



GERMANY

INFOPACK - RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD IN GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION

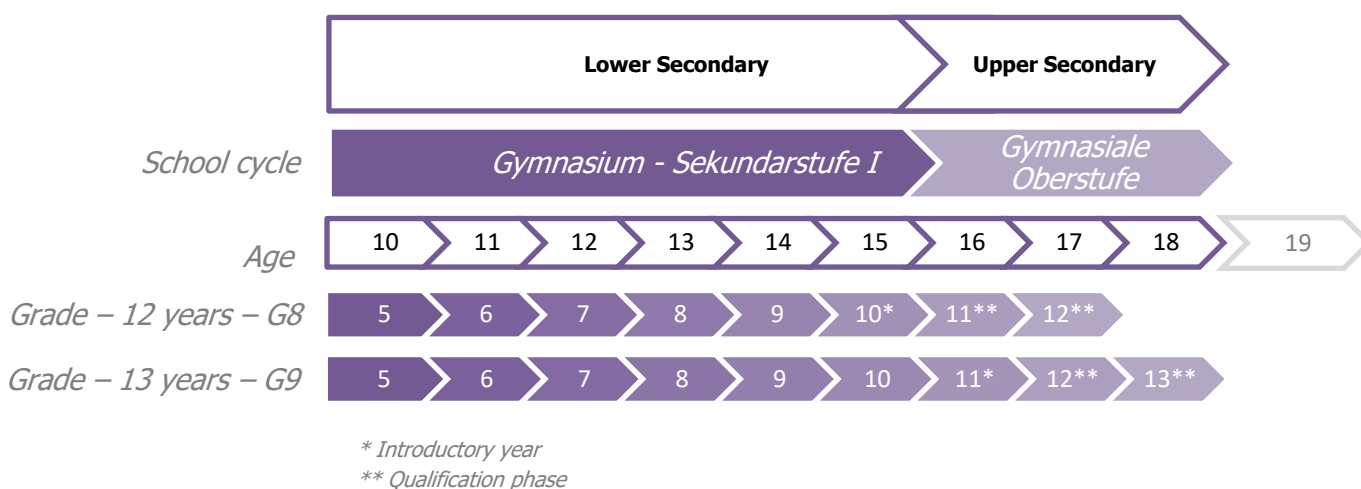
Contents

<u>GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM</u>	2
<u>INFORMATION FOR PUPILS GOING ABROAD FROM GERMANY</u>	3
<u>RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD</u>	3
<u>INFORMATION FOR PUPILS HOSTED IN GERMANY</u>	5
<u>TESTIMONIAL</u>	5

The information below gives an overview of procedures¹ for the recognition of learning periods abroad in general secondary school. It can be consulted by pupils, as well as their families and teachers, who are or plan to be involved in long-term individual pupil mobility programmes abroad. Please note that this general overview does not include details on different programme types (which may be run by governmental agencies, civil society organisations, private companies or schools themselves) and such information can be obtained directly with the provider of the respective mobility programme.

¹ Based on data gathered in February 2021.

GENERAL SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM



Germany has 16 different school systems². Education is compulsory until 18 years of age. Upper secondary school is compulsory and its common principles are laid down by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder (*Die Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - KMK*).

In general, the differences relate to school types and implementation of the common principles/curriculum, and on whether they adopt a 12- or 13-year education system.

General upper secondary education is the *gymnasiale Oberstufe*. There are several options for enrolling:

- Pupils enrol after 9th or 10th grade (depending on the length of the education system)
- Pupils have already been enrolled in a gymnasium from grade 5 or from grade 7, after 6 years in primary school
- Pupils enrol in a special type of gymnasium into which Hauptschule and Realschule³ pupils can transfer following grade 6 or 7
- Pupils attend special courses for particularly clever Realschule and vocational school leavers.
- Pupils who have completed Realschule (grade 10th) can enrol in the gymnasiale Oberstufe and obtain a general upper secondary school diploma.

