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Vocational Guidance Education in Full-Time Compulsory Education in Europe

European Commission

BELGIUM (GERMAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY)

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In Belgium, education is compulsory for young people under the age of 18 for a period of twelve years, beginning the year a child reaches the age of 6 and ending the year he or she turns 18. But not all young people are enrolled in full-time secondary school until the age of 18. The 1983 law on compulsory education only imposes full-time education for pupils between the ages of 6 and 15 (16 if they have not completed the first two years of secondary education), and authorises the others to meet their educational obligations through alternating secondary education *(Teilzeitunterricht)* and vocational training in a company. Thus, unless a pupil has had to repeat a school year, all young people are enrolled in full-time education for at least the six years of primary school and the first three years of secondary school.

Secondary education is divided into three cycles of a duration of two years each. The 1st cycle (the 'observation' 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 (the 'orientation' and 'determination' cycles) consist of general, technical and vocational education (artistic education is not offered in the German-speaking Community). Unless a pupil has had to repeat a school year, the 1st cycle and the first year of the 2nd cycle of secondary education are compulsory for all pupils. The key moment in terms of guidance is at the end of the 1st cycle during the transition to the 2nd cycle, when pupils must choose between the transition streams (all of general education and certain pathways of technical education), whose first aim is to prepare pupils for higher education, and the qualification streams (most of the technical education pathways and all of the vocational education pathways), which prepare pupils to begin their professional lives, whilst allowing them to pursue studies in higher education.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

In the German-speaking Community of Belgium, there are three institutions which are legally responsible for vocational guidance: Psychological/Medical/Social Centres (PMS Centres), schools and the Employment Office *(Arbeitsamt)*.

Educational guidance has existed since 1936 in Belgium. Alongside schools themselves, the law established **Psychological/Medical/Social Centres (PMS Centres)** intended to provide psychological and social guidance to pupils, as well as medical support throughout their schooling. Furthermore, the centres have the legal mission to 'provide pupils, people with parental authority, school authorities and all those who participate directly in the educational process, with information and counselling concerning educational and vocational possibilities, in view of promoting the process of individual choice'.

Since 1989, a national policy or national objectives no longer exist in the area of education and training, as each of the three Communities has become responsible for its own policy in these areas.

In the German-speaking Community, there are three PMS Centres, i.e. one for each education network.One of the political objectives of the current government (2004-2009) is to merge these three PMS Centres into one in order to make more efficient and targeted use of the significant human and financial resources invested by the Community in this area.

Schools themselves also have responsibilities in terms of vocational guidance. The decree of 31 August 1998 *(Grundlagendekret)* related to the missions of the competent authorities and school staff, attributes the responsibilities in the guidance system to the different stakeholders at the schools: the board of teachers, parents and the PMS Centres. Article 15 ('Information on training and careers') states, in substance, that: 'Schools are obliged, in collaboration with the PMS Centres or other specialised schools, to inform and advise pupils and the people responsible for their education regarding studies, training and career possibilities.'

On 17 January 2000, the German-speaking Community created the ***Arbeitsamt der Deutsch-sprachigen Gemeinschaft*** **(Employment Office)** by decree, and entrusted it with a mission – in addition to the usual tasks in the area of employment and vocational training – to coordinate and restructure an area of activities in which employment services were not yet active, i.e. that of vocational guidance provided to young people under the age of 18, in cooperation and consultation with other authorities, in particular the PMS Centres.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Currently, the three **PMS Centres** in the German-speaking Community provide services as a priority to the ordinary and special schools in their network. One of the missions of the PMS Centres is to guide pupils. The staff who work there have the role of providing psychological, medical and social guidance: it is their duty to inform pupils and support their choices. PMS Centre staff may sit on the board of teachers.

It is the duty of the PMS Centres to help young people acquire sufficient knowledge about current and future careers, and not only about the training required for these careers. To this end, they have a wide range of information concerning studies and careers in the German-speaking Community, the other Communities of Belgium – especially in the neighbouring French Community – and in bordering countries, especially in Germany.

The foundation of the responsibility of **schools** is contained in two decrees: that of 31 August 1998 *(Grundlagendekret)* related to the missions of the competent authorities and school staff, and that of 16 June 2008 establishing the essential skills and the educational curriculum guidelines. It is nevertheless explained in rather general terms, with the first decree stating that schools must '… prepare pupils to take an active and creative part in economic and professional life', and the second decree stating that the technology course in primary school and in the 1st cycle of secondary school must help pupils to become capable of making a sound choice at the end of the 1st cycle of secondary school (age 14) regarding the future of their educational and vocational training. But central legislation does not establish the educational methods and content by means of which the school must achieve these general goals. The content and

methods which they intend to use in order to reach the objectives of the curricula and develop the skills required by decree are within the remit of the schools and are therefore the responsibility of the competent authorities and teachers.

