

# ISSUES FOR EUROPEANS IN MK SCHOOLS

## Introduction

An easy-access MK school is the preferred option of a large majority of our parents. European families and missions are grateful for the MK schools, many of which would not be viable without US-staffing and resources. Teacher recruitment from Europe (and Commonwealth countries) is low for a variety of reasons across all missions based there – the need for teachers can't be met from these countries alone. We appreciate the teachers from the USA who are willing to serve in this way and for their personal and cultural contributions that enrich our MK schools.

American understanding of Christian education is generally stronger and our MK schools benefit from this input. We also recognise the positive value of the affirmation that children receive within the MK school context.

Clearly when many schools recruit most of their staff from one country there are necessary measures required to properly address the needs of students from other countries. This article specifies some of the greatest needs from a European perspective and suggests definite policy proposals for schools to implement.

## 1. Graduation standards

The typical high school diploma, even with a good GPA, and SATI test results are not enough to allow university entrance across Europe. All countries in Europe require at least 5 AP or SATII qualifications with high grades in the appropriate subjects. In Continental Europe and Scandinavia the requirement is a recognised mother-tongue qualification plus a minimum of 5 AP qualifications passed to a high enough standard. In the UK, Australia and some other Commonwealth countries the preference is for a mix of 5 AP and SATII in specific subjects that prepare them for a pre-chosen degree course. Introducing them will also allow transfer credit, even sophomore standing, in North America and thus reduce the time needed at university and final debt burden – so everyone gains. Alternatives such as the Cambridge International Exams, (IGCSE leading to International A level or AICE) provide the same advantages and a growing number of our MK schools have introduced them.

Schools need to introduce more AP and SATII courses or the Cambridge International equivalent across a wide variety of subjects and encourage all academic students to take them. If schools can't offer enough courses, internet or correspondence options should be investigated.

Preparation to reach this level in the final years of high school must start in earlier school years with good advice on course selection, and has implications for teaching in middle school. Recruiting enough teachers for these more demanding courses is more difficult, hence the recommendation to investigate other options to supplement classroom teaching.

## 2. Language learning

Non-Anglophone children need to follow a proper academic mother-tongue course in order to re-enter their passport country's education system. For many students the burden of this study comes over and above the normal school programme followed by their Anglophone counterparts. This becomes more and more difficult as they progress into the upper school years.

Schools need to timetable mother tongue lessons as an alternative to less relevant areas of study. Allowing timetabled lessons for mother tongue study would benefit all non-Anglophones, not just Europeans. (These lessons should be part of the core curriculum for these students and NOT optional)

A brief case study should help here. We created room for this at BCS at all school levels. We took time from second or even first foreign language lessons in lower school years and from general studies & second foreign language higher up. Sometimes the time came from expressive arts which meant a smaller role in end of term productions when these lessons were geared to rehearsing for

this. I was too cautious with this at first and increased the number of lessons I gave to mother-tongue study as I realised that it was essential for the children's future.

In a school using Cambridge International examinations I would now give at least one IGCSE time to mother-tongue study for non-Anglophones. They could aim for IGCSE first language in their mother-tongue (these are available in many languages as are literature qualifications and specialist local units of study in the history) or take the Fernschule/Dutch correspondence etc. unit of study – whatever most suits their re-entry needs.

In a US-system there is plenty of flexibility of choice at the upper levels and electives on US history, US government can easily be replaced by mother-tongue language and literature study, history and any classes that complete re-entry requirements as necessary. Such classes can count for credits towards graduation and would often be externally regulated as well.

It is recommended that the amount of homework set should allow for the fact that these students need extra time for mother-tongue study. It should be the school policy to set limits in each subject.

It is also recommended that as a first option mother tongue tutors should be sought or in their absence correspondence or internet courses should be used.

### **3. Culture**

The ethos of and teaching in MK schools reflects the nationalities of the staff, particularly those in positions of authority who are in most cases predominantly American. European children may have limited opportunities to discover their own culture and instead identify more with the American one of the school. There may also be limited teaching about their passport country culture and little identification with it at the school level. Whilst a lot of MK schools are working hard to internationalise they are receiving many teachers with limited experience of other cultures before serving there. It is also true that a small number of MK schools see no need to internationalise the curriculum\* or policies.

