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In the French Community, each school depends on an Organizing Authority. The Organizing Authority is the public authority or the legal entity which assumes responsibility for the organisation of a school and which is linked to one of the three [educational networks](#) [1] mentioned in the [School Pact](#) [2] (law of 29 May 1959) ([loi du Pacte scolaire](#) [3]).

In the French Community, [schooling is compulsory](#) [4] until the age of 18.

The [decree of 24 July 1997](#) [2] of the Government of the French Community (commonly referred to as the "Missions Decree" ([Décret "Missions"](#) [5]) defines its priority missions and organizes it.

Secondary education consists of 6 years that are subdivided into three stage of two years each:

- first stage : normally for pupils aged 12 to 14 years – maximum 16 years old ;
- 2nd stage : normally for pupils aged 14 to 16 years ;
- 3rd stage : normally for pupils aged 16 to 18 years old.

The first two years constitute the first stage, and correspond to ISCED 2. This is the third stage of a pedagogical continuum from pre-primary education to the end of the first eight years of compulsory schooling (2nd year of secondary education), aimed at providing all pupils with the basic skills needed for their social integration and further education.

On the basis of the [decree of 7 December 2007](#) [2] on differentiated education ([décret "enseignement différencié"](#) [6]), a common first stage is organized for pupils who hold the certificate of primary education (CEB). A differentiated first stage, the main purpose of which is to enable pupils who do not hold the CEB to obtain it, is provided for pupils who may not join the common first year.

An additional year (2S) is organized for the benefit of pupils who, at the end of the 2nd common or differentiated year, have such difficulties that an extra year is indispensable.

For pupils who, after attending the first stage for three years, have failed to attain the required level, a specific year is organized : the 3rd differentiation and orientation year of secondary education (3 S-DO). Although it is part of the second stage, it neither belongs to transitional nor to qualifying education. The [3 S-DO](#) [7] will be described under 6.1.

Since 2007, successive decrees modifying the decree of 24 July 1997 have aimed to regulate the enrolment of pupils in the first level of secondary education. The text of this "Enrolment" decree was integrated into the Mission decree. The [scheme](#) [8] for the regulation of enrolments in the first secondary year has the following three aims, as part of an overall plan for the democratisation of school in the French Community:

- to organise the enrolment process in a practical and transparent fashion, so as to limit tensions between the places available at certain schools and the number of applications for them;
- to ensure all families equal access to all institutions and equal treatment in the enrolment process;
- to promote the struggle against failure at school, dropping out and relegation by sustaining the social, cultural and academic mix.

From the third year onwards (second and third stages – ISCED 3), education takes four different forms :

- General ;
- Technical ;
- Artistic ;
- Vocational.

It is also organized in two streams :

- the transition stream prepares pupils for higher education whilst also offering opportunities to enter the labour market ;
- the qualification stream prepares pupils to enter the labour market while also enabling them to continue their studies in higher education.

Note that the distinction between ISCED 2 and ISCED 3 (two and four years respectively) does not coincide with the distinction between lower and upper secondary education (three years each).

General education is a transition stream, whereas vocational education is a qualification stream. Technical education and artistic education can be organized in the transition stream or in the qualification stream.

Finally, on the authorisation of the government in the case of education organised by the French Community, or on the initiative of the controlling authority in the case of grant-aided education, a school, under certain conditions, provide certain courses either in a modern language other than French or in sign language, by organising immersion instruction :

The "[Immersion](#)" [decree of 11th May 2007](#) ^[9] ([décret "immersion"](#) ^[10]) regulates immersion education. When it is organized, between 8 and 13 periods are taught in the target language during the 6 years of secondary education.

Immersion learning seeks to achieve the following:

- in terms of the lessons and educational activities provided in the immersion language, the attainment of the competencies defined in the Core Skills;
- in terms of the immersion language, the attainment of the oral and written communication competencies in that language defined in the Core Skills.

If a school or site organises immersion learning, this is mentioned in the school plan. Enrolment in immersion learning may not be subject to any prior selection.

In its article 95, the Missions-decree specifies that decisions about pupils' progression to the next grade or cycle and the issue of diplomas, certificates and pass attestations within a secondary education institution are the responsibility of the **class council**.

