



Procedure file

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Consultation on options for developing the European Schools system	
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Key players			
European Parliament	Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
	CULT Culture and Education		22/09/2004
		PSE HONEYBALL Mary	
	Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
	BUDG Budgets		20/04/2005
		PSE BÖSCH Herbert	

Key events			
20/07/2004	Non-legislative basic document published	COM(2004)0519	Summary
16/12/2004	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
15/06/2005	Vote in committee		
20/06/2005	Committee report tabled for plenary	A6-0200/2005	
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Documentation gateway					
Non-legislative basic document		COM(2004)0519	20/07/2004	EC	Summary
Committee opinion	BUDG	PE359.897	15/06/2005	EP	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A6-0200/2005	20/06/2005	EP	
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Consultation on options for developing the European Schools system

PURPOSE : to take stock of the development of the European Schools and to open a debate about their future.

CONTENT : for the last 50 years, the European Schools have provided a high-quality, multi-cultural, multi-lingual education service to the children of the staff of the EU institutions. The availability of the Schools has made it easier for the Institutions to recruit experienced, highly qualified staff. The recognised and often praised European Baccalaureate enables and allows access to university education across Europe.

The aim of this consultation is to take stock of the development of the ES and, at this important stage of the expansion of and change in the European Union and to open a debate, seeking to establish a consensual approach to their future evolution and possibilities for change, rather than make any concrete proposals

This Communication begins by setting out the current governance and funding of the schools. Growth of the Institutions and successive enlargements of the Union have led to a considerable expansion of the ES system, from one School in one location to 14 ES in 10 locations by the end of this decade. Whilst some kind of international, multi-lingual international education should always be available to the children of EU staff in all locations where there are EU institutions or bodies, the question of the provision of education in the mother tongue of each pupil in a EU with over 20 official languages, and, indeed, in locations with few pupils needs careful consideration and consultation. Particular issues arise in relation to the small ES.

The paper goes on to focus on an examination of the governance, administrative and budgetary aspects of the ES? system. Thereafter, a number of educational questions, falling more within the areas of the curriculum and quality of service delivery within the Schools, are considered. The main points are as follows:

- On the matter of governance, the Commission feels that the current structure, leaving governance to the Board of Governors is not well suited to taking operational decisions. This will hardly be alleviated by the arrival of the 10 new Member State representatives. The European Institutions, which are de facto major stakeholders are taking an increasingly active interest in the Schools on the grounds that they have a valid interest both as main service receivers and principal paymasters. However, the system of governance under the current Convention largely excludes their participation, where the Commission is limited to one vote on the Board of Governors alongside 17 (or in some cases 19) other voting members. This legacy of a "democratic deficit" on the Board should not continue unchanged.

- Greater autonomy in administration and staffing decisions.

The Communication points out that teachers at the Schools are currently selected for secondment by the education authorities of the Member States. It seems possible and appropriate in the short-term to give consideration to how the final say on the appointment of teachers might be given to the Schools themselves, which are better able to judge the specific skills required to teach successfully in a multi-lingual environment.

- With regard to financing of the European Schools, the paper points out that at present, there is a basic paradox in the budgetary arrangements, namely that a balancing contribution from the EU budget is provided within the annual budgetary procedure without any corresponding influence by the budgetary authority on the costs of the ES. It is, moreover, widely considered that the system of reliance on effectively open-ended EU funding to balance the ES budget has not provided adequate incentives for better resource management, increases in income, and cost savings which could be made without reducing the quality of service provided. At the same time, the budget is also a contentious issue for some of the Member States, which currently provide approximately 22 % of the budget revenue directly by means of the secondment of teaching staff as foreseen by the Convention. Due to vehicular linguistic requirements however, certain MS bear a disproportionate share of the cost and are signalling that they are not prepared to fund any further increases.

- on the matter of maintaining small Schools or language sections, such as those in Mol, Karlsruhe, Bergen and Culham in their current form, the paper states that this is an important issue needing reflection with many elements to be taken into consideration, including the needs of the EU institutions and their staff.