(\*The word "curriculum" needs to be defined, not as a synonym for textbooks, but a statement of what we want our students to know and the strategies and practices we will use to teach them. The point is more than just words – if we reduce our definition of the curriculum to textbooks, then we can believe that the sum total of our learning goals are in those books and they dictate to us what our children should know. In order to cover the curriculum thoroughly it would be good practice to supplement basic textbooks with material from other sources, using diverse resources to deliver the series of learning objectives.)

Schools need firm policies on internationalisation that include the need to recognise each passport culture represented. Staff need encouragement and training to enable them to make the policy work in the classroom and other activities.

Again a short case study may help explain this.

We formulated our internationalisation policy at Bourofaye during the 1990s as we began to receive many more non-Anglophone children. Part of this was the launch of the German language branch, but it also consisted of simple classroom measures such as teaching and acceptance of different spelling conventions and use of idiom, acceptance of different handwriting styles, positive acknowledgement of cultural diversity and using it as a resource rather than feared as a threat. History and geography lessons were based on a core curriculum, but were flexible to take account both of Senegal as the host country and the various passport countries represented. We also deliberately internationalised our choice of literature readers and other resources.

We did have issues with this at times in BCS where some teachers tried to create enclaves of the home country in their classroom, so we developed a policy which we explained to new staff soon after arrival. We also included internationalisation issue seminars in our ongoing teacher development.

We recommend that non-Americans, particularly non-Anglophones, be invited to teach at TCK-PFO courses.

School leaders should be encouraged to take the course in the UK, rather than in the USA.

We recognise that there are practical constraints here – the UK course has to start in late July as soon as possible after the end of the school year in England & Wales. This means that the end of the course in early August can create difficulties in getting to a US-system school in time. The other issue is the transatlantic flight. Our suggestion therefore would be that teachers, especially those for leadership roles, heading to schools in Eurasia should consider taking this course en route. The extra costs of a stop over in the UK would be largely offset by the fact that the course is hosted in a low-cost mission centre. This course welcomes delegates from several countries and has input from several non-Anglophones, providing an international perspective.

#### **4. School organisation and timetabling**

There are some significant differences between curricula in the US and Europe. Examples would be compulsory foreign language teaching from 11 onwards in Europe (sometimes even earlier), integrated mathematics teaching in middle and high school, earlier emphasis on critical thinking, study and presentation skills. These are essential for proper re-entry to study in the passport country.

Students are also expected to study more subjects than the identical day timetable allows.

We recommend that the above requirements should be introduced to MK schools at least for the European (and many Commonwealth) children. The ideal is to combine the strengths of European education with those of the typical MK school, something that would benefit everyone. More flexible timetabling is needed to introduce enough subjects.

We recognise that MK schools can't do everything or be all things to every student. What can be done though is to make some straightforward changes – many of the things that European families need are shared by others from non-Anglophone and Commonwealth countries.

We also recognise that parents have chosen the MK school usually knowing the implications of studying a US-style programme. However, in many cases there is no real choice as there is only one MK school in their area, possibly the only one for hundreds of miles.

#### **5. Resources and costs**

Resources should not come from just one country in an international school, but should reflect all of the passport countries concerned as well as the host nation. It is often the case that parents who have already paid for English-language resources that their children may not need have to pay extra for any non-English language resources in school.

Resources should be bought in from all relevant sources based on a clear definition of what the school wants to include in the curriculum. Non English-language resources to be used in school should be paid for through school fees.

We operated this principle at Bourofaye where we bought mother-tongue resources to be used in school from a budget allocation based on the numbers of children. As a non-accountant managing the budget I kept calculations simple and would maintain that where there is a will there is an easy way.

The low dollar has forced many MK schools to consider economies, but many non-US families have faced low value currency problems in the past and struggled to pay MK school fees. This will become a bigger issue as we receive more students from new sending countries.

All normal routes of economy should be investigated.

Another case study could help here - we operated on a tight budget at Bourofaye, but never felt that children lacked the necessary educational basics. Prudent spending meant that we always had enough good stationery; every child had the necessary textbooks (something that many in some Western countries don't have), IT provision, a well-equipped science lab, sports equipment and more. Our children have progressed to reach their academic potential – careful spending can still be

compatible with good achievement. Our fees are still consistently affordable, even to families from lower-income, new sending countries.

Fees need to be structured to enable our mission families to afford them. This could be through income-related fees or through some sort of scholarship fund.

#### **6. ACSI role**

ACSI has the ability to make recommendations and encourage MK schools in these directions. It also has the authority to accredit schools. We propose that a clear policy on internationalisation being worked out in practice should be an accreditation requirement.

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