

EDUCATION IN BELGIUM

Education in Belgium is regulated and for the larger part financed by one of the three communities. All the three communities have a unified school system, with small differences between the different communities.



The schools can be divided in three groups (Dutch: *netten*; French: *réseaux*):

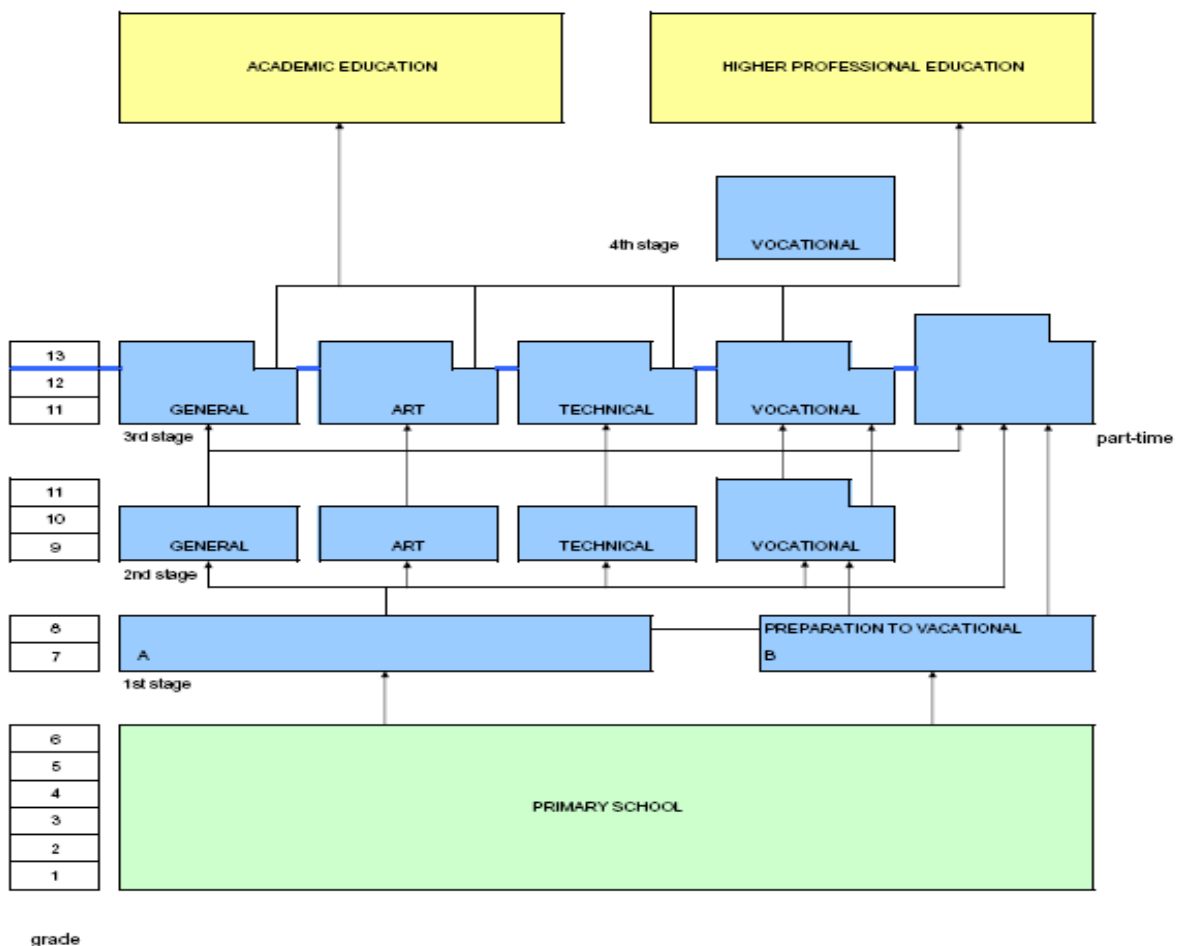
1. Schools owned by the communities (*GO! Onderwijs van de Vlaamse gemeenschap; réseau de la Communauté française*)
2. Subsidized public schools (*officieel gesubsidieerd onderwijs; réseau officiel subventionné*), organized by provinces and municipalities
3. Subsidized free schools (*vrij gesubsidieerd onderwijs; réseau libre subventionné*), mainly organized by an organization affiliated to the Catholic church

The latter is the largest group, both in number of schools and in number of pupils.

Education in Belgium is **compulsory** between the ages of 6 and 18.

In the 2003 [PISA-study](#) by the [OECD](#), the Belgian students scored relatively high. The results of the Dutch-speaking students were significantly higher than the scores of the German-speaking students which were in turn significantly higher than the French-speaking students.

