



SUMMARY SHEETS ON EDUCATION SYSTEMS IN EUROPE

Flemish Community of Belgium

I. Description of education system

1. Education population and language of instruction

In 1998/1999, 35.4% of the population were aged under 29, and 923 488 pupils were of compulsory education age. The language of instruction is Dutch.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

In 1996/97, 30% of pupils in primary and secondary education were in state schools (attached to the Flemish Community, the provinces or communes), while 70% attended grant-aided private schools that received their subsidies from the Community.

The federal government awards financial resources to the Flemish Community for education. The Community parliament exercises legislative powers, and the Community government exercises executive power as regards the organization and administration of education. Private schools may be founded independently of the public authorities, but must comply with Community decrees if they are to award recognized qualifications and get Community subsidies. Different administrative authorities are responsible for running the various categories of school. In schools responsible to the Flemish Community, these authorities are a central board (*Raad van het Gemeenschapsonderwijs*) and local boards. The communes or the provinces are themselves the administrative authorities for all state schools under their jurisdiction, whereas private schools subsidized by the Community are run by separate authorities.

The Community inspectorate is regarded as an instrument enabling the Community to supervise respect for obligations incumbent on the administrative authorities, particularly as regards quality and aims. It exercises oversight of the entire system except higher education. State officials who conduct inspections are responsible for the control of financial management and respect for conditions governing funding.

3. Pre-primary education

This level of education is separate and not compulsory. Pupils may be admitted at the age of two-and-a-half until schooling ends in the June following their sixth birthday. Education is free but parents may be asked to help with meals, transport, out-of-class activity and supervisory duties.

In 1996/97, the participation rate was 253 043 out of a total 292 805 children in the age-group concerned.

4. Compulsory full-time education

(a) Phases

Primary School (<i>Basis onderwijs</i>)	6-12 years of age
Secondary School (<i>Secundair onderwijs</i>)	12-16 or 18 years of age

Full-time education is compulsory from the age of 6 to 15 or 16. From then on, education remains compulsory until the age of 18, but pupils may continue it on a part-time basis. The six years of secondary education are divided into three levels each lasting two years.

(b) Admissions criteria

Primary education normally starts in the September of the year in which children reach their sixth birthday. There are no specific admissions criteria. Pupils are generally aged 12 when they are admitted to secondary education. In most cases, they are able to begin the first year when they have obtained the *Getuigschrift basisonderwijs* (Certificate of Primary Education). Parents are free to choose both primary and secondary schools for their children whose education is free (no fees).

(c) Length of the school day/week/year

In primary and secondary education, activities are five days a week, from Monday to Friday, morning and afternoon, with the exception of Wednesday afternoon. They may start from 8 a.m. onwards and continue until 5 p.m. (4 p.m. in primary education). All pupils have at least one free hour around midday. Teaching is organized in 50-minute periods, with 28 periods a week for all primary school pupils and 32-36 periods a week in secondary school. Schools must provide at least 182 days of classes annually, but are shut during July and August.

(d) Class size/student grouping

Primary schooling is structured into six classes and three levels. When the school population is not big enough for a class corresponding to each age-group, classes are formed through arranging pupils by level, or even placing together children of different levels. In general, teaching methods are not geared to individual needs so teaching is broadly uniform. Teachers are not normally subject specialists.

In secondary education, each class is normally meant to correspond to a single age-group. Nevertheless, this is not always the case, given that age is not a formal admission criterion and years can be repeated in the course of schooling. Teachers are subject specialists.

(e) Curricular control and content

The Flemish Community of Belgium lays down the elementary compulsory content or aims of the curriculum. Courses of study are then determined by the administrative authorities and approved by the Ministry. There are no specially prescribed textbooks or teaching materials, and schools can by and large follow their preferred methods of teaching. The primary curriculum has to include the mother tongue, reading and writing, mathematics, history, geography, observation of the environment, science, religious or moral instruction, physical education, music, handiwork, civic instruction and road safety. A common curriculum in the first year of secondary education gradually gives way to increasing scope for choice in the subjects studied. The compulsory common curriculum initially includes the mother tongue, mathematics, literature, science, a foreign language, art, technical education, physical education and religion or morals. At the end of the second year, pupils choose between general, technical, vocational or artistic education.

(f) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Assessment is undertaken by the teachers who act on their own in the case of primary education, and within a class committee supervised by the head teacher in secondary education. Parents are regularly informed of their children's results, as well their progress and classroom behaviour, in a school report. All tests and examinations are organized and marked by the teachers. An exam has to be passed each year before the following year can be begun. Pupils may revise their choice of subjects studied except at the third level, where their decision has to be final. Pupils in difficulty can repeat a year.

The *Getuigschrift basisonderwijs* testifies to the satisfactory completion of primary education, while the *Diploma secundair onderwijs* is awarded at the end of secondary studies (after six years in the case of general, technical and artistic education, and seven years in vocational education).

The Ministry organizes no common examination for all schools, and formally recognizes their authority to award certificates. Inspectors ensure that educational standards are fully satisfactory

5. Upper secondary and post-secondary education

(a) Types of education

Part-time education	15/16-18/19 years of age
Apprenticeship/training courses	15/16-18/19 years of age

Part-time education is compulsory until the age of 18.

(b) Admissions criteria

Pupils aged 15 who have completed two years of secondary studies, or who are aged 16, may enter part-time vocational education or begin training. Education at this level is free, and parents can choose the institution attended by their child.

