

## European Schools Students' and Teachers' Workload Guidelines Proposal – Lockdown 2020

### CoSup (László Molnárfi and Martina Lalova)

#### Introduction:

Due to the current situation of lockdown due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19, students and teachers alike find themselves forced to communicate through technology from home indefinitely. Though the continuance of education as normal during such a time is of utmost importance, not everyone is able to adhere to their pre-lockdown schedule.

Previously, students woke up, went to school and class was carried out as normal. They had breaks in between to stretch their legs and socialise, and occasionally upon arriving home had assignments to complete for homework. This was a set structure and routine followed by all European Schools (ES), thus all students had more or less the same experience with workload and daily schedule.

However, under the current circumstances, students face the challenge of online learning not being homogenous. Since different schools have different policies as to how the learning is to be continued, we are facing a situation whereby some students, whose schools have continued full days of on-schedule classes in the form of video conferences, have a whole day of learning and still receive additional assignments for many of those classes to be finished and handed in by themselves. Whereas on the other hand, we also have students, who receive work in place of their usual classes to complete and hand in in due time, meaning they can organise themselves accordingly, are free to take breaks from the computer, the constant stress and to get movement or time with family in, something which is of fundamental importance in the present climate.

Quarantine is not easy on anyone. Already weighing on students is the trauma, stress and complications put on by Covid-19, and in addition to this mental health and workload surveys carried out by the schools (e.g. EEB1 CdE<sup>1</sup> and APEEE<sup>2</sup>) show that many students complain about being overworked, with their workload rising higher than it ever was prior to lockdown, meaning ever mounting stress levels, weariness from increased screen time and lack of motivation of students to perform. This can be due to the fact that the usual factors a school environment provide such as socialisation, breaktimes and physical movement, as well as fixed working times are gone. These factors hugely impact students' mental health and well-being and which, when taken away, need to be accounted for when evaluating the way we continue educating them.