Stages of education



The different stages of education are the same in all communities:

- Basic education (Dutch: *basisonderwijs*; French: *enseignement fondamental*), consisting of
 - Pre-school or pre-primary (*kleuteronderwijs*; *enseignement maternel*): -6 years
 - Primary school (*lager onderwijs*; *enseignement primaire*): **6-12 years**
- Secondary school (*secundair onderwijs*; *enseignement secondaire*): **12-18 years**
- Higher education or Tertiary Education (*hoger onderwijs*; *enseignement supérieur*)
 - University (*universiteit*; *université*)
 - Polytechnic/Vocational university (*hogeschool*; *haute école*)

The structure of Secondary Education

When graduating from primary school around the age of 12, students enter secondary education. Here they have to choose a *direction* that they want to follow, depending on their skill level and interests.

Secondary education consists of three cycles or stages (Dutch: *graden*; French: *degrés*):

- First cycle (year 1 and 2)
- Second cycle (year 3 and 4)
- Third cycle (year 5 and 6)

The first cycle provides a broad general basis, with only a few options to choose from (e.g. Latin, additional mathematics, technology). This should enable students to orient themselves in the most suitable way towards the many different *directions* available in the second and third stages. The second and third cycle are much more specific in each of the possible directions. Usually the level of choice available to the pupils grows with their age. While the youngest pupils may choose at the most two or four hours per week, the oldest pupils have the opportunity to choose between different "menus", like Math-Science, Sociology-Languages or Latin-Greek. They are then able to shape the largest part of the time they spend at school. However some core lessons are compulsory like e.g. mother-tongue course, sport, etc... This mix between compulsory and optional lessons grouped in menus make it possible to keep class structures even for the oldest students.

Types of Secondary Education

Secondary school is divided into four general types. Each type consists of a set of different directions that may vary from school to school. The general types are as follows:

- **General Secondary Education** (Dutch: *Algemeen Secundair Onderwijs*; ASO; French: *Enseignement Secondaire général*. About 40% of all pupils): A very broad, general education, preparing for higher education. Once students have completed all six years, it is expected that they will continue studying (e.g.: university or college). The job market considers an ASO diploma alone as useless, so a continued study in higher education is not only implied but even necessary to get a job. Possible directions include (eventually combinations of): ancient Greek and Latin, Modern Languages (stressing French and Dutch, English and German), Sciences

(chemistry, physics, biology and geography), Mathematics, Economy, and Human Sciences (psychology, sociology, media).

- **Technical Secondary Education** (Dutch: *Technisch Secundair Onderwijs*; TSO; French: *Enseignement Secondaire technique*. About 30% of all pupils.): The TSO is divided into two groups of education again: TTK and STK. The TTK courses focus more on technical aspects, the STK courses focus more on practical matters. Both offer a general education in math, languages, history, science, and geography, but mostly not on the same level as ASO courses. Lessons have a less theoretical, but more technical and practical approach. Once students have completed all six years they are either ready for the job market (STK courses mostly) or continue to study (TTK courses mostly). The continued studies could be a seventh specialization year (mostly SSK students take a this as an option), bachelor studies or even master studies. Possible directions include several Office management-like directions, practical ICT, Tourism, Health, Trade, Engineering, Communications,...
- **Vocational Secondary Education** (Dutch: *Beroepssecundair Onderwijs*; BSO; French: *Enseignement Secondaire professionnel*. About 30% of all pupils): Very practical and very job specific education. Afterwards, several directions offer seventh, sometimes eighth, specialisation years. Possible directions include Carpentry, Car mechanics, Jewelry, Masonry... BSO is the only type of secondary education that does not qualify students to pursue higher education. If the student chooses to follow the optional 7th (and sometimes 8th) year, he/she will receive a diploma of the same level as a TSO diploma, which does allow him/her to pursue higher education.
- **Art Secondary Education** (Dutch: *Kunstsecundair onderwijs*; KSO; French: *Enseignement Secondaire artistique*. About 2% of all pupils.): These schools link general and broad secondary education development with active art practice, ranging from performance arts to display arts. Depending on the direction, several subjects might be purely theoretical, preparing for higher education. Directions include dancing (Ballet school), acting, and several graphical and musical arts. Many students graduating from these schools go to music conservatories, higher ballet or acting schools or art colleges to further develop their art.

Students with disabilities can follow **Special Secondary Education** (Dutch: *Buitengewoon Secundair Onderwijs*; BuSO; French: *Enseignement Secondaire spécial*), of different types.