

Minutes of the meeting with Mme Vassilacou, Weds 5 June 2013

Chairs: Fiona Godfrey (FG), Sophie Norman (SN)

Opening remarks (FG): This was not a meeting to explain the UK decision – that had already taken place on 8 May, and the relevant documents are on the FAPEEL website.

The Irish presidency has put the issue on the agenda of the Board of Governors (BoG) meetings and it has now become a high-level political discussion, spearheaded by the Irish presidency, the forthcoming Lituianian presidency and the Commission.

The BoG will be asked on 23 Sept to come up with a cost-sharing proposal.

This has been going on for a while, but it has taken the UK statement to push things to the forefront.

We will be losing EN-language seconded teachers (STs) and now need to look for a local solution.

Rates of pay and conditions are set by the BoG so even if we want to change them, we cannot.

The set of draft regulations for locally engaged teachers (LETs) has been put forward several times for adoption but blocked several times by one of the Member States (MS), i.e. this is something for the BoG to resolve.

We can take some steps at local level, i.e. push for reforms of the recruitment process for LETs. At the meeting with parents on 8 May, the UK Dept of Education (DoE) reps gave a firm commitment to do ‘whatever it takes’ to help with recruitment and fill local spaces. The BRUX 2 European School (ES) has taken this up: 10 posts were advertised in the UK Times Educational Supplement (TES) at a cost of over EUR 10,000. There were 64 applicants for English as a foreign language (EFL), 58 for Language 1 (L1) English and 21 for Physics and Maths.

It is clear that parents are concerned about how the recruitment procedure is proceeding, about the level of competency in EN of teachers, and about assessment of staff.

The ES system cannot offer more than 1-year contracts, so good teachers can be hard to retain.

Mme Vassilacou (MV) then took the floor, explaining that the ES follows the recruitment procedure (copies of which were distributed at the meeting) vigorously. Recruitment is the responsibility of the Director, but they always ask for verification of documents from the competent national inspector, i.e. qualifications are confirmed by them. This is a compulsory procedure and never forgotten. LETs are fully qualified, this is not a problem.

Seconded teachers currently number: 1 in Maternelle, 4 in Primary and 15 in Secondary. 3 STs will finish their contract at the end of this academic year – 2 are leaving early for personal reasons, the 3rd is leaving after a 10th year. So Lux 1 is in a better situation than BRUX 2 who are losing 10 staff.

It is always a worry whether good new teachers can be found, so recruitment for new Secondary teachers started early this year and 3 good ones have been found.

The ES does not offer attractive contracts because they are for less than 1 year. The ISL on the other hand offers ‘contrats indéterminés’ which of course are more attractive. Some ES teachers have been attracted to the ISL and have left the ES early. In fact 1 of the 3 newly-appointed teachers mentioned above has also been offered a post with the ISL, but he has just informed the ES that he will come to the ES.

Conditions of salary are not a complaint but the length of contract can be a problem.

Having found the 3 new teachers for Secondary, recruitment for Primary is now starting. If new staff are not found locally then the school will look for help from the DoE. Recruitment is only happening now because the number of children involved has only just emerged, i.e. the enrolment procedure for Categories 2 and 3 has only just finished in Primary.

Question: Are the 3 teachers above mother tongue?

MV: 2 are mother tongue, the 3rd is almost mother tongue (working in Canada with an EU passport). The advertisements always state that the applicant needs to be EU – although some non-Schengen nationals can have difficulties getting visas for Luxembourg.

Q: By advertising only locally, is the ES narrowing the scope for applicants?

MV: No. If the school only wants to recruit a few teachers (i.e. not as many as 10) it is easier to recruit locally because the applicants are probably already living here. Also, the ES gets CVs sent to them on spec from all over. If there is a need, we will take up the DoE offer, but if we can locally these are the most stable personnel because they won't withdraw at the last minute.

Q: Why not use both procedures in parallel to save time?

MV: We are optimistic that we will find staff locally.

Qs on composition of EN section: Firstly, non-SWALs, i.e. those who have learned EN elsewhere, say at St Georges school, and who have been accepted into the EN section – will the ES ‘toughen up’ its policy on this? Secondly, some 50% of SWALs go to the EN section, rather than to FR or DE which are the ‘national languages’ of this country – will more be encouraged to go to these other sections?

