

NATIONAL REPORT (Belgium)

Models of Cooperation between Vocational Schools and Entrepreneurs in Belgium, France and Spain

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1. Executive Summary

The report notes that in Belgium there is a consolidated system of cooperation between companies and vocational training centres, especially through the Alternance and Apprentissage models. These models make it possible to combine theoretical and practical training, with a strong involvement of companies, and are institutionalised within the education system. The results are positive: high rates of job placement, lower school dropouts and greater preparation of students to face the world of work. The figure of the Accompagnateur and the presence of paid contracts are key elements for the success of these models.

However, structural weaknesses persist. There are difficulties in finding sufficient collaborating companies, lack of involvement of some economic sectors and administrative and bureaucratic limitations that make it difficult to monitor students individually.

The areas for improvement include strengthening collaboration between school and business, reducing the bureaucratic burden, guaranteeing quality monitoring and adapting the models to the specific needs of each territory, sector and group of students.

France and Spain approach to Vocational Education and Training (VET) with different but complementary models. France has promoted dual vocational training since the 2018 reform, doubling apprenticeship contracts and consolidating a structured system with state support, economic incentives and a clear articulation between school and business. The system offers a high level of regulation and monitoring, with 75.6% of graduates entering the labour market.

Spain, on the other hand, has a business fabric dominated by micro-enterprises (95.2% with fewer than 10 workers), which makes it difficult to generalise paid internships. Despite this, good practices can be observed in specific sectors, with flexibility in the rhythms of alternate cycle system and a strong commitment from schools.

Both models offer valuable lessons for transfer to African contexts: France provides institutional strength and clear contracts, while Spain stands out for adapting to environments with limited business capacities. Key factors such as pedagogical support, training flexibility and monitoring tools are essential to adapt VET to different realities and promote social and labour insertion.

2. Introduction

The training of students is a task shared between the school and the company. Both institutions must work together to ensure that the student successfully completes his or her training process. This collaboration is essential to ensure quality training, updated and adjusted to the real needs of the labour market.

Cooperation between educational centres and companies contributes significantly to the preparation of competent professionals and facilitates their insertion into the world of work. When this relationship is established properly, it becomes a win-win strategy for all parties involved: students, schools, and businesses (Gagnon et al., 2025).

Although the three countries analysed – Spain, France and Belgium – share this vision, they start from different educational contexts and traditions. France and Belgium have a long history in vocational training, where collaboration between companies and training centres is more institutionalised. On the other hand, in Spain, the business culture of hosting interns is less consolidated. But a recent law from 2023 probably will force the process.

Belgium, for example, has well-structured systems such as alternate training system and the *apprentissage* system, which integrate theoretical and practical training in a balanced way. In this country, alternation is considered a main training path, not a secondary option reserved for students with low academic performance.

In both Belgium and Spain, educational competences are transferred to the regions, which generates territorial variations in training systems, adapting to the specific social, economic and political contexts of each community.

In terms of results, the employability of vocational training graduates is high in France and Belgium, while in Spain it is moderate, although it has shown a positive trend in recent years. This success in French-speaking countries is largely explained by the greater involvement of the business fabric, especially in Belgium, where companies are a fundamental pillar of the system.

France and Belgium have more consolidated and mature models of company-school integration, supported by dual training and alternate cycle systems established for years. Spain, for its part, is progressively moving towards this model thanks to a joint effort by education administrations, schools and the business sector. However, it still faces cultural and logistical hurdles that hinder its full implementation.

3. Contextual Analysis

3.1. Belgium

Belgium is a federal state made up of regions and communities, with educational competences transferred to each of them. This decentralized model implies that the education system is not uniform throughout the country, but is adapted to the social, economic and political realities of each territory.

At the national level, the Ministry of Education proposes a common Training Programme (known as *Attestation de Compétence* – AC1), which sets out the competencies that students must achieve. This programme is jointly developed by experts from the business sector and the teaching field of vocational training, with the aim of adjusting to the needs of the different economic sectors.

