



# External Evaluation of a Proposal for the Reorganisation of Secondary Studies in the European School System

## Final Report Two Page Executive Summary

Sandra Leaton Gray, David Scott,  
Didac Gutiérrez-Peris, Peeter Mehisto,  
Norbert Pachler and Michael Reiss



This executive summary has been written in response to the Invitation to Tender: External Evaluation of a Proposal for Reorganisation of Secondary Studies in the European Schools for Secondary Years 4, 5, 6 and 7, ref: BSGEE/201401.

1. The main aim of this evaluation was to establish and demonstrate the impact of the proposed new structure for secondary studies (i.e. Levels S4-S7) compared to the status quo. In order to do this, we drew on all the studies and documents undertaken and formulated during the work of the Working Group, as well as various stakeholders including Interparents, the Commission, Directors and Deputy Directors, Careers Advisors, teachers, inspectors, and students. We also spoke with these stakeholders, and accepted written evidence and representations.
2. During our analysis, we determined whether and to what extent the proposals:
  - Met the principles stated in the Convention;
  - Ensured access to European secondary and tertiary education systems;
  - Fulfilled the mandate given by the Board of Governors;
  - Took into account the needs of students faced with the demands of the modern world;
  - Guaranteed in the last two years, leading to the European Baccalaureate, a general education around the eight key competences for lifelong learning.
3. In the interests of completeness, we also evaluated the proposals in an academic sense in terms of how they:
  - Were relevant, coherent, comprehensive, and allowed breadth of study for all pupils in the system;
  - Conformed to the accepted and logical principles of curriculum design.
4. In our evaluation, we also made reference to S1-S3, on the grounds that forms of progression and curriculum coherence require consideration of lower secondary as well as upper secondary studies.
5. We concluded that the proposed structure offered some advantages over the current one; however, we considered neither to be fully satisfactory and therefore we have proposed an alternative model that we consider meets the requirements more closely.
6. The current and proposed arrangements suffer from the same problems (but to different degrees):
  - In both models, a number of pedagogical practices are in use for which there is no supporting research evidence, or indeed where such practices are contra-indicated, such as: students repeating years, using hours of instruction as a proxy for difficulty, excessive numbers of oral examinations that do not take into account students' dominant language sufficiently well, and ability grouping systems that lack transparency.
  - Offering subjects at different levels may affect and distort progression, comprehensiveness and breadth. This may in turn have a negative impact on student mobility to and from the European Schools, as well as restricting access to

national secondary and higher education systems in Member States, as this is not universal throughout Europe. The proposed model goes some way towards recognising this, but not far enough.

- In both models, the subjects available to students, and their related content, do not map closely enough to contemporary degree subjects on offer within Higher Education contexts throughout Europe, particularly in the case of subjects such as Science, Mathematics and Engineering.
- In both models, allowing choices on the scale that currently exists indicates a degree of early specialisation, which students may later regret. It may also lead to problems with subject progression from S1-S7.
- In both models, some student groups may experience indirect disadvantage; in smaller schools, for example, students without a language section, students with special educational needs, students from countries with more than one national language, and students in small language sections. This is because they risk experiencing fewer choices than other students, and their dominant language is not taken into account sufficiently well during the assessment process.
- In both models the eight competences for lifelong learning are marginalised. The proposed model is more in tune with them than the current model, but it is not explicit enough.

7. It is clear in the light of our analysis that more extensive reform of the upper secondary programme of study within the European Schools is needed than is represented by the proposed model, but we recognise this is by no means a simple undertaking. We therefore recommend an alternative proposal, in which:

- The problems associated with clashing options and with option choices between incompatible subjects would be reduced or eliminated.
- Subject progression from S1-S7 is more easily facilitated.
- Class sizes can conform to an educational rationale (optimum size for learning) rather than a bureaucratic one (fitting a large number of option choices into a workable scheme).
- The curriculum of the individual student is now more likely to conform to the curricula offered by European Universities or by European Institutes of Higher Education.
- Language (of instruction) needs in the schools can be more easily accommodated, and discriminatory practices reduced or eliminated.

8. For change to be successful, it should be holistic rather than piecemeal, and it needs to be supported by improvements to teacher capacity and in-service training.

9. Long standing problems to do with failure rates, equality, inclusion, student mobility, access to national systems, student choice, EU expansion and relevance to study at higher education level can all be addressed if the current and proposed solutions are rejected and instead the alternative set of recommendations accommodated and acted upon.

