



IP Memo BoG meeting 15-17 April 2020

The Board of Governors (BoG) of the European Schools (ES) was supposed to gather for its biannual enlarged meeting in Alicante, Spain on 15 April 2020 but, due to the current pandemic the meeting had to be held by video conference.

This unprecedented situation led to several disruptions to the proceedings, caused by technical problems. Some decisions due had to be deferred to Written Procedure (WP). However, most discussions were held and many decisions were taken.

Highlights of the agenda included:

Several budgetary reports, amongst them the **Discharge** to the Administrative Boards and to the Secretary-General (SG) for implementation of the 2018 budget and, concerning the 2021 budget of the ES, **New/Converted/ Discontinued Administrative and Ancillary Staff (AAS) posts**.

For obvious reasons, two timely reports dealing with the **Consequences of COVID-19** were discussed at length.

Concerning the language policy of the ES, two proposals were up for decision by the BoG, **Including the Host Country Language in the group of Languages 2 and Introduction of Language 3 in P4 and P5**.

Finally, a document proposing new guidelines concerning the **Roles and Duties of the European Schools' Inspectors** was discussed, updates were presented on the implementation of the **New Marking System (NMS)**, on **Brexit** preparations, and a proposal for a '**Common Framework for Events organised by the European Schools**' was presented for decision.

The participants were welcomed by the Spanish ES Presidency in the Chair, who highlighted the challenges the system has faced and is continuing to face by the COVID-19 pandemic and expressing their "gratitude to teachers, parents and pupils for adapting to the new situation".

Two new members of the BoG were welcomed, the head of the Irish delegation and a new head of unit for the European Commission. The presidency also noted that this BoG meeting was the first one with 27 Member States (MS) participating. The UK delegation had been invited but, in contrast to the Joint Teaching Committee in February, where the UK inspectors did represent their country, the delegation from the Ministry for Education had communicated that they would not attend.

Having adopted the agenda, the SG took the virtual floor to also thank teachers, parents and pupils for their efforts in facilitating "some kind of distant education", expressing his pride in what the ES

system has been able to achieve in this respect in the circumstances. He also drew attention to the **delegation of emergency powers** to him as SG in this situation, as proposed by the document on COVID-19 consequences. It was agreed that this issue would be debated when the document would come up in the agenda but the Chair also opened the floor for initial comment.

Several MS immediately expressed concerns, notably on the open-endedness of the proposed arrangements. It was also agreed that the two aspects of the document - **risk assessment and actions to be taken**, and special powers - would be discussed separately.

The **Discharge** to the Administrative Boards and to the Secretary-General (SG) **for implementation of the 2018 budget (2020-02-D-34-en-2)** was granted, against, once again, the vote of the European Commission (DG HR) who pointed to the “weaknesses in the control environment” and “non-compliance with rules on staff recruitment” identified by the Court of Auditors (CoA), as well as criticism advanced by the European Parliament’s Budget Control Committee in their most recent report on the ES.

The OSG replied that “we take note of the audit recommendations with the highest priority and are working actively to resolve the problems one by one”.

Next on the agenda was the **Situation of the European Schools in Brussels – Evere temporary site (2020-03-D-47-en-1)**. The SG explained that the number of enrolments into the Brussels schools in the first phase keeps rising, and that the situation remains “critical”, as the main school sites are “fully booked even beyond theoretical capacity”. Having alerted the Belgian authorities once again to the risk of the possibility of a refusal of Category I pupils, the BE Council of Ministers finally decided to make available a temporary site whilst waiting for the 5th school, on the grounds of the former NATO HQ in Evere.

The most pressing issue according to the SG is how to populate the temporary site quickly, avoiding the negative experience of Berkendael which started with student numbers way below its capacity and had been filling up slowly since, creating doubts in the minds of the Belgian authorities as to the urgency of required capacities. He added that “creating a new school with empty sections is not the best option to make quick use of the additional space available”. In Berkendael, “satellite classes” (in DE, EL, ES, EN and IT) were created to solve this problem. As Berkendael operates administratively as a part of BXL 1, the SG is suggesting to do the same with the new temporary site and make it a part of the Brussels school in closest proximity, BXL 2.

The SG proceeded to present simulations of projected population numbers for Evere. More than 1000 students could have been orientated there but only if the sibling rule is not adhered to. Taking it into account and creating NUR to P5 classes, the number arrived at was 496. Therefore, the budget proposal for Evere is based on 500 students initially.

