



The European Parents' Association of the European Schools

*ALICANTE, BERGEN, BRUXELLES I, II, III, IV
FRANKFURT, KARLSRUHE, LUXEMBURG I, II,
MOL, MÜNCHEN, VARESE.*

IP Memo on BoG 3.-5. December 2019

The Board of Governors convened on the premises of the Secretariat of the European Schools (OSGES) in Brussels. Opening proceedings, the chair welcomed new board members from Belgium, Cyprus, Hungary, Sweden and Poland. The UK was not represented.

Before adopting the agenda, several members urged for the agenda point on **Chinese language and culture teaching** to be changed from being a point of decision (on a new framework agreement with Chinese institutions/authorities) to a point of discussion. The Secretary General (SG) clarified that some decision would have to be taken, i.e. on a mandate for his office regarding ES policy on the matter, but not necessarily already on a framework agreement. The agenda was then adopted as it stood.

Other highlights of the agenda included the **priorities of the Spanish ES presidency** and the joint report by the preceding Greek presidency with the Boards of Inspectors and the Teaching Committee for the school year 2018-19.

Among the important B-items, the agenda featured a presentation of the state of play creating a **New Financial Governance** system for the ES, the Central Enrolment Authority for the Brussels European Schools' review of the results of the 2019-2020 **Enrolment Policy** and its proposed guidelines for the 2020-2021 Policy, with special reference to the situation of the European Schools in Brussels (a.k.a. overcrowding).

An update on the implementation of the **New Marking System** (NMS) was put to the Board for discussion. Finally, in an oral communication, the Dutch government's controversial plan to relocate the **ES Bergen** was discussed.

The Chair of the **Spanish ES presidency** presented its priorities (**2019-10-D-40-en-2**) which fall into two categories, structural and pedagogical. Under the first heading, the long-term sustainability of the ES system, co-operation with the Accredited European Schools (AES), security governance, internal control standards, a re-evaluation of the roles of the SG and his/her deputy (DSG), and the status of locally recruited deputies for finance and administration have been prioritised; under the second heading, assessment and NMS, key competences for lifelong learning, ES language policy, a re-evaluation of the roles and duties of inspectors, ES ICT policy and a follow-up of the action plan for educational support policy and provision.

The efforts so far of establishing **New Financial Governance** (**2019-10-D-42-en-1**) were presented by the SG and welcomed by InterParents (IP): *"We believe these changes have the potential to increase the professionalism of the financial governance of the European Schools. As we are aware of the additional responsibilities that this will place on the SG, we have just one question at this point: Given the challenges that OSGES has had in the past to recruit key staff in the central office, is this structure sufficiently robust to ensure that the SG has all the support he needs from the internal control advisory and control functions in the event that key positions might be vacant?"*

The DSG replied that it is foreseen to provide a framework for OSGES, in collaboration with the ES Presidency, in this respect and present it in March/April.

Staying with financial matters, the SG updated the BoG on the current situation regarding the **Cost Sharing** mechanism implementation for the 2019-2020 school year (**2019-10-D-28-en-2**). The European Commission (DG HR) welcomed the publication of "first real hard data" on the issue, and the fact that the number of seconded staff for the ES has, for the first time, not decreased (1220 in 2018/19, 1223 in October 2019). Even if this is still "far away from what we consider as an appropriate target level which should be 65%". DG HR

added that the Commission is requesting all Member States (MS) “to go the extra mile” to ensure that the targets are met.

The directors’ representatives sought clarification on whether the 65% is a minimum or a maximum target, which was not conclusively given. IP argued that an agreement on this is needed, as *“managing the staffing at our schools to ensure quality of teaching is a complex and demanding job. Our schools’ management teams need to know what levels of seconded teachers they can count on in order to ensure that they have sufficient, well qualified and knowledgeable locally recruited teaching teams to make up the difference with their real needs.”*

Several MS delegations voiced their disappointment that the reduction in numbers did not include a financial contribution from MS that are under-seconding. The report was adopted with one MS abstaining for this reason.

