



The European Parents' Association of the European Schools

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

JTC February 2020 IP Memo

The Joint Teaching Committee (JTC) of the European Schools (ES) met on 13 and 14 February 2020 for its biannual meeting in Brussels. Apart from the Office of the Secretary General (OSGES), the current ES presidency (Spain), the Member States' inspectors, schools' directors and deputy directors, the European Commission (DG HR), teachers, parents and students, the Accredited European Schools (AES) were also represented.

Agenda topics included the state of **secondments** and of applications for the new posts of **Assistant Deputy Director**, the Spanish Presidency's plans for **curriculum reform**, a first statistical report on **educational support** provision and practice at the ES, the state of play of the **New Marking System** implementation, several aspects and reports on the implementation of the **8 Key Competences**, as well as on the ES **Language Policy**, most notably and controversially the proposed introduction of **L3 in P4**, and the new guidelines for the **pedagogical use of mobile devices**.

The meeting opened with welcoming the new BE (FR) inspector for Mat/P, Mr Rome as documented in **2020-01-D-64-en-2**.

A communication by the Secretary General (SG) then focused on the state of secondments in the ES, the situation of the Brussels schools and the recruitment for the newly established management reinforcing posts of assistant deputy directors.

At the time of the meeting, there had only been two more **secondments** compared to last year, despite the initiatives taken last year with the help of the then HR Commissioner, Günther Oettinger. The SG called this development "worrying" and informed the JTC that he has extended the deadline and reminded all delegations of their obligations.

The SG informed the JTC that the Belgian caretaker government has finally confirmed that the former NATO HQ site in the Brussels commune of Evere will be made available for a temporary ES. It is expected that the temporary site will open for the school year 2021/22 and hoped that the permanent **5th Brussels ES** will open on the site in 2026 - although confirmation of this would have to wait until the new government has been installed in office.

Regarding the management reinforcement for ES, the recruitment of **assistant deputy directors** for the ES, a picture similar to the one of the state of secondments emerged. At the time of the meeting, only one MS had submitted an application. The Deputy SG added that if there are no valid candidates by the deadline of February 29, a second call will be made, aimed at Locally Recruited Teachers (LRT).

The Spanish ES Presidency took to the floor to elaborate on their plans for the Reform of the European Schools Curriculum (**2019-10-D-40-en-3**). They focus on implementing the Eight Key Competences, with civic competence and its European dimension is a particular priority. Interparents generally welcomed the document and expressed support for it. However, there is one specific idea for implementing the reforms which IP finds highly problematic, the “Proposals of the Assessment Secondary WG on the **Cross Curricular Project (CCP) (2020-01-D-40-en-1)**. The proposal foresees the introduction of a CCP in S6 and S7, replacing the pre-BAC. As the discussion later that day showed, IP was not alone in thinking that the positioning within the BAC-cycle and the time-frame envisaged - entry into force for S6 during the next school year - is turning a good idea into a deeply flawed one. The teachers’ representative flagged up various practical issues, concluding that this was “in principle a good idea but not yet well defined”. Directors’ representative remarked that, giving the changes already happening due to the New Marking System (NMS), this was “not the time to introduce it”, adding that although in favour of the CCP, directors object to it replacing the pre-BAC, a view that was supported by the students’ representative. IP commented:

“If the intention is to assess the Eight Key Competences, implementation at S6-S7 is ill-timed, particularly as no pilot exercise has been done. We feel that students in lower cycles could benefit from doing the CCP and thus building this competence over time.”

The Presidency thanked the JTC delegates for their feedback and concluded that the guidelines for the CCP should be discussed further.

In the context of gathering opinions on the Statistical Report on **Educational Support and on the Integration of Pupils with Special Educational Needs** into the European Schools in the Year 2018-2019 (**2019-11-D-11-en-2**), the SG informed the JTC that a new post in his office has just been created and filled, that of Educational Support Coordinator. The report’s author highlighted that while Educational Support (or Learning Support, LS) has increased - particularly the intensive A type - the budget share for LS varies greatly between schools, where it can be as low as 3% and as high as 30%. She recommended that schools should analyse the overall and the school-based results for their internal planning.

