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Vocational Guidance Education in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe

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In 1914, Belgium introduced a period of compulsory education for children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 14. In 1983, this period was extended to age 18. Compulsory education is applicable to all young people under the age of 18 for a period of twelve years. Therefore, given the fact that the school year lasts from the beginning of September to the end of June the following year, compulsory education begins the year a child reaches the age of 6 and ends the year he or she turns 18.

Full-time education is compulsory for pupils between the ages of 6 and 15. It covers the six years of primary education and the first three years of secondary education. Secondary education is divided into three cycles *(degrés)* of a duration of two years each. The 1st cycle consists of common education for all pupils. In order to allow a differentiated educational pathway which is more closely adapted to the needs of certain pupils, these first two years may also be organised in a differentiated manner. The 2nd and 3rd cycles consist of general, technical, vocational and artistic education. The key moment in terms of guidance is the transition to the 2nd and 3rd cycles, when pupils must choose between the transition streams (also called 'general and technical upper secondary school', whose first aim is to prepare pupils for higher education, whilst allowing them to begin their working lives) and the qualification streams (also called 'vocational and technical upper secondary school', which prepares pupils to begin their professional lives, whilst allowing them to pursue studies in higher education).

Compulsory education is extended up to age 18, but from age 16 or age 15 (if the pupil has finished a 2nd year of secondary education), it is possible to meet this obligation through alternating secondary education and vocational training.

Young people under 18 may also meet requirements for compulsory education through distance learning at home if it meets the conditions established by the government.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

In 2002, the Council for Education and Training (advisory council gathering 28 member organisations) put forward an opinion on guidance and information on studies, training and careers. It defines the notion of guidance, which consists in 'allowing an individual to become aware of his or her personal characteristics and to develop them in view of choosing his or her studies, training and professional activities, in all situations, with the related concern of a collective future and the development of his or her personality and responsibility'. This definition should be enhanced by the European definition, which was the fruit of an agreement made by European ministers in 2005. It applies more specifically to the training and vocational guidance sector for adults: 'Vocational guidance is viewed as an ongoing process of lifelong support provided to people so that they may elaborate and implement their personal and professional projects by clarifying their aspirations and skills, through information and counselling on the realities of work, the evolution of trades and careers, the job market, economic realities and the provision of training'.

The 'Missions ([1])' Decree of 1997 governs educational and vocational guidance at compulsory education level. It defines the procedures and attributes the responsibilities in the guidance system to different stakeholders: the board of teachers (including the school head and the teachers), Psychological/Medical/Social Centres (CPMS, or PMS Centres) and parents.

According to the 19 July 1993 decree, vocational training for the Brussels-Capital Region is within the competence of the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission (COCOF). Therefore, the Walloon Office for Employment and Training (FOREM) is responsible for employment and training in the Walloon Region, whereas *Bruxelles Formation* (Brussels French-speaking institute for vocational training) is responsible for the vocational training of the French-speaking community in the Brussels-Capital Region. The FOREM and *Bruxelles Formation* provide information, support and guidance services to people and companies.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The PMS Centres are tri-disciplinary centres with three essential missions:

- to promote the psychological, psychological/educational, medical and social conditions which provide pupils with the best chances to develop their personalities harmoniously, to prepare them to take on their roles of autonomous and responsible citizens and to take an active part in social, cultural and economic life;
- to contribute to the educational process of pupils throughout their educational pathways, by encouraging the implementation of the means for them to make continuous progress, in view of ensuring equal access for everyone to social, civic and personal liberty. To this end, the centres will mobilise the available resources in the pupils' family, social and educational environments, among others;
- to support pupils in the positive construction of their personal, educational and professional projects and in their socio-professional integration, in a perspective of lifelong guidance.

In order to guarantee the quality of execution of their missions, the activities must adhere to the basic programmes of the Psychological/Medical/Social Centres which include, in particular, guidance and support activities. Furthermore, they have a specific programme as well as a project.

These centres are dependent on the Ministry of the French Community. Even if they often intervene in schools, they are not dependent on them and their cooperation is subject to a contract.

The Psychological/Medical/Social Centres share the responsibility for guidance with the board of teachers in secondary education, which has the task of issuing guidance certificates according to the results obtained by pupils.

([1]) Decree defining the priority missions of basic and secondary education, as well as the structures required to achieve them (decree of 24 July 1997).

