



SCHOOLSYSTEM IN BELGIUM





Education in Belgium

In Belgium the compulsory education from six to eighteen.

The Belgian school system looks like this:

Kinder garden(2.5 to 6 years)

Primary education (6-12 years)

Secondary education (12-18 years)

ASO: General Secondary Education

TSO: Technical secondary education (plus possibly seventh year)

BSO: Vocational Secondary Education (plus possibly seventh year)

KSO: Artistic Secondary Education

Buso: Special Secondary Education (disabled, learning disabilities ...)

Higher education (college or university) (above 18 years)

University Short Type (Professional Bachelor) 3y.

University Long Type (Bachelor-Master) 4y.

University (Bachelor-Master) 4+y.



General principles

Compulsory education for all children from six to eighteen

- The Belgian Constitution provides that everyone has a right to education, thus respecting the fundamental rights and freedoms. In order to guarantee this right for all children, there is compulsory education.
- Compulsory education starts on 1 September of the year in which a child reaches the age of 6, and lasts 12 full school years. A pupil has to comply with compulsory education until the age of fifteen or sixteen. Afterwards only part-time compulsory education is applicable (= a combination of part-time learning and working). However, most young people continue to attend full-time secondary education.
- Compulsory education ends at the eighteenth anniversary or on June 30 of the calendar year in which the youngster reaches the age of 18.
- All children who reside in Belgium are subject to compulsory education, i.e. also children of foreign nationality.
- In Belgium, compulsory education does not mean compulsory schooling. It means that children do not have to go to school to learn. Home education is also possible.
- Children who are unable to attend school, mainly because of serious disabilities, can be exempted from compulsory education.



General principles

Compulsory education for all children from six to eighteen

The Belgian Constitution also provides that access to education is free of charge up to the end of compulsory education.

Primary and secondary schools that are funded or subsidised by the government may therefore not demand any fees.

Access to Flemish nursery education is also free of charge, although it is not covered by compulsory education.



Educational networks

- In many cases the educational networks, as the representative association of governing bodies, take over some of the responsibilities of the governing bodies. They draw up their own curriculum and timetables. This means that the governing bodies concerned surrender some of their autonomy to the networks.
- Traditionally, a distinction is made between three educational networks:
 - **community education** is education organised by a public body called 'Flemish Community Education' acting under the authority of the Flemish Community. The constitution provides that community education must be neutral. This means that the religious, philosophical or ideological convictions of parents and pupils must be respected



Educational networks

- **subsidised publicly run schools** are municipal education institutions organised by the municipalities as well as provincial education institutions organised by the provincial administrations. The governing bodies of this education network are united in two umbrella organisations, the Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (OVSG), and the Flemish Provincial Education (POV)
- **subsidised privately run schools** deliver education organised by a private person or private organisation. The governing body is often a non-profit-making organisation (VZW). Privately run education mainly consists of catholic schools. They are associated in the umbrella body called Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education (VSKO). Furthermore, protestant, Jewish, orthodox, Islamic, etc. schools also exist. In addition to these denominational schools, there are also schools, which are not affiliated to a particular religion. Examples of these are the Freinet schools, Montessori schools or Steiner schools, which adopt particular educational methods and are also known as 'method schools'.



Educational networks

- A small number of schools in Flanders are not recognised by the government. These are the so-called private schools, which are not financed or subsidised by the government.
- Education that is organised for and by the government (community education and municipal and provincial education) is known as publicly run education. Recognised education organised on private initiative is called privately run education.
- The table below shows the distribution of pupils across the different educational networks. It reveals that the great majority of Flemish pupils attend subsidised (privately run) education.