Within the framework of the Pact for Teaching Excellence (PEQ), students begin their vocational training at the age of 14-15 (*4ème*). At 16-17 years old (*6ème*) they can obtain the CBS certification (which does not allow them to continue their studies), and at 18-19 years old (*7ème*) they obtain a diploma that does qualify them to continue their academic training.

An important feature of the Belgian system is the compulsory nature of professional internships. Schools must guarantee an internship position for each student; otherwise, they lose the state funding intended for their training. This institutional commitment has contributed to consolidating a mature system of collaboration between companies and educational centres, especially through dual and alternate cycle training models.

As a result, Belgium has a high rate of youth labour market insertion. In the period 2021-2023, 80.1% of Vocational Training (VET) graduates entered the labour market, approaching the European Union target of 82% by 2025 (CEDEFOP, 2024). In addition, graduates with practical experience in real work environments (dual training) have significantly higher employment rates (84.8%) compared to those who did not do internships (71.5%) (European Commission, 2024).

3.2. France

France has experienced a real revolution in vocational training, especially since the 2018 reform (*Avenir professionnel*). This doubled the number of apprenticeship contracts: from 321,000 to 732,000 between

2018 and 2021. The objective was to respond to the need for labour insertion and adapt to the demands of the market.

Alternate cycle training is mainly offered in public, private or consular *Lycées* and CFAs (Apprentice Training Centres), under the joint supervision of the Ministry of National Education (for academic qualifications such as CAP, BAC Pro, BTS and, lately, university BUT) and the Ministry of Labour for professional qualifications and apprenticeships. The OPCOs (competence operators), created in 2019, are bodies managed by social agents, accredited by the State, which finance contracts and provide technical support to companies (OPCO, 2025). The central regulatory body, *France Compétences*, reports to the Ministry of Labour and redistributes funds, ensures quality and manages the RNCP (*Répertoire National des Certifications Professionnelles*).

In France, the relationship with companies is formalized with paid contracts and companies receive aid and exemptions from social security. There is an apprenticeship contract (*apprentissage*), aimed at young people aged 16–29, which combines theoretical and practical training, and until 2024 there was a professionalization contract, aimed at young people without qualifications and the unemployed, which is more flexible and focused on acquiring a degree or experience. This has led to a 22% drop in new contracts. Another type of relationship is the unpaid internship agreement (*convention de stage*), common in the *Maisons Familiales Rurales* (MFR) and under the tutelage of the Ministry of Agriculture. It is a private agreement between the school, the young person (or the family if they are minors) and the company. This type of agreement allows for a change of practices during the studies, which simultaneously allows for guidance. The internships, as set out in the agreements and contracts, are carried out under the supervision of a tutor/*maître d'apprentissage*.

In France, work-study training responds to an important need: young people with low qualifications and the unemployed, but also young people with good qualifications who opt for vocational training in the first instance, benefit directly. The system has state support to guarantee job placement and business competitiveness. However, the recent cut in aid to professionalization contracts raises concerns, as it would affect vulnerable sectors and small businesses.

Overall, France maintains a mixed public-private system, with central and regional governments, social agents and companies actively participating. This collaboration ensures a close connection between the training sector and the needs of the labour market.

Based on this, France has a youth labour insertion rate of 63.4% (EUROSTAT, 2025). Likewise, 75.6% of Vocational Training (VET) graduates entered the labour market (European Commission, 2025), a rate below the European Union's target of 82% by 2025 (CEDEFOP, 2024).

3.3. Spain

In Spain, the business context poses a structural challenge for the development of dual vocational training. According to the Ministry of Industry and the National Institute of Statistics (February-March 2024/25), 95.2% of Spanish companies have fewer than 10 workers. This reality limits the ability of many companies to appoint a qualified internship tutor and take on the training and hiring of a paid internship student.