MV: We defend the ‘dominant language’ of the child. Many SWALs children go to a FR crèche so the FR language section is becoming more popular. The school cannot force parents to use the ‘national languages’, but it does encourage parents to put the child in the language section appropriate following on from the language of the crèche. In the end though, the parents have the right to choose. In the event of any doubts, the ES tests the child to determine its dominant language.

Q on evaluation of teachers

MV: The deputy heads evaluate LETs in their first year of service. They ask the national inspectors to evaluate these teachers too if they have the time. Training is the same whether for STs or LETs – since the teachers have to perform to the same standard in teaching, they need to have access to the same resources and there is no favoured training between the two groups.

Q: Do you say to LETs that there may be a chance of staying on after a 1-year contract?

MV: Yes, they are evaluated after 1 month then 6 months. They can be offered a permanent contract, but that is not dependent on the school, it is done at a central level. But the school cannot say definitely to a LET that they can stay on until they know how many STs are coming from other Member States. Contracts with LETs can go on for many years, as long as a ST does not come to take their place – i.e. the school is obliged to accept STs when a MS sends them, they have priority. LETs are paid for out of the school budget, so it is necessary to calculate how many pupils are foreseen, how many hours teaching etc.

Q: Can other MS send EN teachers?

MV: Yes. MS have to share the costs of the ES according to the number of their nationals, but they can send EN teachers. There are cases of language 2 (L2) non-native speakers, but they are very good. The FR and DE sections have some non-native speaker teachers. For instance, a Science teacher in the FR section was replaced by a non-native speaker who is very good in Science so any minor errors in language can be acceptable.

Q: Are there any teachers who might leave the 6th and 7th Year classes?

MV: The school tries to give these classes to STs, but sometimes there does have to be a change (i.e. if a ST leaves). When LETs are given to 6th and 7th Year classes, it means they are strong and dependable in that subject.

Q: Adverts for ES teachers in the Irish press seem to put emphasis on needing good foreign language skills and lots of experience. If the Irish government is still happy to send STs, could the job ads perhaps be reviewed and revised?

Indeed, this seems to be the case in the UK too, where potential applicants are known to have been put off by the tough foreign language requirements in the adverts.

MV: We don't insist on language skills, and in fact sometimes teachers do come with no L2, and never master another language, but have done very well nonetheless. The ES has no control though over the adverts since they are done by the national authorities.

Q: Why not take up the offer from the UK DoE of helping with recruitment, and the school could have more control then?

MV: Our method of recruiting locally is good; if we need help we will ask for it.

Q: What is the deadline for recruiting the teachers for Secondary?

MV: We have the 3 teachers needed for Secondary.

Q: But they might be attracted to the ISL... In mid-August, one of them might write to you saying they can't come after all. Why not use the DoE offer and draw up a list of possible teachers?

MV: You could have the same problem. Anyway the ES has a list of potential candidates – these 3 have been selected, but if any of them drops out then there are others.

Q: Parents would like to see this offer used. They would like to see native-speaking and highly-qualified candidates attracted. Using the DoE offer means looking over a wider area rather than just locally.

MV: Candidates come from all over Europe.

Q: You could announce to a bigger pool, at no cost because the DoE is willing to pay.

MV: I will make announcements then for the 2 Primary teachers needed using both options.

[applause]

Q: The 7th Year Maths teacher is leaving, is the Physics one too? The teachers who come won't know the ES curriculum.

MV: The Physics teacher is staying on as a LET which is good news. It can happen that a new teacher has to teach 7th Year – when this is necessary then a lot of care is taken with their training.

Q: Is it possible to pass on the message that a 10th year of teaching is possible? 10 years is better than 9 because some STs don't stay the full 9 years, and it might make a difference to them choosing to stay on a little longer.

MV: Article 4 of the statute gives the possibility of staying a 10th year under certain conditions, for instance if the MS isn't sending a replacement. But it is for the national authorities to decide, and the UK is saying that they won't give a 10th year.