Delegates were invited to comment and raised several concerns. “The presentation of the SG is clear but the situation on the ground less so”, one MS delegate commented. Others called for a more thorough analysis of student population according to language sections and their growth rates. Interparents expressed doubts about the timeline proposed by the Belgian delegation, which seemed to not yet have taken into account the current COVID-19 crisis. DG HR expressed support for the concept of running the temporary Evere site as an annex of BXL 2, and promised to help with a legal analysis of any constraints in populating it.

The SG suggested to organise an extraordinary Board of Governors meeting in the autumn on this issue (and on updates about COVID-19 consequences) to ensure that a decision could be made at the next ordinary meeting in December.

The OSG presented a new **Data Governance Concept (2020-02-D-23-en-2)** for approval by the BoG. It aims to achieve the following: the creation of a master data management tool, the replacement of the current enrolment platform starting with the Brussels schools, as well as the replacement of the current salary software for seconded teachers. IP welcomed the concept, in particular the aspect of a more efficient enrolment procedure. The BoG approved the document, with five MS votes against for financial reasons.

Regarding the **2021 Budget of the European Schools**, three documents were presented to the BoG for approval. Firstly, **New/Converted/Discontinued Administrative and Ancillary Staff (AAS) posts (2020-02-D-40-en-2)** were discussed, with the OSG member in charge explaining that the current proposal was made taking the outcome of the consulting report of the Internal Audit Service (AIS) **on HR allocation and distribution of non-teaching tasks in the ES (2020-02-D-37-en-2)** into consideration. He also added that many of the 13,5 permanent and 4,5 temporary positions were due to legal obligations in the areas of data protection and health and security., whereas the other posts were needed to support increased pupil numbers.

After first critical interventions by MS with a strong focus on fiscal frugality, the debate was interrupted by the virtual visit of the Spanish Secretary of State for Education who welcomed the BoG members, if, sadly not in his country as originally planned. He praised the efforts of the ES to cope with the current crisis situation which was, nonetheless also “an opportunity to strengthen European cooperation”, also in the field of education.

After more interventions, amongst them by the delegate of the schools’ directors defending the new AAS posts as “vital” and “the bare minimum in order for the schools to function efficiently” given the chronic lack of manpower in the schools, the meeting was beset with persistent technical problems and it was decided to close Wednesday’s procedures and continue on Thursday.

The next day saw another of the budget documents, on the **European School, Brussels V – Evere (2020-03-D-2-en-2)**, being commented on, with notably DG HR objecting to the fact that school furniture was included in the budget, which is, according to the Convention for the ES, the duty of the HC to supply. The BE delegation reacted by deferring the issue, explaining that it fell in the responsibility of another authority but promised to get back to the BoG in due course after consultations. To this, DG HR remarked that the pupils must not be kept hostages of the fact that a MS does not provide the furniture needed for the schools, and that they would therefore support the proposal with the proviso that this was clearly minuted.

On the third document, the **Preliminary Draft 2021 Budget of the European Schools (2020-02-D-39-en-2)**, again the same group of MS voiced concerns, with one maintaining that the MS position “on the EU budget is that it should decrease and not increase” and that subsequently, also the ES budget should be revised downwards. The OSG member explained that the main driver behind the budget increase were salary increases that have been agreed in line with the decision taken for the EU institutions, and the SG responding to concerns about the Evere budget’s relative uncertainty that, if required, there would be an amending budget produced.

The budget documents were approved with reservations from six MS delegations.

Coming back to the **Consequences of COVID-19**, the BoG turned to the first and more complex of the two documents presented, **Risk assessment and Actions to be taken in the Pedagogical and Administrative area (2020-03-D-44-en-1)**.

The DSG gave an overview of the most pressing issues. Regarding the re-opening of schools, which closed on 16 March (with the exception of Varese and Munich who had to close earlier), he stressed that the ES are not fully autonomous in their decisions but have to respect the rules issued by the hosting MS.

He explained that the OSG is continuing to analyse the situation, especially with regard to distance learning. He acknowledged the increased role of all parents and thanked the students' representatives for launching a survey amongst students about it, of which the OSG has taken note.

Now, the decision to be taken by the BoG was "what to do for the last half of the second semester". The document has structured the issue into several chapters, concerning the Primary and the Secondary cycles, class councils and finally the BAC 2020. While in the meeting document the suggestions were still also separated in two different scenarios, with one scenario envisaging a return to full *in situ* teaching at the beginning of May, this scenario has now been discarded.