In secondary education, a certain responsibility for educational guidance and/or vocational training of pupils is incumbent upon the **board of teachers**, which has the task of issuing guidance certificates according to the results obtained by pupils (guidance certificate A: pass, with freedom to choose the type of studies; B: pass, with restrictions preventing access to certain areas of specialisation; C: failure, thus requiring the pupil to repeat the year of studies or – if the pupil has reached the age of 15 – to choose alternance training in part-time education (*Teilzeitunterricht*, organised in certain schools only), in a company or in the form of an apprenticeship contract for training part of the time in a company and the other part of the time in one of the two centres of the Institute of Vocational Training for the Middle Classes and SMEs (IAWM). During the board of teachers meetings centred on guidance counselling provided to pupils, the PMS Centres share information with the teachers and the experience they have acquired by providing support to pupils, often over many years.

According to the decree of 17 January 2000 creating an Employment Office in the German-speaking Community, the ***Arbeitsamt*** has the mission of providing information and guidance in the area of careers and training *(Berufs- und Ausbildungsberatung)*. At the government's request, a guide for schools was made in cooperation and consultation with the PMS Centres, in order to develop and improve the coordination of vocational guidance education *(Leitfaden zur Berufswahlorientierung von Schülern und Lehrlingen in der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft)*.

The role of the ministry and the government must not be underestimated. In the framework of its analysis of the functioning of the German-speaking Community, at the beginning of the current term (2004-2009), the government drew up a long list of more than 170 measures *(Maßnahmenkatalog der Regierung)*, with projects and a concrete plan of action for each of them, to be carried out until 2009. This list of measures is revised and updated each year. Approximately ten of these measures are aimed directly or indirectly at the improvement of information on studies, training and careers as well as educational and vocational guidance.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM

The curricula are the responsibility of the competent authorities and are not established by central legislation. They must, however, adhere to the decree of 16 June 2008 establishing the essential skills *(Kernkompetenzen)* and curriculum guidelines *(Rahmenpläne)* in education. These curriculum guidelines, as well as the content mentioned in them, are compulsory and may be considered as minimum curricula imposed on all schools. The skills [*Kompetenzerwartungen*] described in them for the various disciplines must be developed by all pupils in all schools.

Although these curriculum guidelines do not include a course for vocational guidance education, the subject is nonetheless present. Therefore, in the curriculum guidelines for natural sciences and technology, a section entitled *'The specific contribution of technology to the development of*

skills' states that: '… The technology course contributes to discovering and developing talents, cultivating a taste for problem-solving and **stimulating an interest in technical careers. At the end of the 1st cycle of secondary school [at the age of 14], pupils take a fundamental decision regarding the future of their educational and vocational training. The contact with technology in primary school and in the 1st cycle of secondary school helps pupils to become capable of making sound choices.'** The law does not impose a method, however, or the content for reaching this objective. These aspects are within the remit of schools and teachers. Many initiatives are taken in this respect in the area of vocational guidance education. In addition to the lessons in various subjects which teachers devote to the different aspects of careers and trades, very interesting extracurricular activities exist in most schools. Many classes visit artisan workshops and other companies (bakeries, garages, etc.). In other municipalities, one or two open days are organised, during which a number of companies and public services welcome interested pupils from the 5th and 6th years of primary education, for example.

Traineeships within the framework of the curriculum

In compulsory education (between the ages of 6 and 18) only the curricula of the qualification streams – 2nd and 3rd cycles of technical and vocational education – include visits to companies, work shadowing and traineeships in companies, with the latter organised for one day per week or over continuous periods of two to six weeks, mainly during the 3rd cycle.

The law on compulsory education authorises young people between the ages of 15/16 and 18 to meet their educational obligations through alternating secondary education *(Teilzeitunterricht)* and vocational training in a company and a training centre run by the Institute of Vocational Training for the Middle Classes and SMEs (IAWM). In this alternance training, the presence of young people in a company may not, however, be considered as a traineeship. The alternance training organised by the IAWM, for example, is based on an apprenticeship contract signed between a company certified by the Institute and the young person and his or her parents. The young person works for 3 or 4 days per week in a company with the status of apprentice *(Lehrling)* and earns a small salary; for 1 or 2 days, he or she takes general and technical training courses in relation to his or her vocational training in one of the IAWM centres.

As regards part-time education, which also includes work placements for young people in companies, there are plans to restructure the *Teilzeitunterricht* and to elaborate a new legal basis for this form of education, and to increase cooperative efforts with the non-profit sector in view of creating more possibilities for traineeships.

OTHER TYPES OF ACTIVITY/GUIDANCE SERVICES

Contacts with the professional world

Throughout compulsory education, very interesting activities exist in most schools on the initiative of motivated teachers. Among these activities, let us mention the initiative to invite professionals to primary schools, or pupils' visits to companies. At secondary school, this contact with the professional world takes place above all through traineeships in companies,

which are included in the curricula of the technical and vocational sections. Pupils in general education should also have the chance to be in contact with the professional world. This proposal has been made by a working group which is preparing a secondary education reform.

For 16 years, the IAWM has been organising its company discovery weeks *(Schnupperwochen)* during the two weeks of Easter holidays. The 5 000 young people in compulsory education aged 15 to 18 are personally invited – via their schools – to visit and explore one or several of the participating companies. They may spend anywhere from a few hours to one or several days in the companies, and even work in them for a trial period. In 2008, more than 800 young people and 275 companies participated.

