33	4	47	8	355
Eco	86	19	29	179	44	94	88	33		0	11	2	319
Lat	1	1	5	5	1	9	1	4	0		1	0	14
Art	39	39	20	108	48	56	48	47	11	1		2	253
Mus	2	6	3	16	1	6	6	8	2	0	2		31
Total	1155	1177	1223	1841	896	1002	727	671	585	28	419	52	9778
Aver	1.77	1.95	1.83	1.80	1.80	1.97	2.05	1.90	1.83	2.00	1.66	1.68	

<sup>5</sup> Number 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 specialisation proposal, showing the number of students who would not be able to take subjects combinations they wish.<sup>6</sup>

%	Phy	Bio4	Che	L3	L4	His4	Ge4	Ph4	Eco	Lat	Art	Mus	N
Phy					42		69	25		1	39	2	654
Bio4					109	79		77	19		39	6	604
Che					62	49		26	29		20	3	670
L3													1020
L4	42	109	62			156			44				499
His4		79	49		156								508
Ge4	69									1	48		355
Phi4	25	77	26						33			8	355
Eco		19	29		44			33		0	11	2	319
Lat	1						1		0		1	0	14
Art	39	39	20				48		11	1			253
Mus	2	6	3					8	2	0			31
Total	178	329	189	0	413	284	118	169	138	3	158	21	2000
Aver	0.27	0.54	0.28	0	0.83	0.56	0.33	0.48	0.43	0.21	0.62	0.68	20.5%

<sup>6</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

Clash table for the "alternative proposal", showing the number of students who would not be able to take subjects combinations they wish.<sup>7</sup>

%	Phy	Bio4	Che	L3	L4	His4	Ge4	Ph4	Eco	Lat	Art	Mus	N
Phy									86	1			654
Bio4						79						6	604
Che							59	26			20		670
L3													1020
L4													499
His4		79										6	508
Ge4			59					48			48		355
Phi4			26				48				47		355
Eco	86									0			319
Lat	1								0				14
Art			20				48	47					253
Mus		6				6							31
Total	87	85	105	0	0	85	155	121	86	1	115	12	846
Aver	0.13	0.14	0.16	0	0	0.17	0.44	0.34	0.27	0.07	0.45	0.39	8.6%

<sup>7</sup> Source: our own elaboration based on Annex I.

## Annex IV

Table showing the average size of the classes in S6 and S7.<sup>8</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>8</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.