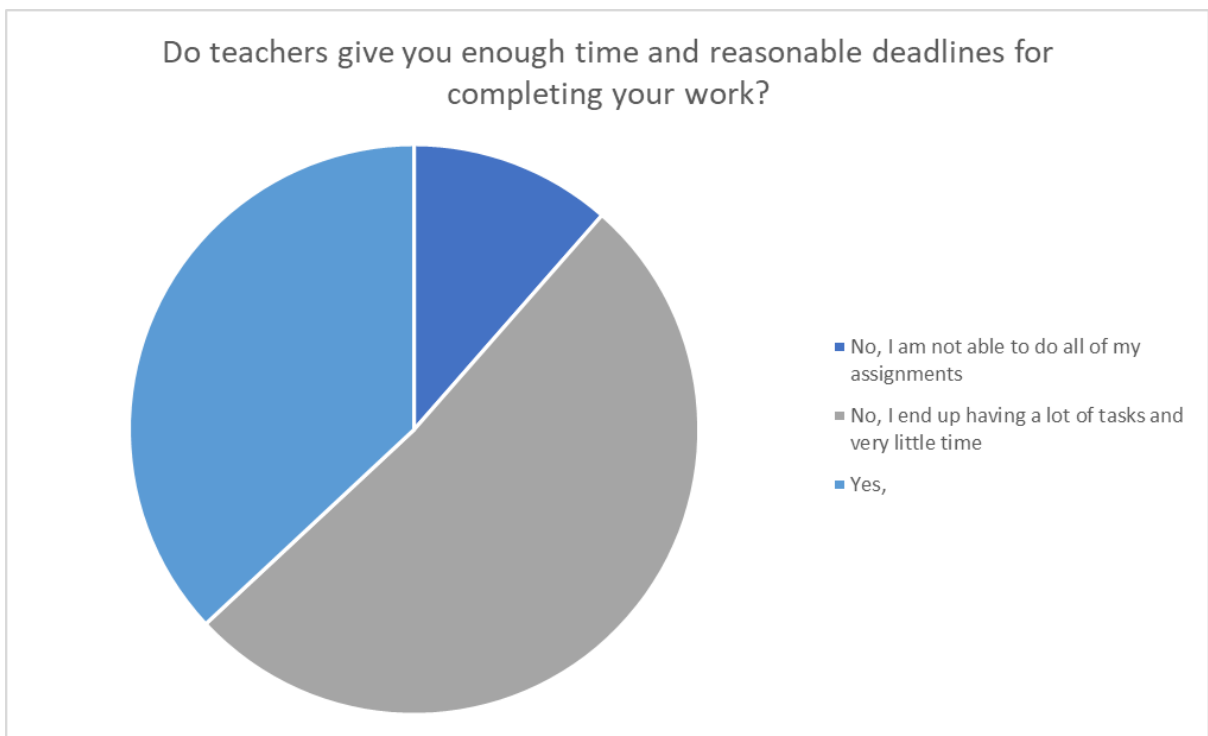
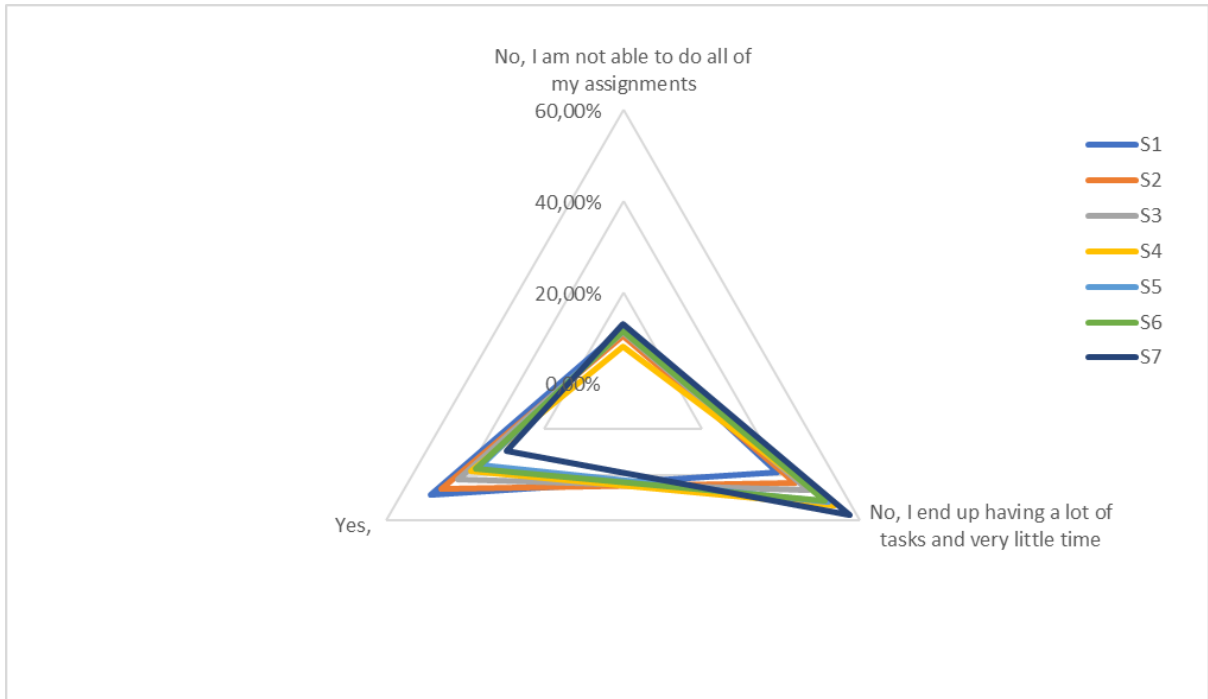
As a concrete example, we can take the CoSup's remote learning survey. Statistics collected over a period of roughly two weeks (22nd of March until the 4th of April 2020) from over 2900 students across the 13 European Schools support this viewpoint of students. EEB1 had 544 participants, and all schools managed to gather a representative sample of students from all years and most sections, and there seem to be no statistical outliers in most categories from school to school (the following data includes ALL 13 schools).

One issue seems to be that teaching staff are trying to compensate for the loss of physical contact in the classroom, especially in S7 but all years included and thus are giving too heavy workloads. However, they seem to bear no effect on the quality of learning, only the amount. An overwhelming majority end up having lots of tasks and very little time.

