



Ambassador's Activities

2012

Distributor: French Embassy in the UK
- Press and Communications Services -
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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the 60th anniversary celebration
of the British section of the Lycée français Charles de Gaulle

London, 14 September 2012

Secretary of State,
Deputies,
Chère Anne-Marie Descôtes,
Headmaster,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Thank you, Secretary of State, for doing us the honour of joining us for the 60th anniversary of the British section of the Lycée français Charles de Gaulle.

It's a great pleasure to be among you all once again in this place of academic excellence, the Lycée français Charles de Gaulle in London. Every year at the French Residence we celebrate the excellent results of our French section pupils in the *baccalauréat*. I'm also well aware and proud of the equally important successes of our British section pupils, so I'm particularly delighted this evening to celebrate these years of school success with you. This autumn, 2012, the British section celebrates its 60th anniversary, its "Diamond Jubilee" in a sense. Its creation was the work of M. Gaudin, the headmaster at the time – I thank his daughter for being among us this evening –, and he believed it was absolutely crucial to bring the French and English school systems closer together. He rightly saw no contradiction between the two approaches.

It's true that the French – even back then – emphasized the need for a critical viewpoint and the expression of differences while retaining a strict academic framework identical for all. For their part, our English friends gave a greater role to the initiative of teachers, while stamping a strong collective identity through the uniform and, above all, group sporting and cultural activities. The creation of the British section was therefore to become the vehicle for a revolutionary convergence. This work was visionary at a time when educational cooperation was not yet a major plank of our bilateral relationship. Admittedly, a cultural agreement had been signed between the UK and the French Republic in 1948, but the idea of a rapprochement between two educational philosophies that were so different was an innovation and a wager on the future.

That wager has today been won. Every year, a new intake of 64 pupils joins the British section. After several years in the French section, these pupils are in themselves the embodiment of genuine bilingualism. Perfectly francophone, they prepare actively for their exams and, above all, for entry to Britain's prestigious universities, where they're sometimes also reunited with their classmates from the French section. They're the ambassadors of the Lycée, of French schools, and I know they don't forget the institution that gave them a solid foundation. Some of them have themselves become active school parents, which proves that you never really leave the Lycée! And let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Association des Anciens du Lycée Charles de Gaulle, which has played such an active role in preparing this event.

The creation of the British section was the first step in a bilateral cooperation that is now well established. Nearly a year ago, on behalf of the Minister of National Education, I signed the Franco-British educational agreement with you, Secretary of State. What a long road we have travelled since M. Gaudin's initiative! Our boards of education and the English local

authorities actively cooperate throughout the country, and countless exchanges are organized by dynamic teachers convinced that these can only enrich our children and teenagers' education. The Lycée continues to play its role. For example, it has created two bilingual sections, in cooperation with two English primary schools. French and English pupils from the same year thus find themselves together in the same classes and share their time equally between being taught in French and in English. In this way, learning the other language takes on a new, practical dimension. This is only one among several bilingual, bicultural education systems, but it gives us a glimpse of the fundamental changes necessary in modern language teaching in a world where communication is an essential skill.

A great deal remains to be done in this field, in France and with our main European partners. It's a necessary undertaking both for our children's professional futures and for their intellectual grounding. So we're ready to support and encourage the initiatives of this kind that you've decided to take, *cher* Michael Gove. Foreign language learning is a fundamental pillar of our two countries' education policies. This Embassy is paying very close attention to the reforms the British government has undertaken. We're therefore delighted to see the place of modern languages strengthened by the English Baccalaureate, but also the announcement of compulsory modern language teaching in primary education. In this way, the crucial work is begun at the very youngest age. Our pupils in the British section prove it, in exemplary fashion.

Secretary of State, I'm delighted to be with you once again to celebrate our bilateral relationship, which is so rich and profound. This 60th anniversary is testimony to the depth and permanence of the ties uniting the UK and the French Republic. We're all very honoured by your presence, and we thank you very sincerely and warmly for it. So I now hand over to you, welcoming you again to the Lycée Charles de Gaulle./.