The **Reinforcement of the management structure of the Schools** is well under way. OSGES presented the BoG with two reports: “Amendments to the Staff Regulations linked to the Introduction of Middle Management Structure” (2019-09-D-4-en-4) and “Draft Implementing Regulations for the Appointment of Assistant Deputy Directors of the European Schools” (2019-09-D-5-en-4). Middle management posts are currently advertised, with a first deadline for candidatures in mid February. Selection procedures will start in March/April and the posts will be in place at the beginning of the next school year, on 1st September 2020. The first call for candidates was only sent to seconded staff, in order “not to undermine the seconded principle”, as the DSG explained. LRT staff, to whom these posts are also open, will receive a call after the field of seconded candidates has been analysed. Any candidate can apply in one school only to avoid competition between the schools. For seconded staff, the normal nine year secondment period will apply. The directors’ representatives praised the reform as “a huge step forward in supporting the management of the ES”.

IP made the following intervention: *“The introduction of a middle management structure is overdue and an important change in our schools. However, it is critical that the best candidate is chosen regardless of whether that candidate is a seconded or a locally recruited teacher. Giving priority to seconded teachers should only mean that the seconded teacher has priority if two equally qualified applicants – one LRT and one seconded – present themselves.”* IP also sought clarification on the training foreseen for those responsible for assessing and selecting the successful candidates, but the DSG commented that OSGES did not see a “massive training need” for the selection committee.

Next on the agenda, three reports were presented on **Teaching posts in the European Schools**, dealing both with the current situation regarding seconded and LRT posts, taking into account the new “protected posts” for LRT (2019-09-D-31-fr-2, 2019-10-D-38-en-2 and 2018-11-D-19-fr-4). IP contributed to the discussion by saying: “we are confident that you, as governors, are all aware of the importance of our locally recruited teaching staff to the quality of teaching in our schools. Whilst there will always be a need for some teachers on temporary contracts who are covering a temporary need (sickness, maternity etc.) the vast majority of locally recruited teachers are needed as permanent members of the teaching staff and should be treated as such. Whilst we recognise the contradiction imposed by having our seconded system vs the need to retain our valued and important locally recruited teachers, we believe firmly, having reviewed the numbers, that there is scope to have a greater percentage of protected contracts – ie true permanent contracts for locally recruited teachers.” IP went on to suggest an analysis to be undertaken about what impact this could have, and the options under which protected contracts could be offered (for example based on length of service), adding that there are analysts among the parents known to IP who would be very willing to volunteer to assist in this work.

The DSG agreed that there might be a need for more protected posts. The issue will be included in the review of the package (Teaching Posts and Attractiveness enhancement) in two years’ time.

IP also drew the attention of the BoG to the “many practical issues” arising from the post appointment deadline at the end of the school year (e.g. LRT being advised that their services are not required for the following year and then after all, they are needed because the promised seconded teachers have failed to materialise. In the interim, of course, the experienced LRT may have found employment elsewhere and is no longer be available to the school). Attention was also drawn to ES with Italian sections which regularly experience problems of this kind due to the seconding practices of the Italian authorities.

On the second day of the meeting, first on the agenda, the joint report about the 2018-19 school year and its annex (**2019-09-D-44-en-2** and **2018-09-D-33-fr-6**), and the 2018-2019 report of the Chair of the Budget Committee (**2019-10-D-17-en-2**) The BoG took note without discussion.

By contrast, the review of the results of the 2019-2020 Enrolment Policy and proposed guidelines for the 2020-2021 Policy by the **Central Enrolment Authority for the Brussels European Schools (CEA)** (**2019-11-D-15-fr-1**) and. In particular the related report on the **Situation of the European Schools in Brussels** (**2019-11-D-17-fr-1**) lead to a particularly charged debate. A letter sent to the BoG by the four presidents of the Brussels schools APEEEs, demanding more involvement by the European Commission in pressing the Belgian authorities to provide adequate facilities (most importantly a fifth ES in Brussels), was interpreted by the SG as an attack on him personally as well as on his office, implying that they had somehow failed in this respect. Many delegations, including the European Commission expressed their support for the SG and also disapproved of the letter.