In micro-enterprises, the training load involved in hosting a student is proportionally much higher than in larger companies. For example, in a company with 10 workers, the presence of a student means that 10% of the workforce is in training. On the other hand, in a company with 100 employees, two students would only represent 2% of the workforce.

On the other hand, Vocational Training in Spain is part of post-compulsory secondary education and, although in recent years there have been significant advances in the implementation of dual vocational training, there are still logistical and cultural barriers that hinder its full consolidation. However, a positive evolution is observed thanks to the joint effort of the administrations, educational centres and the business fabric.

4. Objectives and Scope

Main objective:

Explore and analyze the models of cooperation between Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers and enterprises in Europe and Africa.

Specific objectives:

- Conduct a comprehensive literature review regarding partnerships between VET providers and enterprises in European countries (Belgium, France, Spain).
- Identify and analyse cooperation models that have proven effective in fostering robust partnerships between VET institutions and enterprises, through detailed examinations of case studies and success stories across various European countries.
- Examine the role of public policies by analysing the regulatory frameworks, funding mechanisms, and governing environments that contribute to the success of VET-enterprise collaborations in Europe.
- Synthesize the results of the literature review and case studies to pinpoint best practices and strategies, evaluating their adaptability and potential impact in improving VET-enterprise cooperation in Africa.

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5. Methodology

- Literature review: analysis of specialized documents to identify good practices, trends and organizational models related to internships in educational and professional environments.
- Interviews with experts from schools and pedagogical training centres: collection of professional perspectives through interviews to learn about tutoring models, student monitoring and collaboration between schools and companies.

6. Types of Cooperation Models

Cooperation between Small Service Companies and CEFA Bruxelles School

- The training is done in alternate cycle training, combining theory and practice: 2 days of training at the school and 3 days of training at the company. There are variants for adults: 1 day at school and 4 days at the company. Those are rhythms adapted to the needs of the company. At the school, the schedule is from 09:00 to 16:00 and the internship schedule is the one that takes place in the company with a maximum of 8 hours/day.
- Medium and small businesses: hairdressers, shop assistants, electricians, tinsmiths, mechanics, small business managers...
- Cooperation formula:
 - Alternate cycle and paid training contract between the company and the student. The contract includes an annex that is the Training Plan which reflects the training activities that will be developed in the company and the skills that the student must achieve in this process. It is formalized through a platform managed by the *Office Francophone de la Formation en Alternance* (OFFA). The Training Plan is agreed between the three parties involved and is signed by the company and the student. It can only be graded by what is written in the document.
 - Figure of the *school's Accompagnateur*: the person responsible for relations with companies validates the company to host students, welcomes and accompanies the student to the company, is responsible for contractual documentation, administration, PPE, skills, etc. He makes a minimum of 3 visits a year to the company and makes regular telephone contacts. Informs the teaching staff (*Conseils de classe*) of the evolution of the students during the internship.
 - Figure of the internship tutor in the company. Trained, experienced and connecting well with students.

Cooperation between **Multinational Corporations and Institut Don Bosco Bruxelles**

- Students do an *internship* of between 8 and 15 weeks.
- There is no relationship with the internship tutor in the company. Only, on the way back from the internship, the school has a talk with the student about the experience.
- Cooperation formula:
 - *Agreement* between school and company. There is insurance that protects the school and the company. This time agreement is limited by the days that the student does an internship. This *agreement* defines the objectives of the activities, skills that the student must acquire.
 - There is no interaction between school and company.
 - A person from the school who once visits the student at the company but does not visit the company.
 - There is an *Apprenticeship* dossier to monitor the internships.
 - Partnering companies: Audi, Cofely, Sibelga...

