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|  | **Schola Europaea**  Office of the Secretary-General  General Secretariat |

Ref: 2017-11-D-21-fr-1

Original: EN

‘ACCREDITED EUROPEAN SCHOOLS’ WORKING GROUP  
INTERIM REPORT

Board of Governors of the European Schools

Meeting in Brussels on 5, 6 and 7 December 2017

**INTRODUCTION**

More than ten years after the accreditation of the first two schools, the Board of Governors agreed on the need to clarify the terms and conditions for accreditation.

A mandate was given to a Working Group to study:

* The access to data
* The format of official school reports
* The monitoring of compliance with requirements
* The conditions for accreditation (number of sections, organisation of studies, qualifications of teachers, etc.)
* Composition of the audit team and aspects to be covered by the audit
* The procedure for initial accreditation
* The procedure for renewal of accreditation
* Rules for termination of accreditation
* The cost neutrality of Accredited European Schools (audits, administrative work at the Office, etc.)
* Services that might be made available for the Accredited Schools and their cost
* The possibility of accrediting schools outside EU territory

**RATIONALE**

The Working Group has met three times and has started exploring the following points:

* **Access to data, monitoring of compliance with requirements and format of official school reports**

These three points may be closely linked.

In the current version of the agreements, there is no obligation on accredited schools to make some relevant data available.

As a result, the Secretary-General is obliged to request those data from the schools.

Some schools respond promptly, others less so.

A better solution might be the use of a common school management system. Such a solution would allow accredited schools to produce standard reports and the Secretary-General to obtain direct access to the relevant data.

Improved access to data would facilitate ‘monitoring of compliance with requirements’ and potentially simplify audits. Many checks might be made remotely, before the audit visit.

* **The conditions for accreditation (number of sections, organisation of studies, qualifications of teachers, etc.)**

In the case of the number of sections, the regulations are rather vague and almost contradictory.

The WG recommends clarifying the terms. The Secretary-General should draw the Board of Governors’ attention to this fact whenever a Dossier of Conformity departs from the minimum requirements. The Board of Governors should then justify an exception.

The regulations allow accredited schools a degree of flexibility for the organisation of studies up to secondary year 5.

The WG would recommend defining minimum common requirements, so as not to threaten year-by-year equivalence.

The WG is minded to recommend that teachers’ qualifications should be the same as required in the European Schools, so as not to put the quality of the education delivered at risk and, ultimately, the reputation of the European Baccalaureate Diploma.

* **Composition of the audit team and aspects to be covered by the audit**

There is a general consensus amongst the members of the WG that the composition of the audit team should cover all aspect of the audit.

The number of audits to be carried out has steadily increased over the last few years and the Presidency and the Secretary-General face increasing difficulty in finding volunteer inspectors to conduct the audits.

In parallel with what has been proposed for the evaluation of locally recruited teachers, the possibility of involving external experts with extensive experience in the European School System (former inspectors, former directors or deputies) in the audit teams has been raised.

In general, since the audits and their content draw on Whole School Inspection (WSI) practice, the involvement of directors, who are now well practised in WSI, would be recommended. Given that directors currently in post might prove not to be available because of time constraints, the idea of involving former directors has again been mentioned.

As for the aspects to be covered, the WG recommends widening the scope to cover checking of compliance with regulations (pupils’ curricula, courses offered, teachers’ qualifications, etc.).

That should be case to an even greater extent for audits covering the final two secondary years, leading to award of the European Baccalaureate Diploma.

The audit reports should draw the Board of Governors’ attention to areas where compliance with the minimum requirements may not have been found.

Specific templates should be produced for the scope.

* **The procedure for initial accreditation; the procedure for renewal of accreditation**

There is a general consensus amongst the members of the WG that the general procedures (the workflow process to obtain accreditation) should not be changed.

Instead, practice should be improved, along the lines of the very recent practice put in place.

The original decision of the Board of Governors provides for the signing of two separate agreements:

* One for the years up to secondary 5,
* A separate one for the final two secondary years, leading to award of the European Baccalaureate Diploma.

In fact, this has led in the past to multiplication of the number of audits and agreements signed.

Some practical arrangements would help to reduce the number of audits considerably, without impacting on their quality:

1. As a general rule, the initial agreement should be signed for all levels up to secondary 5, as foreseen in the decision of the BoG, irrespective of the levels already opened in the school. The composition of the audit teams should be arranged accordingly.
2. As a general rule, the timing for the audit of the final two secondary years should be planned in such a way that the new agreement for the final two secondary years would be signed at the same time as renewal for the other years.  
   In that way, both agreements would then expire after three years and the audit for their renewal could cover both.

The number of members of the audit teams should be arranged accordingly (e.g. two Nursery and Primary inspectors for the initial signing of an agreement for a school starting with only Nursery and Primary levels; two Nursery and Primary members and three Secondary members for the initial signing or renewal of agreements covering all levels).

* **Rules for termination of accreditation**

There is a general consensus amongst the members of the WG that clearer criteria and a clearer procedure for termination of accreditation should be defined and the regulations changed accordingly.

* **The cost neutrality of Accredited European Schools (audits, administrative work at the Office, etc.)**

Extract from the AES Regulations:

***“Article 17***

*All the costs entailed by accreditation and its effects, without reservation or exception, shall be borne solely by the Accredited European School.*

*Those costs shall correspond to:*

*a. the travel and subsistence expenses of the inspectors sent by the European Schools. They will be defrayed on the basis of a mission order and under the same conditions as when inspectors carry out a mission on behalf of the European Schools;*

*b. the expenditure incurred by staff of Accredited European Schools in attending the in-service training courses – referred to in Article 16 – organised by the European Schools;*

*c. The teaching materials referred to in Article 16.*

*The costs of purchasing and dispatching the teaching material referred to above will be refunded to the European Schools by the Accredited European School in accordance with the scales set by the budget of the European Schools, on submission of an expense claim.”*

There is a consensus amongst the members of the WG that the sentence “*Those costs shall correspond to:”* does not realistically reflect the scope of those costs.

The BoG recently decided to create a post of Assistant at the Office, paid for proportionally by the AES (70% of the work load is considered ‘general’, for all pupils, and 30% linked to pupils in S6-S7). The cost will be different in each school, according to their population, and calculated every year.

This might be considered to be just a first step towards real cost neutrality.

In fact, a large proportion of the staff working at the OSG also work for the AES: the work in some Units is impacted by the existence of the AES, meaning that the pro rata cost of the people also working for the AES at the Office should be taken into consideration.

Costs at the Office also include the rent of the premises and associated costs, the Member States’ contributions to the salaries of seconded staff, the cost of organisation of the meetings of the organs, costs for inspectors, etc. Here again, the activities and costs impacted by the existence of the AES should be taken into consideration on a pro rata basis.

As for the possible formulas that could be used to share the costs, a breakdown partly proportional to the total number of schools (thus taking into account the fact that some work is in a way ‘independent’ of the number of pupils) and partly to the number of pupils received stronger support within the WG.

Depending on which costs were included, the annual contribution from each AES would then cover some services already paid for or paid back, such as, for example, the cost of the European Baccalaureate and the cost of audits, simplifying financial administration on both sides (OSG and AES). Other services could be more easily opened up also to AES, once the costs of the Units involved in the delivery of these services were included in the share of costs.

**PROPOSAL**

The Board of Governors is invited to express an opinion on this interim report from the ‘Accredited European Schools’ Working Group, so as to guide the future work.