The main suggestion for the **Primary** cycle was **exceptional automatic promotion**, except when parents and school agree otherwise. This proposal was not controversial and approved after the lengthy debate on Secondary, BAC and Class Council aspects.

For the **Secondary** cycle, the measures focussed on upper Secondary from S4, when the A and B marking and examination routine starts. It was suggested that the second **B test**, scheduled for this part of the school year, was to be cancelled, and the mark for the first B test replicated. The second A mark, however, should be given. With regard to arriving at the final C mark, the DSG stressed the role of the **Class Councils**, which already have a lot of flexibility for the C mark decision, but should now "take into account and into consideration the special situation of the pupils as well as of the teaching", and promised to produce a memo for school management regarding Class Councils in this time.

For **S7 and the BAC**, the DSG stressed the need to observe several principles: Fair and transparent treatment of pupils, the application of the same rules for all ES and AES, adding that conducting the usual written and oral examinations was "no longer an option". However, an option to sit the exam in the autumn ("no cherry picking - either the whole exam or nothing") or to repeat the whole year on request should be offered. Both suggestions were approved by the BoG.

During a lively debate, several MS delegates regretted the fact that the ES inspectors were not consulted in the drafting of this document. The DSG apologised for this and explained that the document was drafted after the Joint Teaching Committee (JTC) meeting in February. He added that in future, more in-depth consultation of all stakeholders would be guaranteed.

IP made a detailed intervention on distance learning and teaching, starting with an acknowledgement on behalf of all parents associations' representatives of the ES response to the COVID-19 crisis in general, praising the commitment, resourcefulness and imagination shown by teachers across the system. However, they added:

"There is wide variation in experience on the ground between schools, cycles, sections and individual classes, and parents remain anxious that no minimum educational offer can be ensured under the current arrangement. Primary programmes have been particularly impacted by a lack of a unified programme and common IT tools, and the current situation is not sustainable. For this reason, we are happy to see that the "establishment of a quality assurance frame" is envisaged in the current document.

Parents underscore that concrete implementation of distant learning cannot be left to the self-initiative and personal attitudes of teachers as this is not enough to ensure minimum pedagogical continuity in core subjects, such as L1, maths, L2, science and human science.

In our view, this situation will likely continue in some form into the next school year (in different places and at different times). As the situation evolves so must the approach of the schools and the central

office, and we believe that the road ahead should comprise three distinct stages:

1) To 4 May:

The collection of feedback and best practice and improvement of guidance given to the schools should continue through the end of the April together with the establishment of a quality assurance framework.

Schools should be strongly encouraged to follow the Guidelines and the central office should continue to provide support and advice.

In the meantime, the PedUnit should produce an "inventory" of the remote learning programmes put in place at all schools, including both tools and practices—either obligatory or recommended.

2) From 4 May to end of year (if appropriate):

Based on the findings in the inventory, Best Practice programmes should be showcased and those schools with weaker programmes should be given extra support from the centre.

Quality assurance measures should be strongly advocated.

Online assessment possibilities should be explored.

3) From September:

Clear minimum requirements for remote learning should be set at the centre and the compliance of schools should be monitored.

Assessment methods should be defined and implemented across the system in order to measure attainments and adapt methodologies.

Teachers should be offered trainings and continuous support.

Real quality assurance practices should be fully implemented with the close involvement of inspectors."

The debate then focussed on the issues faced for the Secondary, and in particular the **BAC cycle**. The teachers' representative pointed out that the lower Secondary (S1-S3) was not touched upon in the document, and stressed the importance of a fair examinations and grading for S6, as a predictor for S7 and many university applications. IP and students' representatives (COSUP) supported the teachers' comments. The DSG admitted that S1-S3 should have been included in the document but explained that the upper Secondary issues were more urgent.

How the BAC 2020 could be organised fairly and with credibility was discussed at length. IP had prepared, in collaboration with COSUP, an alternative grading model for the A and B marks to the two proposed by the OSG. The discussion continued into the third day of the meeting. However, the decision about the actual grading percentages was postponed and referred to WP. What was decided was communicated by IP to all parents shortly after the meeting. The document can be found on the IP website <http://interparents.eu/>

On the proposed **Special Powers** for the SG, the discussion showed that, in the current form, they were not acceptable to the BoG. The OSG declared that an amended version would be created and sent to the BoG for decision by WP in the coming weeks.

