

Association des Parents d'Elèves de l'Ecole Européenne de Bruxelles IV Aisbl

Parents Association of the European School Brussels IV Aisbl

Elternvereinigung der Europäischen Schule Brüssel IV Aisbl

Associazione dei genitori della Scuola Europea di Bruxelles IV Aisbl

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Асоциация на родителите на учениците от Европейско училище Брюксел IV Aisbl

Asociația de părinți a elevilor de la Școala Europeană din Bruxelles IV Aisbl

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Canteen Service Annual Activity Report 2022-2023

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1 Canteen services

1.1 Overview

The 2022-2023 school year is the second year post the COVID-19 outbreak, and we can say that the APEEE Food & Beverage department has well turned the page of the pandemic crisis. Since early 2022, the Service was at its full working speed, and has continued welcoming, in the Canteen premises, all the school pupils, i.e., both ‘cantinists’ and ‘tartinists’. Moreover, the Food & Beverage department was still actively contributing to the support of the Ukrainian pupils that the school has enrolled and who used the service.

The year 2022-2023 is also marked by an extraordinary price inflation, which has put a lot of pressure on the finance of the Service, right after the exit of the COVID-19 crisis. Following up on the strategy outlined in the previous 2021-2022 activity report (and based on the feedbacks that the parents and pupils provided in the satisfactions surveys), the Food & Beverage department has managed to address the challenge to provide a quality service to the entire school community (including the professors) and at the same time maintaining the price of the meals rather stable.¹

Overall, for the 2022-2023 school year, the number of subscriptions to the canteen (i.e., for the ‘cantinist’ pupils) has significantly increased compared to the previous year.² The subscriptions (per instalment and in order of payment) were as follows:

- T1: 1714 (vs. 1638 in 2021-2022) + 19 Ukrainian pupils
- T2: 1729 (vs. 1612) + 21 Ukrainian pupils
- T3: 1708 (vs. 1569 + 18 Ukrainian pupils)

We also take it an encouraging sign that the changes (e.g., the revised meal menu for the Canteen and new offers at the Cafeteria and the Snack Shack) implemented ahead of the school year 2022-2023 (namely in the course of spring 2022) with the arrival of the new F&B manager, Mr. Evangelos PILATOS have been supported by the pupils and their parents.

Table 1. APEEE Canteen facts at glance – school year 2022-23

Quantity	Food items
215 830	Canteen meals
12 692	Sandiwches prepared for school outings
17 847 kg	Fruits distributed (via the canteen menus)
13 234	Sandwiches sold in Cafeteria and SnackSshack
19 736	<i>Panini</i> sold in Cafeteria and Snack shack
6 547	Durum sold in Snack Shack

¹The different audits performed during the year did not flag any major issues regarding the cleaning and the food hygiene in the Canteen premises.

² Please also note that at the same time, the number of pupils in the school has also increased (200).

As concerned the unpaid APEEE Canteen subscriptions, thanks to a number of preventive measures (including an enhanced communication around the launch of the instalment payment) taken by the Canteen department (and presented in the last activity report), we are happy to announce that this issue that had been growing over past few years, is now solved. There are currently no unpaid APEEE Canteen subscriptions.

As regards the financial balance, the F&B department posts

- over the 2022-23 school year, a positive balance of 36 235,3 euros (vs. -160 048,5 euros for the preceding school year). This encouraging result, in reality, turns negative, when including the Canteen's share of the APEEE management fees, at **-86 537,42** euros (vs. **-294 083.91** euros in the preceding school year). While the work should continue towards supporting a sustainable financial balance for the APEEE, it is worth stressing that **this represents a most welcome and sizeable financial effort, amid a highly difficult economic situation**. Overall, the ongoing improvement of the financial situation is driven by the good results in the Cafeteria (new products, different organization), reduction of waste and a labour productivity increased for the sub-contractor staff (by reducing hours). Thus, we are confident that all the efforts made over the last years will pay off and the financial situation will be definitely on track in the coming years.

1.2 Strategy for the APEEE F&B service

Following up the lessons learnt from the 2022 Canteen satisfaction surveys, the **APEEE-Canteen Service has pursued its efforts to improve the management of the Canteen and the different services under its responsibility** during the school year 2022-2023. This includes in particular:

- 1.2.1 Working on the nature and quality of the meals** (i.e. more diversity and simplicity) in order to achieve the nutritional objectives without, however, neglecting the pleasure aspect of the meals.
 - **More diverse hot meal menus of the canteen**, in collaboration with a nutritionist and the Belgian national standards and taking into account the multicultural context of the school: The pupils are offered meals that are guaranteed cooked in house with seasonal products. Whenever possible, organic or vegan products are also promoted.