The information and vocational guidance services aimed at young people and adults (in particular people seeking employment) are organised under the responsibility of the FOREM and *Bruxelles Formation* (training for the French-speaking population in the Brussels-Capital Region) for the French-speaking part of the country. The Ministry of the French Community does not play a role, as these are public bodies under the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region. However, dialogues are ensured in a perspective of coherence in the framework of education and lifelong training.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

Vocational guidance education is not included in the compulsory education curriculum as a subject in itself or as a cross-cutting approach.

However, articles 21 to 23 of the 'Missions' Decree make it an obligation for schools and the PMS Centres to provide guidance to pupils. Guidance as a mission of the PMS Centres is asserted in the decree of 14 July 2006 related to the missions, programmes and activity reports of the PMS Centres. *(See the bottom of page 5 concerning the PMS Centres and the first cycle).*

Furthermore, each school may assign the equivalent of two weeks spread over the entire third cycle of secondary education to activities intended to encourage pupils' to reflect on their professional choices and their resulting choice of studies. These activities are part of the regular studies of pupils. The staff members who coordinate and guide these activities are on active duty: there are teachers, PMS agents, and most of the time they work in cooperation.

Traineeships within the framework of the curriculum

Traineeships are not part of the curricular activities in the transition stream (general and technical transition stream).

However, they are generally part of the curricular activities in the qualification stream (technical and vocational qualification stream).

At the end of full-time education, young people may pursue compulsory education in alternating secondary education and training. This is intended in particular for pupils from 15/16 years of age who are still in compulsory education. It is organised or subsidised in the second and third cycles of vocational education as well as in the third cycle of the technical qualification stream. It is provided in an alternating secondary education and training centre (CEFA), which is attached to one or several full-time secondary schools which organise the technical and vocational qualification stream in the second and third cycles. The year of training may take place in accordance with the school calendar or may be organised according to other methods. The training may be organised in training modules. Pupils may be grouped with those in full-time education.

Young people may also complete their compulsory education through vocational training provided by the IFAPME (Walloon Institute for Alternance Training and Small and Medium-sized Companies) in Wallonia, and the SFPME (Training Service for Small and Medium-sized Companies) in Brussels.

This education (CEFA) or vocational training (IFAPME or SFPME) must include training activities in a company. These activities are therefore not considered to be work placements.

The Government of the French Community, the Government of the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission (COCOF) have supported the draft tripartite agreement to define the framework for cooperation related to alternance training.

OTHER TYPES OF ACTIVITY/GUIDANCE SERVICES

Contacts with the professional world

Vocational training which meets the educational obligations of young people is organised (IFAPME or SFPME) in direct contact with companies (see above).

Partnerships are formed willingly between schools and companies in the framework of education, with a view to providing information on careers and guidance (traineeships, visits, conferences, etc.). The PMS Centres cooperate with the CEFA (as with all schools) but are not competent to provide vocational training. However, they may advise it to certain pupils.

Guidance services at school

The board of teachers (the school head and teachers) is among other things responsible for guidance provided to pupils at school. The PMS Centre (see below) and parents are involved to this end. The school board has the authority to take decisions on subjects such as moving up to the next class, cycle or phase and on issuing diplomas, certificates and accreditation of achievement within the school.

Secondary schools put pupils in the first cycle in contact with schools of the same type offering the transition stream as well as the qualification stream, through visits or short observation periods.

According to the law, one of the missions of the PMS Centres is to guide pupils. The staff who work there have the role of providing psychological, medical, social and educational guidance: it is their duty to inform pupils, support their choices and help them discover their own motivations and elaborate their career plans. The PMS Centres employ multidisciplinary teams (psychological/educational counsellors, psychological/educational assistants, social assistants, paramedical assistants and doctors) which are subject to professional secrecy. The PMS Centres are always available for pupils and parents. They provide information and/or counselling concerning possibilities for studies, training, trades and careers, as well as information on the job market to all people who request it. Their services are free of charge.

In the framework of its guidance mission, the PMS Centres favour a global approach to a gradual choice made by pupils, helping them to take stock of their skills, ideas about careers, studies and training, and to free themselves of social and sexist stereotypes. The guidance mission of the centres is in keeping with a perspective of lifelong guidance and training. They work in partnership with the different guidance stakeholders in the world of education as well as employment and training.