The IP president explained that the letter had not in the least been intended to criticise the efforts of the SG and his office but rather to raise awareness of the now desperately critical situation in the Brussels schools. The IP Vice-President added: *“As IP VP for nearly 5 years now I have seen our colleagues in Brussels (and to some extent also in Frankfurt) move from a position of concern to one of absolute desperation. In IP we rotate our meetings around all schools and there is a marked difference in ‘feeling’ of overcrowding in BRX I II and III compared with all our other schools. These are your children and you are their governors. The situation is now critical – with a daily knock on impact on health and safety – from physical risks (corridor overcrowding) to the mental stress of being in such crowded environments day after day.*

We beseech you today to use your position and authority as governors of our schools to encourage the Belgium authorities and support our SG to urgently reach a solution. This is your responsibility.”

The European Commission representatives replied by underscoring the responsibilities of the Kingdom of Belgium in this respect: “It is for the authorities to take action urgently.”

The SG announced that he requested the directors of the Brussels ES to conduct official audits of their capacity and its usage in the coming weeks. They are currently under way in collaboration with the relevant authorities.

Turning to the issue of **Accredited European Schools (AES)**, the BoG was updated on developments, with General Interest Files having been created for three more proposed schools, in Warsaw, Poland (**2019-08-D-12-pl-2**), the Saarland, Germany (**2019-09-D-58-de-2**) and Lisbon, Portugal (**2019-09-D-38-en-2**). For the AES Paris La Défence, France, a Dossier of Conformity (**2019-09-D-40-en-2**) has been created. Furthermore, there have been some changes proposed to the Regulations on AES (**2019-01-D-12-en-8**), including making a minimum of two language sections a condition for accreditation, and adding that teachers’ language competence requirements have to be in line with those of “type 1” ES.

IP expressed its support for the proposed changes, adding: *“As a parent community we very much welcome the expansion of the AES and the total school network even if this gives us some very real challenges in regions where AES and type 1 schools are co-located.”* This is the case in the Luxembourg, where already four new AES have been established alongside the two ES. With the proposed school in Saarland, a seventh school offering the European Baccalaureate will be opening in the region. IP had this comment to make: *“Whilst we welcome the potential of this school to contribute to our vision to have a regional centre of excellence in European School education, we are concerned about the possibility to have yet another school chase after a small group of experienced European school teachers and the added strain that this might cause to our type 1 schools. We would therefore like to request that the German delegation commit to not actively seeking to attract our teachers to this new school, that they make the proposed salary to be paid transparent to our analysts so we can assess if there is a financial incentive for teachers to move from our schools to this new one and finally, that under no circumstances, would teachers be able to move mid year from our schools to the new school. With this in mind – we do share a vision of our region being a centre of excellence for European schools – this vision will start to become a reality when teachers move in equal numbers between all the schools – that no school or group of schools is considered by the teachers to offer superior employment conditions and that thus we can share expertise and best practice to the success and benefit of all schools.”*

At the presentation of the OSGES’ **Fifth Brexit Report** (**2019-11-D-3-en-2**), it was confirmed that by virtue of the Withdrawal Agreement (which has been signed in the meantime), the UK will continue to contribute fully to the ES system (secondments, inspectors) until the end of next school year, 31st August 2021. This date will also apply as the deadline for BAC recognition for students - i.e. UK recognition for all students having entered

the secondary cycle before that date - as well as the guaranteed time concerning the accreditation of the AES Culham. A prolongation of this ES system transition period is possible.

Upon presentation of the **Final Report of the Court of Auditors - Year 2018 (2019-10-D-22-en-2)**, DG HR invited OSGES to make more efforts to close audit points already outstanding, most notably shortcomings with respect to staff recruitment and payment. The SG replied that these have been identified as areas for further work. The SG also stressed the fact that the Court had highlighted the importance of sufficient resources for the schools. These are currently under analysis by internal audit with the report expected to be received soon.