Figure 1. Example of the Canteen menu: week of 4 December – 8 December 2023

LUNDI	MARDI	MERCREDI	JEUDI	VENDREDI
04/12	05/12	06/12	07/12	08/12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pain multicéréales Gluten (froment, orge, avoine, seigle), Soja, Sésame ● Soupe à l'oignon ● Emincé de poulet, sauce à l'orange ● Pomme cube rôtie au four ● Haricots verts filet d'huile d'olive ● Cordon bleu végétarien Gluten (froment), Lait, Œufs, Soja ● Yaourt Lait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pain multicéréales Gluten (froment, orge, avoine, seigle), Soja, Sésame ● Velouté d'épinard et laitue ● Bœuf braisé au carotte Gluten (froment), Lait, Œufs, Sulfites ● Cœur de blé Gluten (froment), Œufs ● Chou fleur sauce échalote/paprika Lait ● Nouille sauté aux légumes & sésame Gluten (froment), Œufs, Soja, Sésame ● Spéculoos Saint-Nicolas Gluten (froment), Soja ● Fruit de saison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pain multicéréales Gluten (froment, orge, avoine, seigle), Soja, Sésame ● Potage au poireau ● Merlu rôti au four, citron et persil Gluten (froment), Lait, Poissons ● Pomme de terre vapeur, filet d'huile d'olive ● Carottes au persil haché ● Cassolette de légumes à l'indienne Moutarde, Soja, Sulfites ● Spéculoos Saint-Nicolas Gluten (froment), Soja 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pain multicéréales Gluten (froment, orge, avoine, seigle), Soja, Sésame ● Potage au pois cassé ● Gyros de poulet ● Pâtes grecques, filet d'huile d'olive Gluten (froment) ● Courgette sauce tomate ● Poêlée végétarienne Céleri, Soja, Sulfites ● Fruit de saison 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pain multicéréales Gluten (froment, orge, avoine, seigle), Soja, Sésame ● Soupe de carotte, crème et miel Lait ● Emincé de porc, sauce au curry doux Céleri, Gluten (froment), Lait, Moutarde, Œufs, Soja, Sulfites ● Riz basmati ● Emincé de fenouil rôti à l'huile d'olive et citron Sulfites ● Lentilles aux légumes ● Flan au caramel Lait

- The Cafeteria and Snack Shack also proposed an extended **alternative offer to the traditional canteen hot meals**: New products are continuously proposed in order to offer a wider choice while maintaining the ambitious objective of proposing as much healthy and tasty food as possible. Some ready-to-eat items bought from suppliers are also proposed but they only represent a small part of this alternative offer.

1.2.2 Avoiding food waste and contributing to the reduction of the ecological fingerprint.

- The Canteen has taken actions (i.e., via enhanced and clearer communication to parents) to reinforce the lunch pre-ordering and when possible, let at the disposal of the pupils and professors Chef's Boxes with cold buffet items left from the teachers' restaurant.
- The big water plastic bottles in the Canteen have been replaced by filtered water from the Canteen taps for the pupils and professors using the refectories. In November, this has triggered a reduction of 600kg of plastic per year and an annual cost reduction for the Canteen of about 15k euros.³

³ Plastic bottles are still used for class outings (pic-nic lunches) and OIB garderie. We are in contact with the supplier to find a solution about the outings. We have proposed to OIB to replace plastic bottles with jugs like it is now done in the Canteen refectories but so far, they have refused for logistic reasons.

1.2.3 Enhancing the communication with the school community, as it is also the mission of the APEEE Canteen to provide the most accurate information possible to avoid that misconceptions govern the food choices of the pupils.

- **Parents:**
 - The Service has reviewed how the parents can have a sound idea of the meals offered and of the Service in general. It has been decided to organise at the beginning of each school year a number of weeks where parents in groups could come at the Canteen during the lunchtime, visit the refectories, meet the Canteen team and share the daily meal together. The first edition of these *Canteen weeks* had taken place last September (and it was a success as all the time slots were quickly filled in and we could not accept all the parents' requests).
 - The APEEE Canteen's website, which is currently being reviewed, is progressively including more complete information on the different options available to pupils for lunch. The APEEE's new Instagram and the Newsletters will also contribute to the improved communication effort by referring and reporting to all the events organised by Canteen services for the pupils. This ranges from the introduction of the new items in the cafeteria and Snack Shack or new Canteen menus for the period to the animations and decorations for Halloween, Christmas and Easter seasons.