Graduation and Certification

The school-leaving certificate (Zeugnis der Allgemeinen Hochschulreife - General higher education entrance qualification) is obtained following the end of-school examination (*Abitur*) at the end of *gymnasiale Oberstufe*. The marks from the qualification period count for the *Abitur*⁴.

² Basic Structure of the Education System in the Federal Republic of Germany, KMK, https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/pdf/Dokumentation/en_2017.pdf

³ Both Hauptschule and Realschule are lower secondary education providing basic general education which upon completion allow choosing between vocational education or general upper secondary education. Realschule provides more extensive general education.

⁴ Eurydice, National Education systems, Germany, Organisation of General Upper Secondary Education https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/organisation-general-upper-secondary-education-21_en

The *Abitur* enables pupils to commence university or a course of vocational education and training. Some universities require an entrance exam.

For more information on the structure and features of the different national education systems in Europe please see the Eurydice overview: National Education Systems | Eurydice (europa.eu).

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS GOING ABROAD FROM GERMANY

Age and grade

Pupils go abroad before the qualification period. Therefore, the grade/age depends on the school system of their federal state:

- 10th grade, 15-16 years old in the case of G8 (12 years' education);
- 11th grade, 16-17 years old in the case of G9 (13 years' education).

Going on exchange during the qualification period is not allowed because the marks collected in these years count for the final exam (Abitur).

A very small number of pupils goes abroad in the previous grade (9th or 10th grade depending on the system).

Pupils who have completed the 10th grade at Realschule and therefore obtained a secondary school diploma, can enrol in an individual pupil mobility programme only if they enrol in the gymnasiale Oberstufe upon return: they have to apply (and be accepted) at a general upper secondary school before starting the exchange programme.

Registration in the sending school

You need permission from your school principal to go abroad. In addition, you are required to be registered in your home school while abroad. You can apply for *Auslands-BAFÖG*, the German funding system for pupils going abroad.

Funding for the sending school

The funding system of schools is based on the number of pupils enrolled. Therefore, if pupils are abroad for a pupil exchange programme they are officially on leave and they are not counted for determining the funding.

RECOGNITION OF LEARNING PERIODS ABROAD

The following information addresses learning periods abroad lasting either up to 6 months, or a full school year. According to the analysis conducted, there is no information available on recognition procedures for periods abroad of more than 6 months and shorter than a full school year. In fact, mobility programmes foreseeing these timings and durations are not usually offered.

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The same procedures are applied, irrespective of which country the learning period is spent in (EU or non-EU). *Please note that in the case of a mobility within a school-to-school partnership⁵ (e.g. Erasmus+) the learning agreement between sending and host school can be used as recognition tool for programmes of any duration up to a full school year.*

The KMK provides recommendations to federal states on the procedure for recognition of a learning period abroad. Recognition is therefore possible, but regulated differently, in each state.

The procedure generally applied is the following. The 'terms for recognition' have to be clearly defined between the school principal, the pupils and the parents before starting the exchange programme, and each school prescribes which subjects have to be taken in the host country during the exchange. Upon return, exchange pupils need to show that they attended the school abroad for the full period abroad and can be re-admitted at school based on the correspondence of subjects between the sending and host school curricula, which is evaluated by a competent authority, generally this is a teacher or the school principal. The main document used for this procedure is the list of subjects which were taken during the period abroad, and a transcript of the marks⁶. No learning agreement between the sending and hosting school is required. Pupils then need to demonstrate that they can keep up with the schoolwork.

The recognition procedure is very well structured, but also complicated and dependent on the willingness of the school principals. More than half of the pupils going abroad decide to apply for recognition and receive it. The other half opts to repeat the school year and use the year abroad as a gap year before the qualification period starts.