Seven agenda items remained. Firstly, new **Draft Service Regulations for Locally Recruited Managerial Staff** in the European Schools (**2020-02-D-31-en-2**) were presented. The DSG explained that his office was hoping for approval by the BoG now so that the regulations could enter into force in May already, in order to facilitate recruitment for posts at the ES Bergen and Frankfurt/Main

where candidatures from seconded staff had not been received. The BoG approved the document with two MS delegations expressing reservations and one abstaining.

The **Priorities of the Spanish Presidency** of the European Schools 2019-2020 (**2019-10-D-40-en-5**) were presented in their final form in order for the BoG to mandate the relevant pedagogical WGs to work on the proposals which needed development. It was also an opportunity to thank the presidency.

IP remarked: *“Parents would like to thank the presidency for all its work and express their appreciation of the values expressed in its presentation. Work is currently much needed to uphold the values of tolerance as well as European values in general, and IP fully supports all efforts in that respect. We also welcome the idea that proposals pertaining to this end are taken to pedagogical WGs.”*

Other BoG delegates expressed themselves in a similar manner. The mandate to the WGs was approved.

Two documents regarding the ES language policy were presented for decision by the BoG. Firstly, on **Including the Host Country Language in the group of Languages 2 (2020-01-D-25-en-3)**. The OSG member in charge explained, that the initiative to include the HCL among the L2 languages would come from the admin board of each individual school, and would then conduct a “proper and deep analysis” of the consequences for the school before gradually implementing it, starting from P1. He added, that the reform would “facilitate the integration of pupils into their host countries and add to their choice of higher education by supporting access to the national tertiary system. He also pointed to the fact that this proposal has been “on the table” for ten years now, acknowledging that five MS delegations have consistently raising concerns about the financing of the reform. However, the Budget Committee (BC) had now expressed a positive opinion, as well as the JTC and the JBI.

Directors, teachers and parents all welcomed the document, with particular reference to the decision of implementing the change being the prerogative of the schools’ admin boards.

DG HR expressed its concern that the introduction of HCL as L2 would be “an obstacle to staff mobility”. The directors’ delegate responded that the issue had been examined on many occasions, showing that the mobility from national systems is far more important than mobility across the ES, adding that “we have comprehensive means of adapting to pupils who arrive without the necessary languages”.

The document was approved with reservations expressed by three MS delegations, and five delegations abstaining.

The second language policy document proposed the **Introduction of Language 3 in P4 and P5 (2020-01-D-26-en-3)**. The OSG member explained that the proposal was aimed to make the ES language policy more coherent and more consistent with the principles of the ES.

When the floor was opened for debate, almost all delegates, while supporting the principle of multilingualism, expressed serious concerns about the proposal. Mainly because it was envisaged to be mandatory across the system, unlike the HCL proposal, but also because of the implications for the teaching of L1 and maths, which would have to be reduced to make room in the timetable for L3 teaching. The teachers’ delegate pointed to the fact that most ES pupils do not have the environmental reinforcement of L1 that their peers in the national systems enjoy, and also warned of possible negative effects on vulnerable students and a substantial increase of the demand for

Educational Support, without the means to meet it. MS delegates whose pupils benefit from Other National Language teaching (ONL) expressed their dismay at possible negative effects on ONL.

IP commented: *“It is worrying that the Board of Governors is being asked to take a decision on an important curricular issue under the current extraordinary circumstances, at a moment when stakeholders are necessarily occupied with short-term imperatives. We believe that long-term curricular changes should be carefully weighed and debated and we fear that in the current context, this will not be possible.*

In the current meeting cycle, parents have widely supported the idea to introduce an L3 option in the primary, particularly one offered in the context of European Hours. Unfortunately, this is not the proposal before us.

We underscore that the reservations of different stakeholders on this proposal have been substantial. In particular, we believe that the concerns of primary teachers, those familiar with the realities on the ground, should be taken seriously and addressed before any proposal on this matter is put to the Board of Governors for approval.”

It was decided to refer the proposal back to the Pedagogical Reform WG, which was mandated to find ways of strengthening L3 in a manner supportable by all stakeholders.

Next, the **proposals for a 'Common Framework for Events** organised by the European Schools' (**2019-12-D-36-en-3**) was presented for decision. It had already found support at the JTC and the BC. However, DG HR voiced strong opposition to one aspect of the proposal, the discharge foreseen for teachers involved in the organisation of the events, on the grounds that “internal structures have already been increased by 30%. A further increase is therefore premature”. First, the effects of the increase already affected would have to be evaluated.