- **Pupils:** following the logic of the *Canteen weeks*, the Service has started to reflect on organising Canteen information sessions with the pupils and their professors. The discussions with the professors are still ongoing for the establishment of such sessions on a more permanent and formal basis.

- **Professors:** For many years, the APEEE Canteen, besides the pupil refectories, also manages a Restaurant for the professors (the so-called '*Resto profs*'). This restaurant is basically a dedicated refectory for the professors and the school managers and staff where they have their lunch. The meal for the kids is proposed (at the same price paid by the pupils) as well as an *upgraded* lunch meal and a salad bar (at a higher price though). Due to the current financial difficulties of the Canteen Service, the service at the Resto profs has been reviewed in order to ensure the sustainability of the service, which is very important as it allows the professors, the school managers and staff to meet over lunchtime in a convivial place than classrooms or school offices. The APEEE has engaged discussions with the professors to see how some further adjustments could be envisaged regarding the lunch offers in the *Resto Profs* (including the surveillance and the assistance of the smaller pupils).

- **School:** Due to space and class timetables constraints, the lunchtime given each pupil is quite limited (about 20min). Under these constraints and in order to ensure the best lunchtimes as possible for every pupil, the APEEE is continuously discussing with the school management. For instance, the Canteen, whenever possible, allows pupils entering the refectories before their designated period and eat.⁴ In addition, with the collaboration of the school, the Canteen has reinforced the supervision to avoid that some pupils (mostly from secondary grades) extend their stay at the Canteen, at the expense of the time of other kids.

1 The priority is given to pupils who have subscribed at the Canteen service.

1.2.4 Improving the Canteen management

- **Intensive work is done, on a daily basis, with all the F&B suppliers to obtain the best products at the best prices.** This is an acute and relevant activity given the period of high monetary inflation that we have been through. The aim is clearly to buffer as much as possible the inflation impact on F&B department under a non-price increase assumption of the canteen subscriptions. This crucial work is performed by the stock manager (that we had hired two years ago) under the supervision of the F&B manager with the help of the Chef of the kitchen. The Canteen Service managed to contain the impact of the latter price increase by fierce price negotiations by the suppliers, advance purchases and an adjustment of the meal recipes. Overall, the Canteen supplies had increased by 28% compared to last year. This is explained by the increase of the Canteen revenues (more subscriptions which has a positive impact) but also by the sizeable price increase in the food supplies.⁵
- The Canteen manager has also worked towards an optimisation of Service by making a drastic reduction of the Canteen subcontractor team and improving its productivity, and also thanks to dedicated trainings. To recall, over the past years and during the COVID-19 crisis in particular, the Sub Contractor's cost had continuously and significantly increased to ensure secure lunchtime at school. Currently, 25% reduction of the Sub Contractor's cost has been achieved.
- We also welcomed new team members in the Canteen department: (i) Vasileios Tsaprasidis (September 2022) as '*Chef de partie*' and took over former sub-contractor staff, and (ii) Mohamed Agharbi Abrighach (March 2023) as kitchen assistant in replacement of a retired staff. These new staff members have also brought their expertise to improve the productivity of the Canteen staff and improve the efficiency between its different services.

1.3 Canteen subscription prices evolutions and policy

Frist, it is worth stressing that that the **Canteen Service in the European Schools are not subsidized neither by the European Institutions nor by the national governments**. This a key point to bear in mind when it comes to the price of the meals at the Canteen, which at the same time legitimates the intense work done by the Canteen team to compress as much as possible the costs, while trying to ensure a quality service.

⁵ First contacts have been already taken with the school and the Régie du bâtiment to discuss the possibility of adding a second walk-in freezer. A second freezer would allow us to increase the stock of frozen supplies and reduce the cost. We haven't received any reaction yet to our request.

Table 2 - 2022-23 Canteen in EEBIV: subscription prices (per instalment)

	2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days
T1	€ 258.30	€ 368.55	€ 387.19	€ 492.19
T2	€ 188.38	€ 248.66	€ 301.40	€ 376.75
T3	€ 162.69	€ 226.05	€ 280.85	€ 356.20
S1-S6 T3	€ 128.44	€ 180.84	€ 226.05	€ 287.70
Daily Meal Price	8.56€	7.54€	6.85€	6.85€

The first instalment (T1) had 72 days and the second (T2) had 55 days. the third instalment (T3) had 52 days and for classes S1-S6 the third instalment had 42 days. We calculated two different prices for T3 since classes S1-S6 finished the school year earlier and avoid possible reimbursements at the end of the school year.