Educational networks

- DIAGRAM 1:
- **Distribution of pupils across the networks in primary and secondary education (2003 - 2004 school year)**
- subsidised privately run education: 68.30 %
- subsidised publicly run education: 16.52 %
- community education : 15.18 %



Educational networks

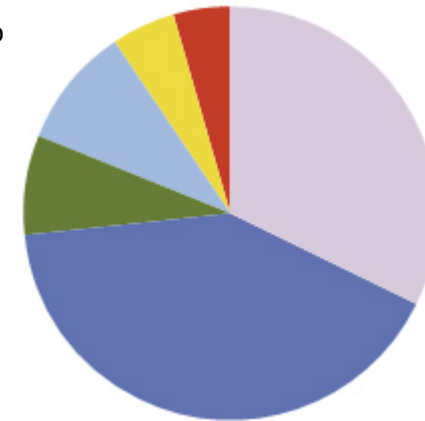
DIAGRAM 2:

The education budgets per level of education (2004)

- nursery and primary education: 32.38 %
- secondary education: 41.04 %

Education provided by colleges

- of higher education: 7.81 %
- university education: 9.56 %
- continuing education: 4.78 %
- regardless of levels of education: 4.44 %

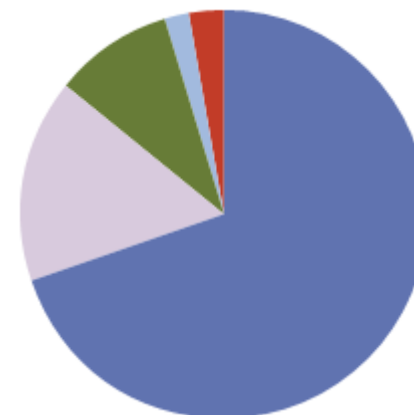


Educational networks

DIAGRAM 3:

The education budgets for every category of expenditure (2004)

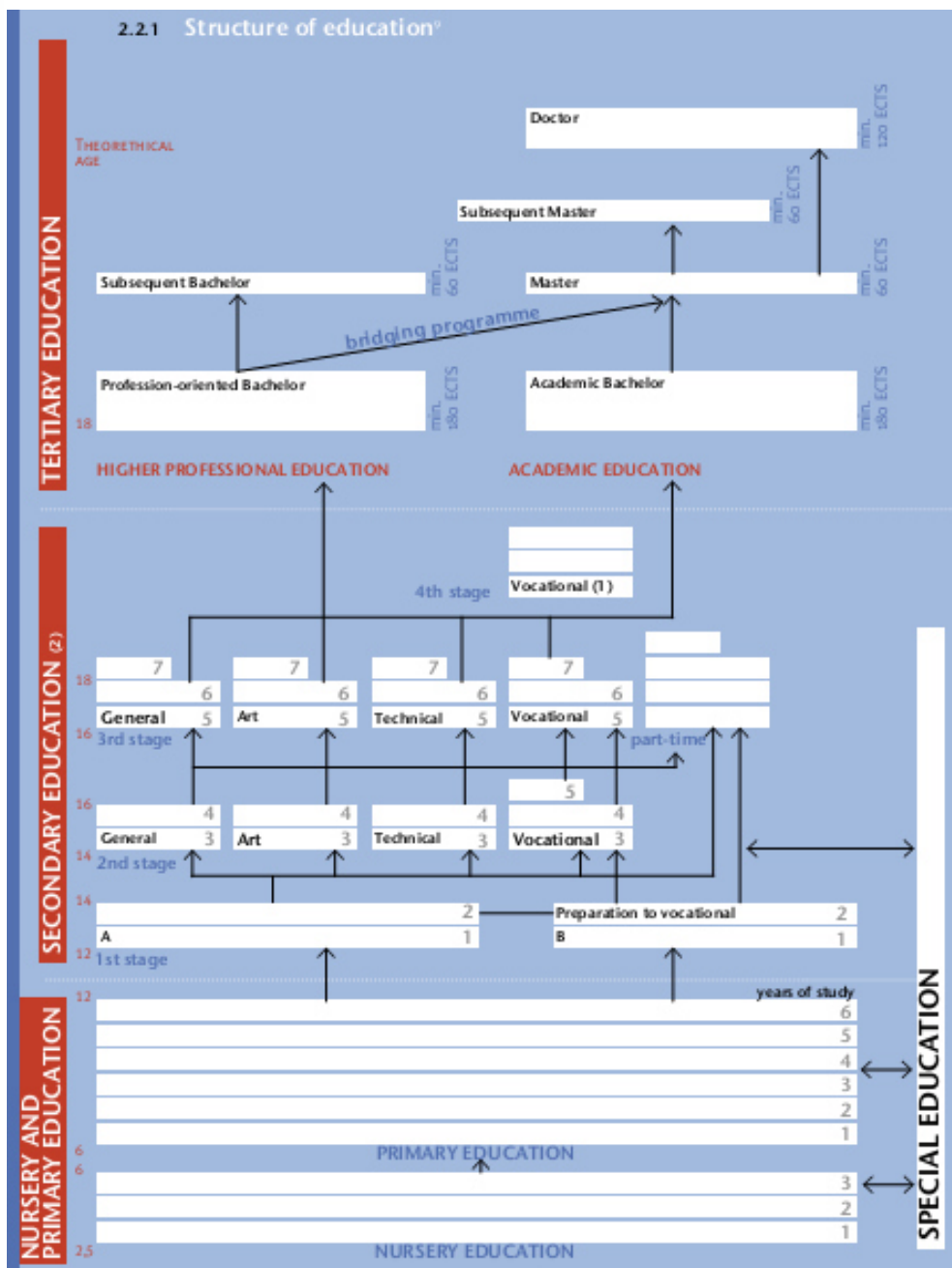
- Salaries: 69.99 %
- Operation: 15.95 %
- Tertiary education: 9.47 %
- Investments: 2.04 %
- Others 2.55 %