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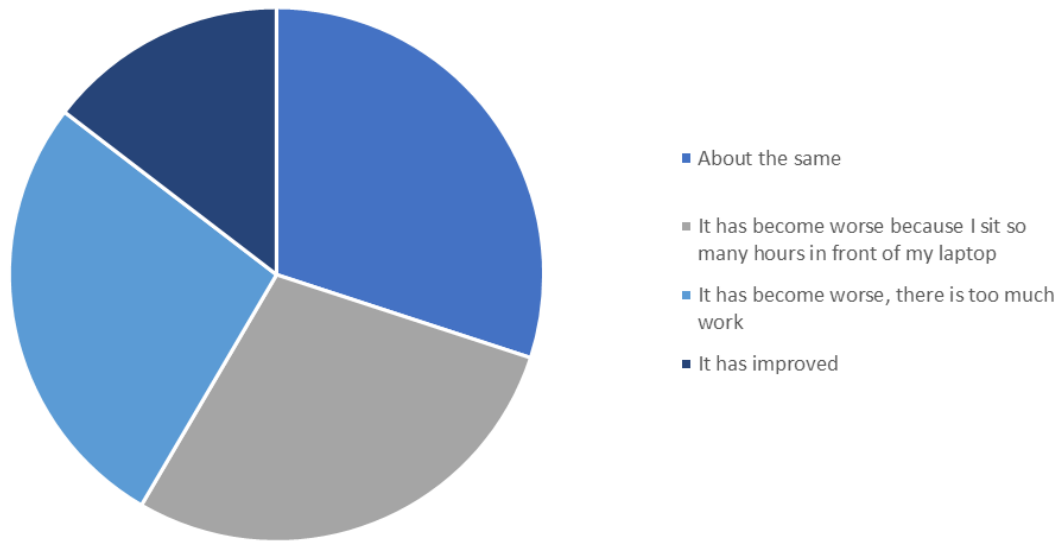
<sup>1</sup> <https://13stars.eu/workload-given-by-teachers-too-heavy-with-remote-learning-says-eeb1-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fZ9foBJaUNJTlxkRZo-U8lb25S5I3XQ/view?usp=sharing>