For more information on the legislation of each federal state, the umbrella organisation of non-profit pupil exchange organisations - *Arbeitskreis gemeinnütziger Jugendaustausch* (AJA) provides an overview⁷.

Periods of between 2 and 6 months

The KMK recommends that pupils who go on exchange for periods of between 2 and 6 months should be allowed to re-enter their school in Germany to finish the grade. If you spend abroad the second semester, you will discuss with your school on how to catch up the missed contents, if admitted to the next grade.

This type of exchange is recognised easily according to the procedure outlined above, but pupils can only do it before the qualification period.

A full school year

The KMK recommends that the school year abroad is recognised when done in the last year of the 'introductory period' of upper secondary school. In some federal states, next to the procedure mentioned above, schools require pupils to pass an exam for the subjects that are assessed in the

⁵ within a school-to-school partnership, learning outcomes are usually recognised based on a learning agreement developed between the schools concerned.

⁶ E. Briga, 'Recognition of school study periods abroad in Europe: An overview and policy recommendations. European Federation for Intercultural Learning', EFIL, Brussels, 2018.

⁷ Arbeitskreis gemeinnütziger Jugendaustausch, <https://aja-org.de/anerkennungsflyer/>

Abitur⁸, and each school decides independently on how to organise this. Some federal states allow exams to be taken via email or online, while the pupils are abroad (e.g. Berlin), but it depends on each school.

In general, when pupils spend a full school year abroad, it is particularly important that they catch up with the missed contents when they are admitted to the next grade.

INFORMATION FOR PUPILS HOSTED IN GERMANY

Registration in the host school

There is no legal framework that regulates your status as an exchange pupil. The school principal assesses each individual case and decides whether you can attend as a 'regular' pupil – taking exams and getting a certificate including marks – or attends as an 'extra' pupil without any specific tasks. Hosted pupils usually attend 10th or 11th grade, i.e. the year before entering qualification phase, depending on their age. As a hosted pupil, you cannot be placed in the last two grades of upper secondary school.

Funding for the host school

Schools usually do not receive any funding for the exchange pupils they host as most of the time they are not enrolled as regular pupils.

Certification for hosted pupils

At the end of the exchange, you receive a certificate confirming you attended the host school; the type of certificate varies from school to school.

Possibility of graduating in the host country during the exchange

You cannot be hosted in Germany during the qualification period. It is not possible for exchange pupils to graduate in Germany during their mobility because a pre-requisite for sitting the Abitur examination is to have attended the full qualification period in the country.

TESTIMONIAL

Dorothea from Germany: a full school year to Spain

"I made myself proud by overcoming obstacles."

I participated in the exchange to follow my father's steps, who spent his youth abroad. I also wanted to live a unique experience and become more extroverted.

⁸ Briga, 2018.

When I first arrived in Spain, I could barely speak any Spanish, I was shy and afraid of others' judgement. I overcame the fear of speaking by literally speaking. Once I started interacting and telling myself I was going to make myself proud, positive changes occurred. I proved to myself I could do it.

I have many nice memories of the exchange but one is particularly funny. During the Christmas season I met up with my exchange friends to make cookies and gingerbread houses. We had Christmas music blasting through the house and the atmosphere was so amazing that we forgot the cookies in the oven and they burnt!

A straightforward recognition process

I was lucky enough to have my exchange recognised, thanks to the fact that the curriculum in my Spanish school was similar to the one in Germany. The only different subjects were Technology, Economy, and *lengua* (the history of the Spanish language).

Thanks to the exchange, I got to know myself all over again and learnt how to live alone abroad. I am more mature and I can see the world also from other people's perspective, which will be useful in my future as well. In recommending the exchange to other students, I'd stress that it is not a holiday. You have to embrace yourself and step out of your comfort zone; at the beginning it may seem impossible but time will make it easier. An open mind, zero expectations and the willingness to learn are crucial. My advice is not to be afraid to make mistakes and to enjoy every second of your exchange, you never know what may happen next.

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