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Cooperation between **All Size Companies and Alteranance en MFR (France)**

- The training is in the alternate cycle system, combining theory and practice. The rhythm of work-study is very diverse depending on the educational specialities and the needs of the company. It usually goes for weeks, but usually following a 50% stay in the company and 50% time in school.
- Small, medium and large companies in a wide variety of professional fields, such as commerce, agriculture, mechanics, hospitality and tourism, food, health...
- Cooperation formula:
 - Alternate cycle system internship agreement between the company and the student, unpaid. The contract includes the Training Plan, which reflects the training activities that will be carried out in the company and the skills that the student must achieve in this process.
 - The figure of the internship tutor at the school (school teacher) is responsible for the relations between the school and the company.
 - The figure of the internship tutor in the company, must be a trained, experienced person with the ability to establish a good connection with the students.
 - There is an internship dossier, where the student records the activities, learning and reflections. It is a key tool for evaluation and self-reflection.

Cooperation between **Small Service Companies and EFA Dual/Alternate cycle (Spain)**

- The training is Dual/alternate cycle, combining theory and practice: usually 15 days of training at the school and 15 days of training at the company. There are variations depending on the production rate of companies. The internship schedule is that of the company.
- Service companies are micro, mini and small: gardeners, farmers, mechanics, small business managers...
- Cooperation formula:
 - Paid training employment contract between the company and the student, and an unpaid internship agreement between the company, the school and the student. The contract includes an annex that is the Training Plan which reflects the training activities that will be carried out in the company and the skills that the student must achieve in this process. This is formalized through a platform managed by the competent body in education.
 - There is a teacher from the school who acts as an internship tutor at the school and is responsible for managing the relationship with the collaborating companies. It is responsible for verifying that companies are suitable for having students and accompanies the student during the process. It also manages all administrative and contractual

documentation. He maintains regular contact with companies through visits and calls, and informs the teaching team about the progress of the students during the internship.

- Figure of the internship tutor in the company, must be an experienced worker of the company and social skills to deal with students. They must have completed compulsory training that qualifies them to act as a tutor.
- There is an internship dossier where the student records the activities carried out, the learning achieved and their personal reflections. This dossier is a fundamental tool both for evaluation and for encouraging self-reflection.

7. Analysis of Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths:

- The experience reported shows that work-study results in a higher rate of labour insertion, less premature dropout and greater involvement of all actors (co-trainers).
- Teaching adapted to skills.
- The internships serve as a *meeting with the professions* (orientation). The company must be clear that they are not productive. A model that allows the student to practice a trade. Work with your hands. Another way of learning.
- Learning by working builds them as adults. They become adults sooner.
- Companies are looking for skills and students feel valued.
- The presence of paid internship contracts favours the schooling of young people in these models.

Weaknesses:

- Difficulties in finding companies, making the contract with the company. The sector could get more involved. Lack of collaborative development with the sector.
- Difficulties in the involvement of the ministry of guardianship (education, work, agriculture, etc.).
- Absenteeism of teachers. Substitutions.
- Lack of knowledge of the work-study system on the part of the teaching staff. Traditional teaching practice is still strong among the teaching community and clashes with the alternate cycle system.
- Difficulties in monitoring the practices by the tutor. Lack of time, availability of vehicles, public transport...
- Administrative problems, bureaucratic problems, paperwork... Lack of time and more and more documents to fill out.
- Not all students are made for the *Alternance* (alternate cycle system), but it is where many more adapt to it.

8. Identification of Areas for Improvement

- Limited involvement of the productive sector: many training programs have difficulty finding enough companies willing to host students. The lack of structured associations and the low involvement of economic sectors weakens their impact and sustainability.
- Insufficient institutional coordination. There is often a lack of synergy between ministries and public bodies responsible for education, labour and sectoral development (such as agriculture). This fragmentation generates unclear responsibilities and weak implementation of policies at the territorial level.
- Insufficient preparation and support for teachers. Teachers often lack the necessary training and understanding to properly implement and support alternate cycle system models. Traditional teaching practices continue to be dominant, which may conflict with the practical and competency-based approaches to learning in the workplace.