The centres inform pupils in the 1st cycle of ordinary secondary education about the educational possibilities organised and subsidised by the French Community as well as the training possibilities. They raise pupils' awareness about elaborating a vocational or training project. The centres propose counselling to parents, if necessary, to provide them with information on the school system and the appropriateness of their child's education/career choice.

The centres also inform pupils in the 2nd cycle of ordinary secondary education about the educational possibilities organised and subsidised by the French Community as well as the training possibilities. After formulating the offer, the centres meet the demands of pupils who request individualised assistance regarding vocational guidance or training. The centres also inform pupils in the 3rd cycle of ordinary secondary education about university and non-university higher education as well as training possibilities.

The role of the PMS Centres consists in guiding or restreaming pupils in secondary education throughout their educational pathways. In the case of special difficulties, a diagnosis and a treatment plan are established in agreement with the school and the parents.

As regards admission to specialised education, the PMS Centres are in charge of the multidisciplinary exam in order to advise guidance to parents. They must also agree with requests by pupils enrolled in specialised education to attend ordinary education.

The PMS Centres intervene at the request of young people, their parents or the school, or on their own initiative in various circumstances.

Each Centre provides guidance to a series of schools. The PMS Centres may intervene collectively (information sessions, maturation of the vocation, tests, etc.) in the schools they are tied to by contract. They may also meet pupils individually (interviews, follow-up of tests, restreaming, etc.) in the schools where they often have an office, or in their own offices.

Guidance services outside school

Non-profit associations exist, such as the SIEP (information service on studies and careers) and the CEDIEP (documentation and information centre on studies and careers), as well as sectoral initiatives (for example, Technopass, a resource and documentation centre for industrial trades).

QUALIFICATIONS OF GUIDANCE STAFF

In the schools

Teachers are active in the area of guidance within the framework of the board of teachers, which issues guidance certificates (certificate A: pass; B: pass, with restriction to certain areas of specialisation; C: failure). During the board of teachers meetings centred on guidance counselling provided to pupils, the PMS Centres provide information to teachers without having to intervene systematically at the end of each cycle.

Guidance training is not included in the initial training of teachers. Modules of ongoing training are sometimes proposed jointly with PMS Centre staff.

The 'Missions' Decree specifies the qualifications required for PMS Centre staff, namely those of psychologist, nurse or social worker. The ongoing training for PMS Centre staff is of two types: compulsory (6 1/2 days) and optional (6 1/2 days). It is organised at three levels: at inter-network level, at network level and at the level of each competent authority (the competent authorities may call upon different training providers). University or non-university initial training does not exist for future guidance counsellors. They receive training in their own organisations or through modules of ongoing training.

The Board of Governors for PMS Guidance examines everything concerning the evolution of legislation and training for PMS Centres, with a concern for quality. It shares its opinions with the government.

COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Cooperation between schools, PMS Centres, parents, former students and other stakeholders is recommended in the framework of the 'Missions' Decree, but depends on the individual initiatives of schools. External partners may be from guidance services at universities, colleges of higher education, the public services (FOREM, *Bruxelles Formation*, *Carrefours Emploi Formation*, etc.) and non-profit associations (such as the SIEP, the CEDIEP, *Inforjeunes*, etc.). For example, the PMS Centres organise or are associated with career campaigns. Several PMS Centres prepare and/or support pupils who participate in fairs. Partnerships exist between PMS Centres and schools for the organisation of activities in the framework of vocational and educational guidance. Schools may organise encounters with the *Carrefours Emploi Formation* (employment and training forum which depends on the FOREM) or with university guidance services (CIO or SOU). Many activities exist which depend on the initiatives of schools and/or PMS Centres.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

The Government of the French Community provides secondary schools with information related to higher education as well as the requirements for each pathway. It is presented in the form of publications, such as: *L'enseignement supérieur. Mode d'emploi*: http://www.enseignement.be/gen/syst/sup.pdf

The French Community provides an information website called *Mon métier, mon avenir* (My career, my future – http://monmetiermonavenir.cfwb.be/) for young people attending compulsory education.

The information platform *Horizons emploi* (Employment Horizons) offers a database on careers and vocational training. This new website integrates data from Formabanque and the General Administration for Education and Scientific Research. A collaboration is under way with *Bruxelles Formation* (http://www.leforem.be/former/horizonsemploi-index.html).

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