IP thanked the OSGES for this report and commented that it showed some positive trends - more **ISA (intensive support)** agreements, e.g., but also worrying ones, like the decrease in the number of tripartite (outside) agreements. IP also suggested that this annual report should be made more use of as a monitoring tool which could help in identifying problems in the application of existing policy and procedures in individual schools.

The EC HR representative requested further information on why the variations of LS cost per pupil varies so greatly across the schools. The DSG replied by pointing to local differences in MS funding but conceded that there is a need for more harmonisation in general. This is why OSGES has employed a LS coordinator.

Later that day, the prolongation and extension of the list of categories in the Call for expression of interests for **therapists for pupils with special educational needs** in the European Schools (**2020-01-D-30-en-1**) was presented to the JTC and welcomed in particular by IP and inspectors.

In an oral presentation, the inspector in charge of the New Marking System (NMS) updated the JTC on the **implementation of the NMS in the BAC cycle**. Of 22 subjects assessed concerning their oral examinations and assessment sheets, 13 were found to be in line with

the guidelines, 3 needed further adaptations, 2 were not in line and had to be re-done, the material for 5 subjects were still incomplete.

IP thanked OSGES and the inspectors for their work but raised three urgent questions, given that the S6 cohort in this school year, and next year's BAC, will be graded using the NMS:

"1. Concerning the implementation process, on what measurable results and key standard indicators are the inspectors and the central office monitoring the situation in each school? The parent community needs to be reassured on the basis of official data, which can provide an overview for each school, language section and individual topic on the progress of the implementation process.

2. Regarding the recognition of the new marking scale, how many Member States have updated their conversion tables? Is it a concerted effort among all the member states, as expected by the parents community, in order to achieve an harmonized approach in respect to the rights of our pupils?

3. BAC 2021: The families involved are deeply concerned their pupils will have to face any unexpected failure in the assessment process. Which concrete mitigation measures are foreseen to guarantee that also this first population of students will access a fair BAC examination? Can the central office name a couple of them to help Interparents to respond to the parents' inquiries?"

The inspector informed the JTC that the examples for written examinations, including the generic matrices have been finished and will be evaluated and distributed by the end of the month.

One OSGES representative announced that the Pedagogical Development Unit is preparing a statistical analysis of results, starting with end of year marks for S5 last year. Another added, that the MS have received two communications providing guidance regarding BAC recognition and grade conversion over the past year and that they will receive a third one shortly.

IP felt that not all aspects of parents' questions had been addressed.

A document in connection with next year's BAC was presented and discussed, the updated: "Arrangements for Implementing the Regulations for the European Baccalaureate" (**2015-05-D-12-en-19**). On page 34 of this document, changes have been made with regard to the definition and subsequent sanctioning of cheating. IP made it clear that parents do not agree with these changes:

"Interparents regrets that the comments made at the BAC observatory have not been taken into account. Parents believe that the proposal does not take into account the principle of proportionality recognised by Article 49 of the Charter of Human Rights of the European Union and the case-law of the European Court of Justice, the European Court of Human Rights and the Complaints Board.

Cheating and attempting to cheat are defined in a broad way, including situations that cannot objectively be considered as real cheating or attempt to cheat but rather situations where the student has been negligent (like, for example, forgetting to remove a standard watch). This also contradicts the principle of strict interpretation of sanction law.

Up to now, the rules take into account the principle of proportionality and allows to impose a penalty proportionate to the actual misbehaviour. The proposed modification risk to lead to situations where the principle of proportionality is no longer respected."