Organisation of the school and academic year

- For nursery, primary and secondary education, the school year starts on 1 September and ends on 31 August in theory. However, because of the summer holidays (1 July up to and including 31 August), the school year ends on 30 June in practice.
- In tertiary education, the academic year starts between 1 September and 1 October. The academic year ends on the day before the start of the next academic year.
- Up to the 2004 - 2005 academic year, a system of study years is applied, one academic year coinciding with one year of study. From the 2005 - 2006 academic year onwards, the student enrolls in one or more autonomous course components.
- He/she chooses for the already existing educational programme of 60 credits per academic year or for a flexible combination of course components (= less than 60 credits per academic year).



E.T.I.E. ANTWERP meeting March 2014 at SpectrumSchool



Nursery and primary education Structure and organisation

- 'Basisonderwijs' comprises both nursery and primary education.
- Nursery and primary schools provide nursery as well as primary education, an autonomous nursery school only provides nursery education, and an autonomous primary school only provides primary education.
- Since 1 September 2003 a new structure, a school cluster, has been operational in nursery and primary education. This partnership between several schools adds to a more effective management of means and extends the scope of the separate schools.
- There is mainstream and special nursery and primary education.
- Nursery education is available for children from 2.5 to 6 years.
- Between the ages of 2.5 and 3 years, children can start mainstream nursery education at only 6 times in the school year: at the first school day after each holiday period and the first school day in February.
- Once the young child has reached the age of 3, he/she can start school at any time in the school year.
- The school entry dates don't apply to special nursery education.



Nursery and primary education Structure and organisation

- Mainstream primary education is aimed at children from 6 to 12 and comprises 6 consecutive years of study.
- The start of primary education normally coincides with the start of compulsory education (= the age of 6). This is also the age at which the few children who do not have received nursery education, (normally) start primary school.
- Special nursery and primary education is aimed at children who need special help, temporarily or permanently. This can be because these children are suffering from a physical or mental disability, have serious behavioural or emotional problems, or serious learning difficulties. Special nursery and special primary education consist of 8 types, adapted to the educational and developmental needs of a particular group of pupils.
- In principle, special primary education lasts seven years.



Nursery and primary education Structure and organisation

- Integrated nursery and primary education is the result of co-operation initiatives between mainstream nursery and primary education and special education. This education is aimed at making disabled children or children with learning or educational difficulties attend classes or activities in a school for mainstream education, with assistance from special education. This may be temporary or permanent and may concern some of the lessons or all of the lessons.
- The number of teachers in nursery and primary education depends on the total number of teaching periods allocated for funding purposes. This means the total number of teaching periods organised in a school that is funded or subsidised by the government.
- basis of the numbers of pupils on a particular count date and the supplementary teaching periods.
- Apart from the number of teaching periods, schools in mainstream nursery education receive a number of periods to call in child carers. They support nursery teachers and optimise the way in which the young child is taken care of.



