

## **Submission from Ms Isabelle Gall, Carnoustie High School**

### **The European Schools' Model and Scottish Modern Language Learning**

I would like to expand on my experiences in language education to inform the discussion on the development of Modern Language teaching in Scotland, especially the '1+2' proposals. I will draw mainly on my 13 years teaching in the European Schools system, but also on what I have learned as an examiner for the Cambridge English Speaking Exams and on my recent experience as Principal Teacher Curriculum Group Modern Languages in Carnoustie High School, Angus.

#### **1. The European School system**

##### **Why should Scottish educators be aware of the European School System?**

If Scottish education aims to improve the level of language skills of Scotland's young people, we can learn a great deal from the European Schools' model.

1. The system produces exceptional linguists and learners, many of whom go on to international studies and careers.
2. The pupils in the European Schools learn another language from the start of primary school to the European Baccalaureate level.
3. The pupils of the European Schools learn other subjects through their target language.

##### **1.1 What are the European Schools?**

The European Schools are official educational establishments controlled jointly by the governments of the Member States of the European Union. In all these countries they are legally regarded as public institutions.

The mission of the European Schools is to provide a multilingual and multicultural education for nursery, primary and secondary level pupils. The European Schools were established in 1957 to educate the children of employees of European institutions such as the European Commission, and nowadays include the European Patent Office and various European Research Organisations. The children of these employees are entitled to a place in a European School. In addition, a number of organisations have contracts with the European Schools which guarantee entry and private pupils are also admitted in some of the schools.

There are currently 14 European Schools, in six EU countries, with a total of approximately 24,000 pupils on roll. These schools are administered by the European Schools' Board of Governors and these are known as Type I schools.

In addition, a number of Type II and Type III schools have been established or are in the process of being established.

Type II and type III schools are administered and financed by the national education systems of the individual Member States of the EU and accredited by the Board of Governors. They have been established to support some of the smaller European Agencies by offering the European style of education to their employees' children. They will typically have a large number of pupils drawn from other backgrounds whose parents want this type of education for their children. The European Baccalaureate is available to pupils in Type II and Type III schools as well as those in Type I schools.

## **1.2 The Objectives of the European Schools**

- to give pupils confidence in their own cultural identity – the bedrock for their development as European citizens;
- to provide a broad education of high quality, from nursery level to university-entrance;
- to develop high standards in the mother tongue and in foreign languages;
- to develop mathematical and scientific skills throughout the whole period of schooling;
- to encourage a European and global perspective overall and particularly in the study of the human sciences;
- to encourage creativity in music and the plastic arts and an appreciation of all that is best in a common European artistic heritage;
- to develop physical skills and instil in pupils an appreciation of the need for healthy living through participation in sporting and recreational activities;
- to offer pupils professional guidance on their choice of subjects and on career/university decisions in the later years of the secondary school;
- to foster tolerance, co-operation, communication and concern for others throughout the school community and beyond;
- to cultivate pupils' personal, social and academic development and to prepare them for the next stage of education.

**from the European Schools' official website: <http://www.eurisc.eu/>**

## **1.3 The importance of linguistic skills**

To foster the unity of the school communities and encourage genuine multi-cultural education, there is a strong emphasis on the learning, understanding and use of foreign languages. There are a variety of ways in which this goal is supported.

- The study of a first foreign language (known as L II), is compulsory throughout the school, from the first primary class to the Baccalaureate.

- All students must study a second foreign language (L III), starting in the second year of secondary school.
- From the fourth class of secondary school, students may choose to study a third foreign language (L IV).
- Language classes are composed of mixed nationalities and are taught by native speakers
- In the primary school, a weekly "European Hour" brings children together from all language sections for cultural, artistic and games activities.
- In the secondary school, classes in art, music and physical education are always composed of mixed language sections.
- From the third class of secondary school, history and geography are studied in the LII, also called "the working language".
- Finally, everyday interaction in the playground, the corridors and the recreation rooms enhances the acquisition of other languages and the realisation that using them is not only vital but natural.