With regard to educational and curriculum issues, the paper discusses the following:

- Education of children with special needs be they learning difficulties or physical disabilities deserves greater attention. The existing provisions of the Convention are currently implemented by the Schools in a diverse manner and the programme for children with Special Educational

Needs (SEN) and for Learning Support (LS) are important tools to be developed further. Both programmes require monitoring so to ensure a good distribution of resources among language sections and individual pupils, to optimise locally provided services and to evaluate their impact.

- The need to consider the option for the Schools to offer a leaving certificate other than the European Baccalaureate. A feasibility study would need to be undertaken.
- The maximum class size is set at 32 which is larger than in many Member-States. In some cases, these classes also accommodate pupils for whom there is no mother tongue section and who therefore need extra support in order to work as effectively in a "foreign" language. Consideration should therefore be given to ways to reduce the maximum size.
- The high intrinsic value of the European Baccalaureate must be maintained. The EB examination system needs to be reviewed to ensure a harmonised approach and high academic quality. Concerns about the absence of real quality evaluation of the ES? education provisions and the way the inspection system operates have been expressed by parents and parents? associations.
- The success of the European Baccalaureate has led to a broader interest for its wider availability in several MS, while, at the same time, decentralisation of EU activities has created a need for European schooling to be provided in schools other than the traditional European Schools.

For some of the matters outlined above, the Commission proposes certain improvements which could be decided upon and implemented by the Board within the present framework. The Commission states that it will build on the ideas set out in this Communication for its work within the BoG.

The Communication also opens a debate on possible longer-term more radical change to the system of governance of the ES beyond the scope of the current international Convention. The Commission will organise a wide consultation with and between stakeholders over the coming months before making any significant proposals on the future development of the ES system.

Consultation on options for developing the European Schools system

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Mary HONEYBALL (PES, UK) welcoming the Commission's launch of a consultative exercise about the future development of the system of European Schools, taking into account the enlargement of the EU, the interests of the new Member States, the creation of additional EU agencies outside Brussels and Luxembourg and the urgent need to revise and evaluate and reform a system which was established 50 years ago and which originally catered for only four languages.

The decentralised agencies and the new Member States: Member States hosting one of the new decentralised agencies must take greater financial responsibility for the education of the children of staff, and appropriate solutions must be found for each of the new places of work. Parliament felt that in these cases, cooperation between the European Schools and regional or local schools able to deliver the curriculum leading to the European Baccalaureate is an option. Such cooperation should aim to promote high-quality education and European integration, maintain linguistic diversity and facilitate labour mobility.

Language sections for the languages of the new Member States should be established as a matter of urgency and all pupils should be receiving mother-tongue teaching. Parliament also called on the Commission to examine the possibility of establishing European schools in the new Member States.

The future financing of the European Schools system, Category III pupils and the smaller schools: Parliament believed that the balancing contribution from the Communities must not develop into an open-ended commitment. It endorsed the view that the annual projected budget allocation for each school should take account of the size and needs of the individual schools and of evidence of efforts to spend the budget allocation as effectively as possible. However, it rejected the imposition by the Commission of a ceiling on the Communities' contribution to the European Schools budget before the Board of Governors has presented its estimate of the revenue and expenditure of the Schools for the following financial year. Furthermore, the current arrangement, whereby Member States' contributions are directly linked to the number of teachers they second to the European Schools and to the premises they provide for the European Schools, is not equitable and alternative systems of financing should be explored. Nevertheless the present system, whereby teachers are appointed and paid their national salaries by Member States, ensures access for the European Schools to the teaching expertise of these States and is the means by which the financial contribution of the Member States is secured.