Nursery and primary education Structure and organisation



- Finally, the government allocates to each school a funding envelope for management and support staff. These funding envelopes are meant for special needs (only in mainstream nursery and primary education), the co-ordination of ICT policy and the development of administrative support.
- The government does not impose any minimum or maximum numbers with regard to the number of pupils per class. The schools decide for themselves how they divide the pupils into groups. Although there are other possible ways of organising, most nursery and primary schools choose a year group system. In most cases, every class has its own (nursery) teacher.



Secondary education

- Secondary education is aimed at young people aged 12 to 18. In principle, all schools in secondary education are open to boys and girls. Indeed, a school is not allowed to refuse children on account of their gender.
- Since 1989, **full-time secondary education** has been organised in a uniform system.
- This uniform structure comprises stages, types of education and study disciplines. The definitive choice of subjects is postponed until the second stage so that pupils are first introduced to as many subjects as possible.
- The majority of teaching periods in the first stage is devoted to the core curriculum.
- From the second stage, we distinguish four different education forms. Within one of these education forms, the pupil opts for a particular course of study. Below we try to shed a light on the four education types:



Secondary education

- **General secondary education (ASO)**, places an emphasis on broad general education, which provides a very firm foundation for passing on to tertiary education.
- **Technical secondary education (TSO)**, places a special emphasis on general and technical/theoretical subjects. After TSO, young people can exercise a profession or pass on to tertiary education
- **Secondary education in the arts (KSO)**, combines a broad general education with active art education. After KSO, young people can exercise a profession or go on to tertiary education
- **Vocational secondary education (BSO)** provides practice-oriented education in which young people learn a specific occupation in addition to receiving general education.



Secondary education

- In the fourth stage consisting mainly of nursing education, no core curriculum is imposed because of the specificity of the training.
- A pupil gains the certificate of secondary education after successfully completing six years of ASO, TSO, or KSO or seven years of BSO. With a certificate of secondary education from any school, type of education or course of study, a young person has unrestricted access to tertiary education.
- Young people whose physical, psychological, social or intellectual development is hampered by a disability, or learning or behavioural difficulties, can receive **special education**. These young people temporarily or permanently need special assistance and education adapted to their needs.

Secondary education

- The aim is to integrate the pupil as far as possible in the educational environment and in society, by means of an individual educational and teaching provision. The years in special secondary education (**BuSO**), rarely coincide with the school years in mainstream secondary education. Indeed, a pupil only passes on to the next 'learning stage' when he/she is ready for this. The types of education that exist in special primary education are the same as those in secondary education. The exception is type 8, which is not organised at the level of secondary education. In special secondary education, types of education are organised in accordance with the type of disability and the possibilities of the pupil.
- Young people with a disability can also be admitted to a school for mainstream secondary education through the system of integrated education (GON). They are helped by experts from special education.
- From the age of 15 or 16, pupils can transfer to **part-time education**. Indeed, young people can follow training in part-time vocational secondary education (**DBSO**). They can also opt for an entrepreneurship training course provided by the VIZO-Syntra-network or for a recognised part-time training course.



Tertiary education

- The higher education reform Act of 4 April 2003 thoroughly changed tertiary education in Flanders. The Act contains three major lines of action: the introduction of the bachelor-master structure, interinstitutional co-operation between a university and one or more colleges of higher education and the accreditation of training programmes. Below we will explain the first two lines of action. The accreditation of training programmes is discussed in point
- An association is inter-institutional co-operation between one university and one or more colleges of higher education. Associations facilitate improved interaction between education and research in the academic bachelor courses and the master courses provided at colleges of higher education.
- There are five associations in Flanders:
 - the K.U. Leuven Association
 - the Ghent University Association
 - the Antwerp University Association
 - Brussels university association
 - the universiteit - hogescholen Limburg association.