(c) Curricular control and content

Those who manage centres for part-time education determine their specific curriculum. Courses for the students concerned combine general education with preparation for a job. The part-time education undertaken by a 15-year-old student must comprise a minimum 360 hours annually, and at least 240 hours for students aged 16 or over. More specifically, part-time secondary vocational education involves 15 hours a week. This course combines one day's theory with four days' work for an employer.

(d) Assessment, progression and qualifications

Part-time education is recognized and may lead to the award of a certificate. Apprenticeship leads to a certificate of vocational aptitude and/or an apprenticeship certificate awarded on the basis of continuous assessment and a final examination. After the first and second levels of secondary education, a study certificate is awarded. The Flemish Community has set up an Examinations Commission enabling those who wish to sit examinations and receive diplomas outside the school system.

6. Higher education

(a) Types of institution

The Flemish Community distinguishes between university education and non-university higher education. The latter, which is the preserve of *hogescholen* (higher colleges), provides courses in a single stage lasting three years, or two stages of either two plus two, or two plus three years.

(b) Access

Pupils holding a certificate of upper secondary education may apply for most courses in higher education. Entrance examinations are organized for some courses (particularly studies in civil engineering and medicine).

(c) Qualifications

Single-stage higher education leads to the award of the diploma of *gradu * in various disciplines (such as social work, nursing and accountancy, in particular). Two-stage non-university higher education culminates in the award of qualifications such as commercial or industrial engineer, *licenci *, architect, etc.

University education provides for the award of the qualifications of *licence*, doctorates and other postgraduate degrees.

7. Special Needs

Special education caters for persons between the ages of 3 and 21 who suffer from a handicap that prevents them from following courses in normal education. This provision covers between six and eight stages, depending on the level of education, which are adapted to particular handicaps. Despite some limited provision apparent within normal education, special education as a whole is always offered in schools specifically intended for that purpose.

In 1996/97, around 4.5% of primary and secondary school pupils attended such institutions.

8. Teachers

Teachers at pre-primary and primary levels must have a teacher's diploma awarded after three years at a higher college with a course option in teacher training. Primary school teachers do not generally follow a subject specialization and give classes in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers at secondary

level have specialized in each subject they teach. Teachers at the first level of secondary education must have the specific diploma corresponding to one stage of higher education, while those at the third level must hold the diploma specifically awarded after two stages of higher education, or university education. For the second level of secondary education, either category of qualification is valid. Teachers in higher education generally hold a university doctorate. All teachers are employed by the administrative authority of their institution. After a temporary period of employment, teachers may be appointed by the administrative authorities under certain conditions. They have a specific status which is not the same for subsidized education as it is for Flemish Community education.

II. ONGOING REFORMS AND TOPICS OF DEBATE IN EDUCATION

Main areas/aspects of ongoing reforms

- a. Reform of the school guidance centres ((pre-)primary – secondary education)
- b. Reform of adult education
- c. Pilotproject modularisation (secondary education)
- d. Reform ARGO (autonomous body organising community education) (primary – secondary education)
- e. Reforms in secondary education
- f. Reforms in higher education

Quantitative/qualitative aims of these reforms

a. Reform of the school guidance centres

Until now the two main tasks of school guidance, namely guidance of pupils and health supervision, are done by two separate organisations, the guidance centres and the centres for health supervision in schools.

By the reform these separate centres are integrated in one centre for educational guidance (Centrum voor Leerlingenbegeleiding) in order to create a more transparent and coherent supply.

The new reform also contains an aspect of scale-enlargement (a condition for the establishment of a Centre for Educational Guidance is that it covers a range of 12.000 pupils).

The school and the Centre for Educational Guidance, with which it cooperates have to draw up jointly a policy plan or a policy contract, that establishes the cooperation for a period of three years.

b. Pilot project modularisation – Secondary professional education

The current system of “end of the year”-exams in order to pass to the following year, results in an important number of school leavers without certification.

In order to remedy this situation, it has been decided to organise the 3 year study cycle in modules, that have been conceived in such a way that each modules corresponds to a number of abilities to practice a profession. By accumulating all modules the pupil disposes of the whole of the abilities required to practice a profession. After the succesful completion of each module, the pupil obtains a partial certificate. After having succesfully completed all modules of the training he obtains the final diploma.

The advantages of modularisation are flexibility, greater transparency for the employers and experience of success.

In the long run this modularisation could be extended to other levels of education.

Major debates/discussions

In Flanders recently a major debate has been going on concerning the topic of anti-social behaviour at school. The minister has launched an action plan on this topic, that resulted in public discussions in the media. This action plan puts its main accent on the prevention of antisocial behaviour.

It distinguishes between 4 kinds of actions :

I. Structure-oriented actions concerning general school policy

- creation of a "positive school climate" (pupil centred, stimulation of success experiences, clear rules, involving all actors concerned)
- competent/satisfied teachers/directors (optimisation of teacher training, in-service training)
- Agreeable school environment/infrastructure

II. Structure-oriented actions concerning prevention

- pupil guidance
- combatting school leaving
- support for schools with concentration of "problem students"

III. Person-oriented actions

- education of values (respect for diversity, non-violent problem solving)
- specific sensitization actions (stickers, posters, badges)

IV. CURATIVE ACTIONS

- sanction policy (sanctions with pedagogical objectives, alternative sanctions involving family and friends)
- cooperation with external partners (social assistants, health sector, services of youth protection)

Remark :

As there are elections on the 13th of June, planned reforms could not be taken into consideration

Unrevised English

For more detailed information on education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (www.eurydice.org)