The OSGES representative rejected the parents' intervention, arguing that "all the rules are made aware to the pupils well in advance." One MS took the floor to support the OSGES position, commenting that "17-18 year olds should be able to come to the exams prepared, and that the document "puts everything on paper that everyone should know about cheating."

IP responded that this interpretation would be a misunderstanding of its position and clarified that parents are, of course, not in favour of cheating in any way.

A little later in the day, and after the debate about the planned CCP mentioned above, the DSG presented his proposals for a **Common Framework for 'Events'** organised by the ES (Eurosport, Science Symposium MEC, Arts symposium FAMES), (2019-12-D-36-en-1). The need for this arose because schools find it more and more difficult to finance these events. The DSG explained that some of the main ideas of the common framework approach is to engage all schools (including the participating AES) in a fair sharing of costs, a more adequate overall budget from the EC and a full use of sponsorships where there are available.

Directors and Deputy Directors welcomed the document wholeheartedly, stressing the need for a uniform approach. The Commission voiced its opposition to a fixed amount budget contribution but suggested for individual schools to prepare an estimation of the expected costs. The DSG replied that it was the Commission who had originally asked for the proposal of a fixed amount, only to question it now, after three meetings of the WG. A more reasonable intervention earlier in the WG would have been welcome, he added.

IP expressed its gratitude to the WG for this important work, finally laying down a common framework for the organisation of events in the ES, adding:

"IP is looking forward to seeing all Events handbooks being updated once this new framework is approved. A more equitable distribution of costs among schools should go hand in hand with a clearer reference in each handbook to the selection procedure and criteria of participating that must be fair, transparent and communicated in advance to all students. Moreover, the handbooks should clearly set out how the events should be announced in order to ensure that the message reaches a large number of participants."

Discussing the **Guidelines on the implementation of the 8 Key Competences (2020-01-D-28-en-1)**, IP expressed their concern that the document is not far-reaching enough and that a centralised guidance (in the form of a "road map", e.g.) will be needed to ensure a harmonised and successful implementation. The teachers' representative also underlined that "nobody has a clear picture about the implementation" of the key competences and called for more training on it. The report's author from the OSG replied that in the WG it had become clear that the key competences would best be addressed by including them into the syllabuses. This, unfortunately, cannot be done in the short term as they have just been updated and approved and the next update is only scheduled in ten years' time. As a remedial measure, he suggested introducing relevant annexes to the new syllabuses. The WG will now turn to producing those.

At the subsequent presentation of the related document **Harmonisation of pedagogical planning** in the European Schools – **Introduction of the eight key competences (2020-01-D-60-fr-1 + Annexe 2020-01-D-61-fr-1)**, the inspector in charge was able to present the state of play from his perspective. He called the document "very dynamic" and suggested an

exchange of present practices between schools and sections. He also confirmed that training for teachers will be organised.

The teachers' representative intervened to express opposition to "what is seen as extra administrative workload". The inspector replied that the administrative workload will not necessarily increase, as the yearly planning would not be needed under the new system, only semestrial planning would remain. The teachers were not convinced and the decision whether to approve the annex document was postponed to the following day, when the teachers, after having discussed further on the margins with the OSG, agreed to approve the annex but stated to still have reservations about timing and training aspects. The annex was approved by the JTC.^[1]_[SEP]

Next, opinions were invited on the report about **Including the Host Country Language in the group of Languages 2 (2020-01-D-25-en-1)**.

The OSG author of the report explained that this idea was first raised ten years ago but could only now that the ES have a coherent language policy, be properly implemented. He also underlined that this change would only be possible if the administrative board of the individual ES agrees, having analysed the underlying facts and figures, and that the implementation is to be gradual, in order to help the schools find all the resources required and integrate the consequences of the change into the BAC.

IP expressed their support for this initiative on the basis of the provisions outlined by the OSG.

The Commission informed the JTC that they had reservations regarding the administrative aspects of the change and that they will only express an opinion once the financial planning for the change has been presented.