Tertiary education

- The introduction of the bachelor-master structure
- The colleges of higher education and universities are gradually introducing the bachelor-master structure from the 2004 - 2005 academic year onwards.
- Higher professional education only offers bachelor courses and is only provided at colleges of higher education.
- Academic education consists of bachelor courses and master courses. Academic education is provided at universities and at colleges of higher education operating within the framework of an association.
- The educational provision in tertiary education is laid down in the Higher education register. This register is annually updated.
- From the 2004 - 2005 academic year onwards, higher education provides five possible programmes of study. These courses are set out below.
- There are two kinds of **bachelor courses**: the professional and the academic bachelor course.



Tertiary education

- Only colleges of higher education offer professional bachelor courses. These courses are mainly geared towards professional practice. Their aim is to teach students general and specific knowledge and competencies that are necessary for an autonomous exercise of one specific profession or a group of professions.
- bachelor course, can take a subsequent bachelor course. This further training programme aims at developing an in-depth understanding or specialisation in the field of the competencies acquired during the bachelor course.
- Both colleges of higher education (within the framework of an association) and universities offer academic bachelor courses. These courses are intended to make students pass on to the master course.
- The study volume of a bachelor course is at least 180 ECTS credits. This corresponds with three years of full-time studying. The study volume of a subsequent bachelor course is at least 60 ECTS credits. This takes one year of full-time study.



Tertiary education

- Students who want to start a bachelor course or a subsequent bachelor course, have to satisfy specific entry requirements.
- Apart from the general and specific entry requirements, an admission test designed to gauge the students' artistic talents is mandatory for the following disciplines: visual and audio-visual arts, music and performing arts. Students proposing to enter medicine or dentistry have to sit an entrance examination.
- Students successfully completing a bachelor course and a bachelor after bachelor course earn a diploma.
- The **master courses** are offered by universities and colleges of higher education within the framework of an association. They are academic although some master courses may be professionally-oriented.
- Master courses are intended to bring students to an advanced level of knowledge and competencies that are typical of scientific or artistic functioning in general and of a specific domain of sciences or arts in particular. This knowledge and these competencies are necessary for autonomously exercising a profession or group of professions.



Tertiary education

- A master course can be followed by a further training programme called a subsequent master course. This training programme aims at developing an in-depth understanding or specialisation in the field of the competencies acquired during the master course.
- The study volume of a master course is at least 60 ECTS credits. This takes one year of full-time study. This also applies to a subsequent master course.
- A master course can be followed by a further training programme called a subsequent master course. This training programme aims at developing an in-depth understanding or specialisation in the field of the competencies acquired during the master course.
- The study volume of a master course is at least 60 ECTS credits. This takes one year of full-time study. This also applies to a subsequent master course.
- master course after completion of a bridging programme.
- At least a master diploma is required for entering a subsequent master course.



Tertiary education

- Students having completed a master course and a subsequent master course earn a diploma.
- A **doctoral programme** is focused on the preparation of a doctoral thesis. This doctoral course is concluded with a certificate. A doctorate based on a thesis concludes with the academic degree of 'doctor' (after a public defence of the thesis). Only universities are allowed to deliver this doctorate degree.
- The **postgraduate courses** are designed for students who want to strengthen their competencies or attain specialised expertise in the competencies acquired in the bachelor or master programme. Both colleges of higher education and universities can organise these courses.
- A postgraduate course is concluded with a certificate.
- **Continuing education** comprises a wide range of in-service and further training programmes within the context of lifelong learning.
- Continuing education leads to a certificate.
- At present a new act on **teacher training** is being prepared. Until it is passed, the situation is as follows.



Tertiary education



- The former three year teacher training courses of one cycle that qualified nursery teachers, primary teachers and lower secondary school teachers at colleges of higher education are transformed into professionally-oriented bachelor courses.
- Some advanced teacher training courses that have a study volume of at least 60 credits are transformed into a subsequent bachelor course.
- Colleges of higher education organising academic bachelor and master courses in commercial sciences and business studies, visual and audio-visual arts, music and performing arts can complete these courses with a teacher training course. They can be organised simultaneously or after the master course. This teacher training course leads to the diploma of qualified upper secondary school teacher. It is a teaching qualification for the second, third and fourth stages of secondary education.
- Universities also provide teacher training programmes based on the same concept. These programmes can be organised following on all courses of all disciplines.