Guidance services at school

The board of teachers is the main stakeholder responsible for guidance provided to pupils at school. The PMS Centre (see below) and parents are involved to this end. At the end of the first 8 years of compulsory education, pupils are directed towards the type of education which is best adapted to their aspirations and capacities, i.e. general education, technical education or vocational education, or one or two years later, towards one of the types of vocational training organised by the IAWM in the form of an apprenticeship contract.

In the framework of their responsibility for educational and vocational guidance, secondary schools provide pupils with information brochures on studies and the various vocational training possibilities in the German-speaking Community or elsewhere. For example, the brochure *JOB Start – Bewerberinfos* has been published by the ministry since 2004 to facilitate the transition of pupils and apprentices from school or vocational training to studies or additional qualifications, or to the professional world.

Secondary schools organise information days or evenings on studies and careers in collaboration with the PMS Centres, the *Arbeitsamt*, the IAWM, the parents' association, universities and colleges of higher education, service clubs and other partners.

Guidance services outside school

The multidisciplinary teams at the PMS Centres (psychological/educational counsellors, psychological/educational assistants, social assistants, paramedical assistants and doctors) provide services free of charge to pupils and their parents, as well as to teachers who are interested. The PMS Centres intervene at the request of young people, their parents or schools, or on their own initiative in various circumstances. They work in close collaboration with schools, where they sometimes have an office, and with the Employment Office *(Arbeitsamt)*. 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. In this case, a personalised interview usually takes place during a school day, if possible during breaks or periods when the pupil does not have classes. Group interventions are also possible, for example, for information

sessions, the choice of studies or a career, tests, etc. In these cases, the PMS Centre counsellor usually goes to classrooms to speak with the pupils.

Girls' Day, a European action day for vocational guidance provided to young girls, was organised in the German-speaking Community on 24 April 2008 on the initiative of the IAWM, thus adding a new important element to vocational guidance organised in schools. It was an excellent occasion for young girls aged 11 to 18 to experience the reality of professional activity in one of the 39 companies which participated, and to become familiar with the professional world and various fields of activity which are not typically considered to be 'feminine'.

Young people and companies (certified to train apprentices) may benefit from the IAWM's electronic platform called the *Lehrstellenbörse*, where companies may list their offers for apprenticeship contracts, and pupils seeking alternance training may find up-to-date offers.

The *Arbeitsamt* provides young people, PMS Centres, the IAWM and information centres for young people with various publications: a 31-page brochure presenting all the training possibilities for young people in the German-speaking Community, a 20-page guide for parents *(Die Berufswahl. Ein kleiner Ratgeber für Eltern)*, a 40-page brochure on higher education in the French and German-speaking Communities, and approximately 90 information files on careers.

The *Arbeitsamt* is currently considering the introduction of standardised professional aptitude tests, which have been used in Germany since 1992 for career choices *(Berufswahltests)*.

Career choices are discussed at seminars *(Berufswahlseminare)* organised on the initiative of the PMS Centres and/or the *Arbeitsamt*. Through practical exercises, role-playing and simulations, participants approach different issues related to choosing a trade or a career.

QUALIFICATIONS OF GUIDANCE STAFF

In the schools

Teachers are active in the area of guidance. During their initial or ongoing training, they are not prepared to provide guidance to pupils regarding their choice of studies and career.

In other guidance services

The qualifications and degrees required for the staff at the PMS Centres, namely the psychologists, nurses or social workers, are regulated by royal decrees. No special training for guidance practitioners is included in initial training. They learn about guidance through experience at work.

'Learning by doing' was also the motto of the people at the Employment Office of the German-speaking Community who were responsible for vocational guidance and the coordination of the information and guidance efforts of various stakeholders in the area of guidance provided to pupils about studies, careers and training.

COOPERATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, PARENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Cooperation between schools, parents, former students and other stakeholders is not only recommended by the ministry and in statutory texts, but is also practised in schools and elsewhere, as discussed in the present study. The achievements depend greatly on the motivation of the people responsible for guidance and on the individual initiatives of schools and teachers.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Since 2004, the Ministry of the German-speaking Community has provided secondary schools with access to information brochures on studies and various possibilities for vocational training in the German-speaking Community or elsewhere (see above).

The PMS Centres and the *Arbeitsamt* (Employment Office) are very well equipped and are accessible to everyone (see above).

The *Jugendinformationszentrum St Vith* (JIZ) and *Infotreff Eupen* (information centres for young people) provide information on education, training and career possibilities.

Internet references

Dglive: The website of the German-speaking Community: www.dglive.be

IAWM – *Institut für Aus- und Weiterbildung im Mittelstand und in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen* (Institute of Vocational Training for the Middle Classes and SMEs): www.iawm.be

ADG: *Arbeitsamt der Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft* (Employment Office): www.adg.be

Sources

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2. Ministry of the German-speaking Community

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