Parliament went on to note that the level of fees payable by the parents of Category III pupils has risen substantially in real terms since 2002 and that this has resulted in increased revenue for the Schools and a smaller increase in the contribution from the Communities' budget than would otherwise have been the case. Such fees do not meet the full cost of educating these pupils. However, that the parents of Category III pupils should not face excessive fee increases during the remainder of their education in the European Schools system. The Commission, through its representative on the Board of Governors, must press for the publication of clear criteria for the admission of Category III pupils. Parliament also repeated its call for the Board of Governors to revise the criteria it has adopted for maintaining individual language sections in individual schools so as to rule out any discrimination against an official language of the EU.

Better governance and administration: Given the growth in the number of European Schools and in the number of pupils they teach, the tasks of the Board of Governors should essentially be those of setting strategic goals, of oversight and of review. Parliament felt that detailed management questions specific to individual schools should, in the first instance, be addressed by the Administrative Boards of the individual schools, and that each school should be considered an autonomous entity as regards operational and financial matters. The Administrative Boards of the individual schools should be given control over the financial and operational aspects of the individual schools within the strategic goals laid down by the Board of Governors.

Parliament noted that the Community currently pays a balancing contribution equivalent to some 57% of the annual cost of the European Schools system, whereas the Member States contribute 22%. It believed, therefore, that the Commission, as representative of the Communities, should have voting rights on the Board of Governors more in line with the Communities' contribution to the budget, and that the Commission must report to the European Parliament following each meeting of the Board of Governors.

With regard to the Commission's suggestion that two new bodies might be established, Parliament felt that a single governing body, with the authority to take decisions affecting the Schools system as a whole and willing to accept responsibility for balancing sometimes conflicting

financial and educational imperatives, must be maintained.

Curriculum and educational issues:Parliament called for the following:

- nursery, primary and secondary school classes, taught by a single qualified teacher, should not be larger than 30 pupil equivalents;
- from 2008 there should be a progressive introduction of a maximum class size in nursery and primary classes of no more than 25 pupil equivalents;
- the Commission must encourage the development of coefficients in respect of children with certified special educational needs and of pupils whose mother tongue is different from the language in which they receive most of their instruction (Language I), and ensure that these coefficients are applied when class sizes are calculated;
- the Commission, working together with the Member States concerned, to find solutions as a matter of urgency in order to deal with the excessively high pupil numbers at some Schools, which are undermining teaching standards.

Special Educational Needs provision: Parliament called on the Commission to produce reliable statistics about the extent of the requirements for special needs provision in all the European Schools and further urged the Board of Governors to carry out a survey of provision at each of the European Schools for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), including children with physical and/or intellectual disabilities. The Board of Governors is asked to draw up a set of minimum standards relating to educational provision, to undertake an accessibility audit of the European Schools so as to ensure that the buildings are accessible for children with physical disabilities and to take any other steps deemed necessary in order to support all pupils with special educational needs. There must be an allocation of resources in terms of finance, staff and expertise with a view to providing first-class education for SEN children and to fully promote the concept of inclusive education, as is the case in other schools across Europe. Parliament called on the Board of Governors to examine constructive alternatives for those children who are unable to cope with integration in mainstream classes.

If SEN pupils are to benefit from their education at the European Schools, specialist multidisciplinary teams (such as educational psychologists and speech and language therapists) must be set up in Schools to provide support and advice for the teachers, pupils and parents concerned. Parliament called for one of the larger European Schools to launch a pilot project for an SEN resource centre, comprising qualified personnel with relevant experience and appropriate teaching materials (books, computer software), the role of which would be to provide expert advice and materials for teachers involved in the education of SEN children in the school. Financing should be set aside for this project in the 2006 budget.

The European Baccalaureate:Parliament asked the Commission to do all in its power to ensure that the Board introduces, by the beginning of the school year 2007-2008, an alternative leaving certificate in parallel with the European Baccalaureate, for pupils who choose to follow a more vocational education. It went on to state that the high intrinsic value of the European Baccalaureate justifies its wider spread and its full recognition without discrimination by universities in Member States and in third countries. Parliament invited the responsible authorities in the Member States to consider the merits of making the European Baccalaureate more widely available as a school-leaving certificate outside the European Schools.