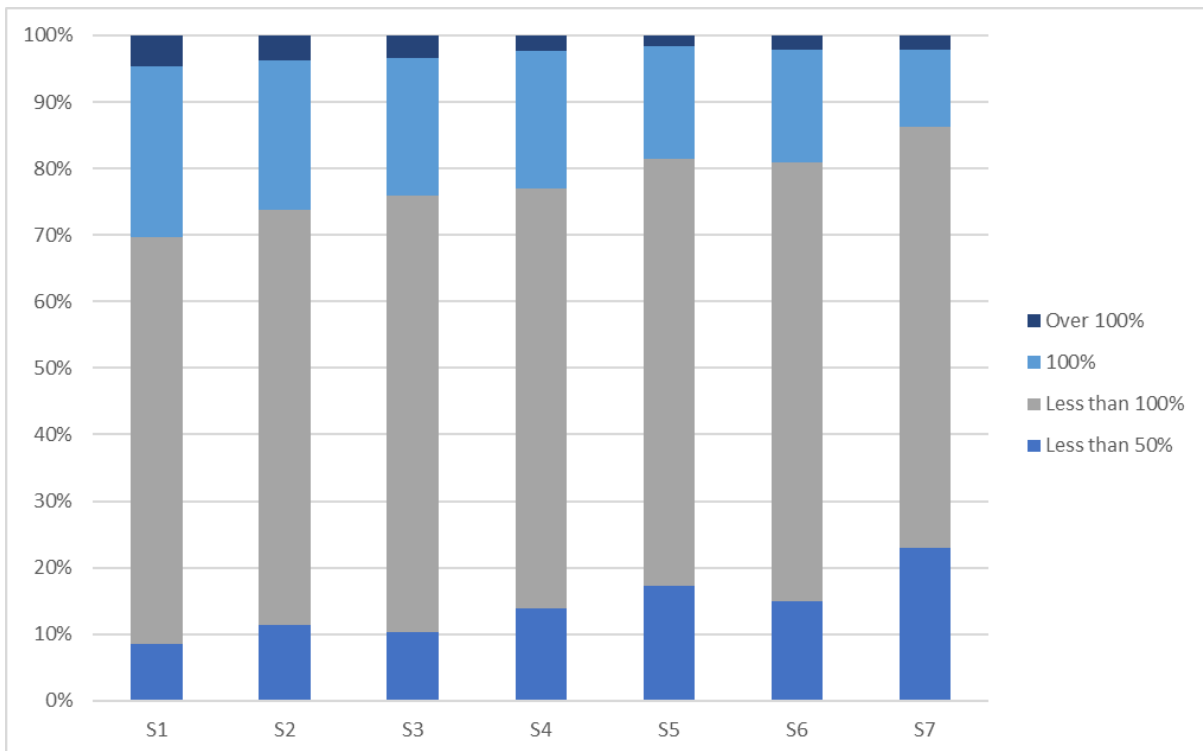


This is a factor in students' mental health, which as also self-reported through personal feedback, seems to be getting worse. Although 15% of all ES students report an improvement in their mental health, the data below clearly show how the students' wellbeing has indeed been compromised either by the ongoing crisis or the sole use of remote learning, without direct social interactions, as a solution.

### How has Online Schooling affected your stress level and mental health?



It is also important to mention that the quality of learning as a whole has gravely deteriorated over the past three weeks of isolation, due to the yet-in-its-infancy remote learning system, according to the survey, regardless of the increased workload (“How well can you learn?”).



### Proposal:

It is impossible to impose the same method of distance learning for all students in the ES system. However, it is possible to implement a set of enforced guidelines for the amount of work students are

allowed to receive per subject, especially in the European Baccalaureate (BAC) cycle, and under what circumstances and frequency this work is to be assigned.

Implementing such homogenous guidelines is necessary, as the previous policy encouraging the students to communicate to teachers that they are overworked has proved ineffective – many students report having asked and being promised a change, but never receiving one.

The guidelines proposed are modelled on the European School of Munich's homework guidelines<sup>3</sup> and can include a certain allocated limit of work amount and length that can be given for each subject (2 period/4 period options in the BAC cycle), so as to ensure students have time to organise themselves accordingly and pursue different activities outside school. Such ideas are already being discussed, with A2 guidelines that were brought up at the BoG meeting from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2020 to ensure a harmonized workload and grading for teachers in light of this crisis.

In fact, ensuring a harmonized workload and grading with staff collaboration was one of the solutions to psychosocial challenges faced by students during the coronacrisis listed in the document published by the Office of the Secretary-General's Pedagogical Development Unit on pedagogical continuity on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020<sup>4</sup>.

#### Examples:

#### For schools in which online classes follow the same schedule as that of a normal school day via video calls:

- Teachers should either give their students time during class to work on a specific task, project, presentation etc. and complete it in their own time if they do not manage to finish during class

Or

- Have a limit on how much time their homework tasks can demand of the student, such as:
  - In S1-5 no longer than 10-15 minutes per lesson of the week.
  - In S6-7 about 10-15 minutes per lesson of a 2-period subject and 20 minutes per lesson of a 4-period subject.

#### For schools which allow teachers to decide their own method of distance teaching:

- The amount of work sent by the teacher should correspond to the 45 minutes their class would have taken up were it held normally, plus 10-15 minutes of homework.
- For classes held via video conference, same as the aforementioned option.

It is also advised that the deadlines for these to either be for the next lesson, if the task be simple and short, or given a week in advance if it takes more time and effort from the student.

Notwithstanding the above, we urge the teaching staff to take into consideration the above-described feedback from students and adjust their workload accordingly, and furthermore to adapt the homework frequency given as per the personal feedback of their students.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://esmunich.de/fileadmin/Website/Downloads/Hoehere\\_Schule/HS\\_Hausaufgaben\\_Regelung.pdf](https://esmunich.de/fileadmin/Website/Downloads/Hoehere_Schule/HS_Hausaufgaben_Regelung.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.eel2.eu/sites/default/files/inline-files/2020-03-D-11-en-2%20Distance%20learning%20recommendations%20%283%29.pdf> page 6