## 1.4 Structure of the languages teaching

### 1.4.1 Primary Section (Pupils start at around age 6)

	Years 1+2. Number of 30 minute periods	Year 3,4,+5. Number of 45 minutes periods
L1 (First Language)	18	9
Mathematics	8	7
L2	5	5
Exploring our world	2	4
Art	4	1
Music	3	1
Physical Education	4	1
Religion/ethics	2	2
European Hours	-	3
Recreation	3.5	2.5
Total hours	25.5	27.5

### 1.4.2 Secondary Section Years 1-3

#### Number of 45 minute periods

Subjects	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
L1	6	5	4
Maths	4	4	4
L2	5	4	4
L3	-	3	3

PE	3	3	3
RE/Ethics	2	2	2
Human Sciences	3	3 in L II	3
Integrated Sciences	4	4	4
Latin (optional)	-	-	4 (b)
Art	2	2	2 (b)
Music	2	2	2 (b)
ICT	1	1	-
Complementary activities	-	1	2 (c)
Total	32	33/4	31,33 or 35

(b) Pupils who take Latin may discontinue art or music

### 1.4.3 Secondary years 4-5

Core subjects	number of 45 minute periods
L1	4
Maths	4 (or 6)
L2	3
L3	3
Biology	2
Chemistry	2
Physics	2
Geography	2 in L II
History	2 in L II
PE	2
RE/Ethics	1

Elective subjects	number of 45 minute periods
L4	4
Economics	4
Latin/ Ancient Greek	4
Art	2
Music	2
Computer Studies	2

### 1.4.4 Secondary years 6 and 7

Core subjects	number of 45 minute periods
L1	4
Maths	4 (or 6)
L2	3
Physics	2

Geography	2 in LII
History	2 in LII
Philosophy	2
PE	2
RE/Ethics	1

Plus Electives

Including L3 and L4  
 Latin and Ancient Greek  
 Advanced Language L1 and L2

More details of the syllabi and methodology of the languages teaching can be found on the official European Schools' website: <http://www.eursec.eu/>

### 1.5 The levels of language reached by pupils in the European Schools if they complete the European Baccalaureate

(This information is taken from *The European Schools and the European Baccalaureate – Guidance for Universities and Schools* DfES 2009 and refers to English as the target language.)

#### Language 1

This examination is taken by mother-tongue pupils. Teaching is to A level standard or International Baccalaureate Higher level.

#### Language 2

This examination is taken by pupils whose mother tongue is not English, although they may in some cases have followed almost all their subjects in English (i.e. those without a language section for their own mother tongue who have therefore been in the English section of the school).

The basic pass level (grade 6.0) of the L2 exam equates approximately to level B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, but most candidates are at C1 level and above. A candidate with this level or higher should not be required to take a supplementary English test.

#### Language 3

This examination is taken by pupils who have been studying English for 6 years. Pupils opt to take either the Written or the Oral exam. The basic pass level (grade 6.0) of the L3 exam broadly equates to between level B1 and B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, but most candidates are above B2.

## **Language 4**

This examination is taken by pupils who have been studying English for 4 years. The basic pass level broadly equates to level B1 of the Common European Framework. Note: in a study made by the European Parliament of European School alumni, the vast majority of respondents to the survey said that their level of English was high enough for their academic career.

## **2. Developments in other European Member States**

As a speaking examiner for the Cambridge International English exams over the last 12 years I have been able to note the following in Germany and the Netherlands.

- Many secondary schools, both state and independent, are opening 'bilingual' courses, where pupils learn at least one subject through the medium of their L2, which is almost always English. In certain parts of Germany, such as Baden Württemberg, teachers are trained to become 'bilingual teachers'.
- Senior pupils are encouraged by their schools to sit the Cambridge CAE (Level B2+) and the CPE (level C1+) in their final years. This provides internationally recognised proof of their English levels.
- Across Europe, many universities are now offering courses in English to attract an international student population. This means that the young people going to these universities are fluent enough in English to complete the degree. This is the calibre of candidate that Scottish student would be competing against for places or posts.