Q: Do LETs who have been STs have to pay school fees? [STs do not pay fees]

MV: Full-time chargé de cours (LETs) do not. If they are half time then they pay half fees.

Q: Do new LETs have to pay fees?

MV: It is the same rule for full-time or half-time.

Q: Do some STs not stay on for a 10th year?

MV: Most do stay, but some go to the ISL to a permanent contract.

Q: What can be changed to make contracts for LETs into 1-year contracts?

MV: It is a decision which has to be taken at the BoG and it needs to be unanimous because it concerns the statute. It will be talked about again in Sept. The big problem is that we are not competitive in our contracts.

Q on evaluation

MV: The national inspectors do the ES a favour by evaluating LETs. It is hoped that the new statute for LETs can be agreed in Sept, they would then have more stability, career advancement and better training. Under the new statute, evaluation would be in the 1st year, and then every 4 years.

Q on selection boards for interviews

MV: There are 3 or 4 on the board, with a maximum of 5 people including the Deputy Head for Primary and always a native speaker from the section.

Q: Is there a financial loss to the ES since salaries for LETs have to be paid for out of the school budget?

MV: There is no ceiling, the needs have to be foreseen and covered. The school is obliged to pay salaries. STs receive a national salary which is topped up by the ES; LETs get all their salary from the ES.

Q: Do the raised fees for Cat 3 have something to do with this?

MV: No.

Q: Can evaluation of teachers be speeded up to make sure 'bad' teachers are weeded out?

MV: Parents must always pass on their worries. The school has to be able to prove that a teacher is not sufficiently good. They do their best and address complaints. The teacher is asked to a meeting to discuss the issues and inspectors are asked for advice regarding STs. The procedure for STs is lengthy; for LETs the procedure is faster.

Q: Is there a risk of a LET walking out at any time during the year?

MV: The first year is a 1-year contract and it is very rare for a contract to be terminated during the academic year, but if it happens then every effort is made to ensure that the replacement teachers are up to speed.

Q: Could there be information on the school website about the teachers' backgrounds and qualifications?

MV: No, the school does not have the right to disclose such information. The inspectors do see it though.

Q: Do all teachers have teaching qualifications?

MV: There may be one or two in the school without a pedagogical diploma who nonetheless have teaching experience of some 20 years and who are deemed satisfactory. But all teachers recruited in the last 5, 6, 7 years do have qualifications.

Q: Do teachers have to have a background in the subject they teach?

MV: The Member State has to send a teacher capable of teaching the subject requested by the ES. Sometimes a teacher will be sent who teaches say Maths and Biology rather than Maths and Chemistry, and the ES then has to do some timetable alterations.

Q: There is one teacher who teaches both Human Science and Integrated Science, is this ok?

MV: Yes, because in some countries Geography is a very scientific subject, so the above combinations would be acceptable for one teacher to be able to teach.

Q: Do you look at qualifications of LETs?

MV: Yes, we send copies to the inspectors. The Court of Auditors also control LETs.

Q: Since 1-year contracts in Luxembourg cannot be extended long-term [i.e. without having to make them permanent after a certain period] could the ES ask the Lux government to make an exception, and have the possibility of different lengths of contract?

MV: But the BoG has to agree.

Q: Maybe the ES could push the BoG more? Parents rely on the school to push matters.

MV: This depends on decisions made by the 27 countries [shortly to be 28] in the BoG. Parents have a vote here [through Interparents]. The ES has no right to vote, although it can speak at the BoG.

Sophie Norman (SN) summed up the meeting with the following hopes:

- Efficient advertising of posts could be increased at local level by making use of local job-seeking websites such as [Job.lu](#), [Monster.lu](#) and [Angloinfo.lu](#) and via the local press (*Luxemburger Wort*) to expand the pool of candidates.
- The ES will use the free offer from the DoE to advertise all posts and draw up a list of potential candidates who could also step in if teachers leave or don't take up a post.
- Evaluation of teaching qualifications for all potential teachers (STs and LETs) is under the responsibility of the DoE.
- Maybe it should say on the ES website that teachers are welcome to send in their CVs throughout the year, so as to have a permanent list of available teaching staff.
- A strong Anglophone advocacy group is essential to take this issue forward.