On another aspect of the ES language policy, the document **Introduction of Language 3 in P4 (2020-01-D-26-en-1)** was presented, provoking a lengthy and lively debate.

While the OSG author described the main focus of the planned reform being language awareness and introducing flexibility in the selection of courses in Secondary, arguing that starting L3 earlier would help pupils to master L3 better and to a higher standard, the majority of JTC delegates voiced their concerns and their opposition to the idea.

The majority of Member States (8 critical interventions, three fully supportive ones) pointed to concerns that the introduction of L3 will be at the cost of L1 and mathematics, as total time for teaching is limited. This argument was supported by the students' and the teachers' representatives, who also pointed to the issue that the change would create further problems for pupils with learning problems like dyslexia, creating a less inclusive environment at the ES. The directors' representative admitted that directors had not reached agreement on the issue. The Primary Deputy Directors however, opposed the proposal, arguing that "we have many pupils without a clearly defined dominant language, and a lot of them cannot speak one language sufficiently. At this moment, this reform would be at the cost of the pupils. This should be introduced as optional and not as compulsory"

IP commented: "*Parents are deeply concerned that reducing L1 hours will undo the advances made with the Language Policy. Multilingualism, and indeed the whole pedagogical project of the ES must be built on a strong core of L1. ES students are growing up in a multilingual environment and do not have the same L1 environment that their peers in the national systems enjoy.*" IP also pointed to the important impact this reform would have on

Educational Support, and expressed their concern that it is being undertaken for logistical rather than pedagogical reasons.

The Spanish ES Presidency expressed its support for the proposal, adding that “it must go ahead and be presented to the BoG. It will not be a catastrophe, we believe it will be a beneficial measure”, before closing the debate.

Addressing the use of technology in the ES, the JTC was required to reach a decision on a report about a **Digital tool for teaching, learning and assessment in Mathematics and Sciences (2020-01-D-76-en-1)**. The tool in question is called Geogebra, and it is available on multiple platforms and in multiple languages, with Office 365 compatibility, as the OSG author explained. In Finland, it is already used for the national Maths exams, he added. The timetable for its introduction foresees its introduction at the beginning of the next school year and its first use for assessment in June 2022. Directors’, Deputy Directors’ and students’ representatives all welcomed the initiative, while teachers warned that the introduction would be premature and would create significant annual cost. IP supported the teachers’ arguments, while recognising the general viability of the tool:

“We would like to stress the importance of NOT implementing changes in the BAC cycle as early as proposed. We recommend a step-by-step approach: from next year onwards, the software would be used for exams in S5, the year after in S6 and the year after that in S7. This would give enough time for the students to be acquainted with the tool for examination.”

The ES Presidency concluded that the JTC gives its approval, and that critical remarks will be considered.

Staying with IT use, the next report up for a JTC decision were the **Guidelines for the pedagogical use of mobile devices** in the European Schools (**2020-01-D-14-en-1**). The OSG author explained that the guidelines contain recommendations but nothing mandatory except for the introduction of the new digital tool for Maths and Physics (see above), that the introduction was foreseen for this September, and that the necessary training policy has been adopted by the Budget Committee.

The Commission asked for reassurances about budget neutrality. The teachers’ representative warned that some schools might not be ready in time and urged a postponement of the implementation. OSG replied that an ongoing revision would guarantee a correct implementation. All other JTC participants taking the floor for interventions welcomed the guidelines, including IP.

Finally, in an oral **Brexit** update, the DSG informed the JTC that, given that the UK government has so far excluded a prolongation of the transition period, the Brexit WG will ask the BoG for a mandate to explore all possible ways to mitigate the consequences of Brexit post-August 2021, amongst them most notably to ensure a sufficient number of native EN-speakers in the ES system. The UK delegate reminded the JTC in this context that “our contract as inspectors is finishing this year”, adding that one important issue is the matter of English examiners and who will replace them.