## **3. My recent experience as Principal Teacher Curriculum Group in Carnoustie High School, Angus**

Carnoustie High School has only 5 associated primary schools and we are able to send out our specialist Modern Language teachers to support French and Spanish teaching in these. This is an ideal situation for the following reasons.

- The primary children are learning the language with the support of a language specialist (in some cases a native speaker). As ever younger children begin to learn a second language, it will be more important to expose them to the language in a playful, stimulating, near immersion type situation in order to engaged their innate language acquisition abilities. A primary teacher who may only have a limited knowledge of the target language would not be in the best position to do this.
- Transition between primary and secondary Modern Language teaching is assured.

- We expect to see a reduction in a number of Modern Language classes in S4. This is because almost all S3 pupils were strongly encouraged to take a modern language till last year. Now with the Curriculum for Excellence and option choices in our school reduced to 6 columns, we expect fewer classes in S4 and therefore fewer teaching hours. Ideally, we hope to be able use this surplus time to teach more classes at younger stages in primary schools.

#### **4 The conclusions I would like to draw**

In most Scottish schools, it would be difficult to create the international atmosphere that exist in a European school which creates a transformational alchemy where children are completely open to learning languages and do so from an early age with relative ease. However we can consider what it is be possible to create within Scottish schools. I would suggest the following important elements which we can see in the European schools.

Both primary and secondary schools should raise awareness of all the languages used by children and adults in their school community, so that monolingualism is not seen as the only norm.

Where possible the Modern Language teachers at every stage should be native speakers or, at least, language specialists.

In the early years, the teaching in primary schools should take place in playful, creative contexts where the language is not formally taught, but used as a means of communication in other activities. This allows the younger children to acquire the language in a more naturalistic way. The immersion in the language should take place frequently, even if it is for shorter periods.

As children begin to learn languages from earlier stages in the primary schools, progression and transition must be assured in the secondary education they move into. This will require close liaison between associated primaries and the secondary school.

In Carnoustie, children are learning Spanish and French in tandem from primary stage through to S3. Some of them find this confusing, while others take it in their stride. From my own experience, I consider that focusing on one language for a longer period might result in more proficient use of the L2.

Despite the European School focus on language learning, the commencement of L3 begins at S2 level. It is felt that the L2 should be well embedded as a vehicular language before another language is added. This focus on the L2 for 6 years, does in many cases allow the

pupil to become almost bilingual. On the other hand, by the time they begin the L3, many have lost their natural ability to acquire a language. Some find it difficult to learn a language in a more structured way, as they had absorbed their L2 in a more naturalistic way.

Most of the European language learning providers use the CEFR as an internationally recognised benchmark for their courses. The CEFR is mentioned briefly in some of the CfE literature, however, I think it would be positive to make pupils aware, perhaps by using the self-assessment grid, of the level of their skills in relation to the CEFR. We could also encourage them to complete the Europass languages passport, or create a Scottish equivalent.

In a secondary school, using the target language to learn elements of the curriculum (IDL) should be widespread if the pupils are to reach the levels of communication of their European counterparts.

If we genuinely wish young Scottish people to compete linguistically with their European neighbours, we must aim higher. In some of the literature it is suggested that being a 'basic user' is a useful skill. Indeed it would be wonderful if all Scottish pupils could achieve basic user level in a language and we should aim for this breadth. However, if a young person wishes to use their language in the global marketplace, they need to aim for depth of learning. They must be able to function at least at level B2 and many Higher candidates or even Advanced Higher candidates would not be able to do this at present. Hopefully, as the children begin to learn earlier and naturally acquire skills when they are still able to do so, the standard of L2 performance in Scotland will rise.

I strongly believe that there is place in Scotland for a European-style school, or at least, a flagship state school with a multi-lingual learning as a key aim.

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