Some changes the subscription policy were made as of the start of the 2022-23 school year occurred, as follows:

- More consistency in the Canteen subscription prices: The target was to keep the Canteen subscription prices constant as much as possible with an assumption of **6.85€** price per meal for the enrolment of 5 days per week and. Increase 5% progressively as days decrease.
- The policy for **family discount** has also amended to be aligned with the others APEEEs in Brussels, i.e., the discount is only given to the 3rd member of the family and not at all the children of that family as before.
- The full amount of each period subscribed was required to ensure the same start and end dates for the period for every pupil (except in cases of reimbursement apply).

Table 3a presents the numbers of subscriptions for the current school year up to now. Year to date for the 1st instalment, 1827 subscriptions have been already recorder, which is 116 more than 2022-2023. As regards the 2nd period, 1836 subscriptions have been recorded the instalment so far. The figures for the second instalment might still evolve over the coming weeks. Table 3b complements Table 3a with the subscriptions for which a family discount was granted.

Table 3a - 2023-24 Canteen in EEBIV: Numbers of subscriptions (T1 – T2)

Trimester	2023-2024	Normal Price					Total Revenue per Subscription scheme
		Complete Subscriptions					
	Plan	Nursery	Primary	S1-S6	S7	Total	
T1	Total	127	646	958	96	1827	
	2 days	0	1	122	15	138	€ 28,273.38
	3 days	7	39	153	20	219	€ 67,069.04
	4 days	120	606	589	53	1368	€ 495,227.60
	5 days	0	0	94	8	102	€ 46,203.25
T2	Total	127	650	962	97	1836	
	2 days	0	0	127	16	143	€ 24,634.31
	3 days	8	39	167	19	233	€ 50,793.44
	4 days	119	611	582	54	1366	€ 373,434.60
	5 days	0	0	86	8	94	€ 33,085.50

* The number total of subscriptions in Table 3a also include the number of discounted subscriptions in Table 3b.

Table 3b - 2023-24 Canteen in EEBIV: numbers of subscriptions (T1 – T2)

Family Discount						Total Revenue per Subscription scheme
2023-2024	Complete Subscriptions					
Plan	Nursery	Primary	S1-S6	S7	Total	
T1	10%	5%	6%	2%	21%	
2 days	0	0	10	1	11	€ 2,204.10
3 days	2	0	10	0	12	€ 3,499.37
4 days	11	32	33	1	77	€ 26,583.48
5 days	0	0	7	0	7	€ 3,064.01
T2	3%	4%	6%	5%	13%	
2 days	0	0	3	3	6	€ 970.99
3 days	0	3	15	1	19	€ 4,058.73
4 days	4	21	42	1	68	€ 17,607.24
5 days	0	0	2	0	2	€ 647.33

A. Way forward: the Canteen price in 2024-25

Overall, amid a very challenging context on many respects, it seems clear that the **APEEE F&B department is pursuing its financial recovery after years of budgetary troubles**. Besides, some favourable signs as for instance the significant reduction of the inflation, the economic outlook for the coming months remains highly uncertain and the prospects are not the more encouraging ones, as the prices are expected to remain at a higher level than before. Considering all **the fruitful efforts and changes brought by the department (both in terms of the variety of the Canteen offer and the costs reduction), it would be definitely warranted to pursue these efforts to reach a balance financial account (and eventually rebuild reserves).**

To this end, the efforts should continue to focus on the two main following levers:

1. Improving the quality of the service in order to attract more subscriptions and improve the profitability of the service. For instance, there is quite a number of Canteen subscription cancellations every terms. The Service is looking at the reasons for these cancellations and the way to secure the inscriptions once they are made;
2. Maintaining the costs. This is the corollary of the previous point and also aims to the improve the profitability of the service.

As explained above, the F&B department have been working on the first two above-mentioned points over the last year with success and will keep working on them. For the time being, the focus and the priority should remain on these points (*i.e.*, the quality of the service and the cost reduction). **However, as seen in the past, the situation might evolve rather quickly, and one cannot exclude adverse developments that would dramatically change the current picture and require any significant raise in canteen prices this year or the next one⁶. The F&B department will keep monitoring closely the situation and keep you inform as appropriate.**

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⁶ As a rule, for each instalment, the Service always consider a possible price evolution margin of 5% to cater for increases from suppliers.