The class council is chaired by the head of school and consists of the members of the management and teaching staff responsible for educating a defined group of pupils. There are thus several class councils in an institution. The parents and pupils are not represented within the council. However, the [Centre for Psychological, Medical and Social Services \(CPMS\)](#) ^[11] is represented. Among its missions are the following:

- Identification of difficulties: Solutions are sought in consultation with parents and the educational team in order to optimize the continuation of the schooling.
- diagnosis and guidance, in collaboration with the school. The pooling of observations complement each other and allow for objective and effective support for the pupil, as the PMS centre analyses and evaluates a set of psycho-medico-social data.
- Educational and vocational guidance: the CPMS helps to clarify the possibilities of carrying out a personal project (choice of studies).

The class council is responsible for preparing a mental aptitude, social and behavioural report on each student at regular intervals; drawing the appropriate educational conclusions; proposing any necessary guidance or remedial support and, if need be, orientations or re-orientations; establishing a common approach to each student. It bases its opinions on factors such as the pupil's previous school record, intermediate period results, reports and exam results, information received from the Centre for Psychological, Medical and Social Services, and in some cases meetings with the pupil and his or her parents. It takes the necessary decisions at the end of the year regarding promotion to the next grade (with or without restrictions), deferment (with the obligation of taking final exams in September), denying promotion and certification.

In addition to full-time education (training provided entirely in the school, with the exception of some practical training courses), there is also secondary dual vocational education, which is part of the qualifying education. This education was reorganized in 1991 and the repertoire of training profiles was then extended (Decree of 3 July 1991, modified in 2001, on the organization of [dual vocational education](#) [12]).

Dual vocational education combines practical on-the-job training and training with a training operator covering general and vocational subjects. It is organized within the framework of a partnership according to precise modalities in terms of duration of training, recognition of acquired training, certification, supervision, remuneration and social rights.

The Centres of Dual Vocational Education and Training (CEFA = Centres d'enseignement et de formation en alternance), which are part of the education organized or subsidized by the French Community, organize two types of dual vocational training in ordinary education: that aimed at the same Certificates and qualifications as ordinary full-time qualifying education and that aimed at lower levels of qualification, through specific profiles. The Centres of Dual Vocational Education and Training organize training from the third year of vocational education and from the fifth year of technical qualifying education.

The [IFAPME](#) [13] and the [SFPME](#) [13] also organize dual vocational training courses called "apprenticeship contracts" which make it possible to encounter compulsory schooling.

On [8 January 2009](#) [9], a decree approved a [framework agreement](#) [14] entered into between the French Community, the Walloon Region and the French Community Commission (Brussels-Capital Region), defining among other things new arrangements for the steering of dual vocational education and training and the creation of a single status for young people in this programme. This ensures all young people who choose this form of education the same rights and payment mechanisms and access to certification for all, regardless of the operator chosen.

A [register of the year 2016 on the offer of dual vocational training in Brussels](#) [15] can be downloaded from the website of the [Consultative Commission for Training, Employment and Education in Brussels](#) [16].

At the end of the 6th year of secondary education, secondary schools may organize **additional years of study**:

- at the end of the third stage of transition-stream education, a 7th year in preparation for higher education : "mathematics", "sciences", "modern languages" or "Performing arts and broadcasting technology" ;
- at the end of the third stage of qualification-stream technical education, a qualifying or complementary 7th year of technical education;
- at the end of the third stage of vocational education, a complementary 7th year of vocational education (of type a, b or c).

Moreover, a **fourth stage** is organized in full-time complementary vocational education in some secondary education institutions for certain courses such as general hospital nursing and hospital nursing (mental health and psychoanalysis). It consists of three years of study, in some cases preceded by a preparatory year.

Business management training is organized by IFAPME and the SFPME for the students who have completed their apprenticeship contract.

For pupils with special educational needs an offer in **special needs educations** has been developed. This offer is discussed under '[educational support and guidance](#) ^[17]' (see 12.1 to 12.3).

The rest of this chapter will first explain the types of institutions encountered in the French Community, with particular reference to the different networks and to dual vocational training ; the means put in place to promote schools' accessibility ; the age of pupils per level and the number of pupils per class ; and the temporal organization of the school year, week and day. Next, curricula, subjects and teaching methods will be explained. Finally, we will explain how formative and summative, external and internal evaluations are set up, the progression of students in their schooling and, finally, which Certifications are awarded.

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