Upon request by DG HR, the document was approved with the aspect of discharge taken out to be decided at a later stage.

Presenting a document revising the **Roles and duties of the European Schools’ Inspectors (2018-09-D-35-en-7)**, the DSG asked the BoG for a mandate to elaborate concrete measures in a dedicated WG, and asked for a legal commitment from the seconding MS that their two inspectors should be able to spend a combined 120% of their professional time dedicated to the ES from 2022, due to the increase in their tasks and duties. The vast majority of BoG delegates expressed their support for the document, including IP who took the floor with the following intervention:

“Parents are very aware that in addition to their national and subject expertise, our system also calls on inspectors to have other expertise and competencies such as educational support, assessment and testing, educational policy & curriculum development in a multicultural and multilingual context, digital learning and increasingly, faced with the loss of EN expertise due to BREXIT, EN specialism to support L1-4 as well as the BAC subjects. We would recommend a regular inventory of the required additional competencies and that these should be also be taken into account during the nomination procedure. In the event that there are any gaps for any given academic year of either subject or competency expertise, we would recommend a procedure be put in place to allow for any missing competencies or expertise to be filled by direct recruiting by OSGES until MS can fill the gap.

We would like to see a little more elaboration of the very welcomed proposal regarding long term planning and would like to see this long term planning include time allocated to ensure that inspectors are consistently present in the individual schools to allow increased interaction with key stakeholders, as well as involvement in teacher training and retraining, sharing of best practice and insofar that

these long term plans are relevant to the individual schools are transparent to our Admin boards. We would also welcome regular feedback from the inspectors at the level of the Admin boards.

Finally, we believe that there is immediate need for inspector input on how we can ensure quality assessment relating to virtual education and distance learning.

Of course, parents would welcome any opportunity to be involved in this working group as this is a topic at the heart of our system."

The chair concluded that everyone was in agreement about the key role being played by the inspectors in the ES system and that the mandate was given to the OSG as requested.

Three documents were presented concerning the implementation of the **New Marking System**:

- Updating of the tables of equivalence in the Member States (**2019-11-D-23-en-2**)
- Sample examination material for use with the new marking system in the European Baccalaureate (**2020-03-D-48-en-1**), and
- Analysis S5 and S6 marks (**2020-03-D-50-en-1**).

After a brief introduction by the OSG author of the first report, DG HR took the floor to express its worries about the lack of new and adapted conversion tables being presented, and its concern, in particular, about the Danish table which seemed to disadvantage ES students in the Danish tertiary system, adding "already now, many Danish students are returning to Denmark for their final years in Secondary because of unfavourable treatment." IP supported this intervention explicitly. The Danish BoG delegate replied: "We are surprised to hear from DG HR that Denmark discriminates against ES pupils. We have two ministers taking care of this and, as explained by OSG, Denmark uses percentiles to convert the marks and for bonus A mentioned in other elements that parents have put forward. It is clear to this ministry and other ministries that this is not possible according to the Lisbon treaty."

The Chair announced that BoG took note of the document, as it did with the second document after a brief discussion.

The third document had been put together with the help of the Statistical Department of the Spanish Ministry for Education, based on data provided by OSG. In essence, the data showed an increase of marks between 4 and 5.5, and a decrease in marks between 8 and 8.5, compared to the 2017/18 S5 marks, "as was expected". The analysis of S6 marks was done internally and examined the results of 1st semester S6. As OSG explained, averages have a tendency to drop in S5 and increase again in S6. The drop was bigger in the analysed data but the tendency remains the same for current S6. The failure rate has decreased.

IP thanked the ES Presidency and the OSG for this analysis and commented that parents would welcome more detailed information, breaking down the data by school, section and subject.

The OSG concluded that the BoG took note also of the third document and urged MS delegates who have yet to do so to produce adapted conversion tables before the start of the next school year.

Finally, the OSG asked the BoG for a mandate to extend the work of the **Brexit WG**, to continue work for proposals by December 2020 to be tabled before the UK leaves our system. The proposals would look at a future potential cooperation with the UK., addin that there has been substantial discussion whether Europeans Schools could be part of a future EU/UK relationship. The request was not controversial but, for technical reasons, the vote on it was referred to WP.