The DSG then gave an update on the introduction of the **New Marking System (2019-11-D-23-en-10)**: the last syllabus is currently being finalised, centralised training for teachers and directors is being organised with the help of the inspectors, who also have published guidelines. Decentralised training sessions are being held at the schools. Member States have been requested to update their equivalence tables - so far, four MS have submitted new equivalence tables (CZ, DE, MT, SL) but only one of them (SL) has done so satisfactorily. IP expressed, yet again, parents' worries about the fact that one big MS (DE) had rushed to approve a new conversion table that did not take into account the now clearly visible impact of the NMS - of the marks being lower on average than they were in the old system - and seems to be reluctant to exercise further reflection. IP suggested that Article 5 of the Convention on the European Schools represented a legal basis for the BoG to endorse the OSGES recommendations in all MS.

The SG requested that MS rethink their equivalence tables in light of the data and expressed his readiness to invite an expert from DG Education (EAC) to support it. The BoG took note.

The **Reports on the 2019 European Baccalaureate**, from the Chair of the Examining Board (**2019-09-D-21-en-2**) and from the OSGES BAC unit (**2019-07-D-22-en-3**), were well received. IP underlined that the number of complaints by parents has fallen, not least due to the BAC monitoring platform put in place by IP which has established a communication channel with the BAC unit, helping to resolve minor issues without the need to resort to a formal complaint. The DSG thanked both authors of the reports and informed the BoG that Working Groups involved in the BAC cycle - giving the example of the PreBac WG - will ensure a follow-up and present proposals in February. BoG members were encouraged to visit the online interactive BAC report <http://scholaeuropa.eu/bacc/report/2019>

The BoG then moved to the controversial topic of **Chinese Language and Culture in the European Schools (2019-09-D-63-en-2)**. The BoG members broadly agreed on the importance of teaching Chinese language and culture at the ES, now enshrined in the syllabus as an L4 option. However, those who took the floor, most expressed reservations about mandating the SG to negotiate a renewed agreement with Chinese authorities or institutions, like the Confucius Institute, pointing to recent reports of manipulation and propaganda in their educational activities.

The existing agreement was signed in 2010 by directors with HANBAN, the Confucius Institute HQ, without it passing through the BoG. Even though it was recognised as having been signed in good faith at the time, many BoG members voiced their support for the inclusion of the BoG in any future agreement, most notably DG HR. The fact that HANBAN has provided substantial funding for schools participating in the agreement also came under scrutiny. DG HR commented: *"Contributions from a body in close contact with the state administration of a third country creates significant issues to be resolved."*

IP remarked that some parents associations have their own arrangements with Chinese institutions. It was agreed that it is their duty to ensure propriety and practice due diligence when engaging with contractors.

On behalf of the ES system, the BoG gave the SG a mandate for a review of Chinese tuition in the schools: *"The BoG invites the SG of the ES to explore the options, in close consultation with the services of the European Commission and the Presidency of the BoG, to offer courses in Chinese language and culture in the ES. The BoG requests the SG to clarify the legal and ethical framework in which agreements with another party, including organisations of Third Countries, can be signed."*

The BoG expects the SG to provide an update at the next BoG meeting in April.

Finally, the SG updated the BoG on the Dutch governments' plans to **relocate the ES Bergen**. The Ministry for Education was supposed to send a written request for a formal response to three location suggestions. The time-frame for completion of the move has been indicated as being five to seven years. The IP president made the following statement:

"Parents are much concerned by the decision of the NL ministry to move away from Bergen. The school is in urgent need of a substantial investment with regards to its maintenance. As it seems, the ministry has not lived up to its responsibilities in this respect. The Bergen school must not be neglected, especially given the indicative time frame for the relocation. Parents also regret that in this process so far neither parents nor the school advisory council have been consulted. We ask for all stakeholders to be more closely involved in the future."