- Under-established student monitoring and support. Tutors struggle to follow up effectively due to lack of time, mobility issues, or limited resources. This negatively affects the quality of support and the early detection of needs during stays in the company.
- Administrative burden and excessive bureaucracy. Complex procedures, inefficient digital platforms, and a constant increase in the document load limit efficiency and generate stress among teaching staff and coordinating staff. These difficulties can discourage participation and move away from the educational focus.

9. Recommendations for Improvement

- Strengthen the involvement of the productive sector through incentives, alliances with economic agents and the creation of efficient digital platforms that connect companies and educational centres. At the institutional level, it is recommended to establish coordination bodies between administrations and improve interdepartmental communication with shared digital tools.
- Offer teachers specific training on the pedagogy of alternate cycle system programmes, to encourage stays in companies and to create spaces for teaching collaboration. This will make it possible to break with the inertia of traditional models and better adapt training content to the reality of work.
- Improve student support, it is necessary to recognise teaching time for follow-up, offer logistical support to tutors and develop applications that facilitate communication between all the actors involved.
- Reduce bureaucracy, simplify documentation, improve digital platforms and incorporate support administrative profiles. These actions should facilitate more efficient management, relieve teachers and reinforce the effectiveness of the alternate cycle model.

10. Conclusion

One of the priorities of this project is the detection and systematization of good practices in school-company collaboration for Vocational Education and Training (VET) students, with the aim of identifying adaptable and transferable models to African contexts. This task involves analysing not only the institutional structures, but also the rhythms of training, accompaniment, pedagogical tools and the involvement of educational and business actors.

Best practices observed:

- a) Alternate cycle rhythm adapted to the socio-productive context. The most effective VET systems – such as those in Belgium, Spain and France – share a key characteristic: the flexibility of the training pace.
 - In Belgium, the alternation can be 2 days at school and 3 days in the company, especially in sectors such as hairdressing or mechanics.
 - In Spain, in areas such as agriculture, work is done with periods of 15 days at school and 15 days at the company, responding to the natural production cycles. In catering, internships are concentrated on weekends and holiday periods.
 - In France, in technical sectors such as aeronautical mechanics, periods of 3 to 5 weeks of theoretical training in school are combined with long periods in practical environments such as airports or specialized workshops.

This ability to adapt alternate cycle system to the needs of production and territory is key to applying VET models in African contexts, where the diversity of realities (rural vs. urban, agricultural vs. industrial, etc.) requires flexibility and contextualization.

- b) Comprehensive student support. Both in the school and in the company, the quality systems provide for continuous pedagogical and human support:
 - Personal mentoring at school as a pedagogical tool, not just corrective.

- Face-to-face or virtual follow-up during the internship, preferably carried out by professors with a previous relationship with the student.
- Periodic meetings between company and school mentors to ensure consistency in training.
- Specific training for companions (*Accompagnateurs*) in both environments.

Human support is essential to combat dropout and promote labour insertion, especially in African contexts where this practice is very rare. This practice is perfectly adaptable with the minimum and adequate training of the mentor staff.

- c) Formalized internship contract or agreement. The relationship between student, school and company is regulated by agreements that define training activities, insurance, regulations and (in some cases) financial compensation.
- This legal framework guarantees legal certainty and transparency for all parties.
 - Although remuneration can be an incentive for the student, it must be considered that it can be unaffordable for small businesses (especially relevant in African economies based on micro-enterprises and informal work).

The agreement model can be simplified and adapted for informal environments, guaranteeing at least the recognition and planning of training activities.

- d) Pedagogical tools for monitoring and reflection
- Practice booklet: record of the student's activities, learning and reflections.
 - Joint assessment of progress by school and company tutors.
 - Spaces for sharing at school (dialogue time), where students share experiences and generate collective knowledge.

These tools are low-cost and easy to implement, and can encourage self-reflection and the critical construction of knowledge, which is key in environments with fewer technological resources.

Comparison with Spain and France:

In Spain, despite the advances in dual vocational training, the presence of micro-enterprises (95.2% have fewer than 10 workers) limits the capacity to accommodate students. This makes the good practices observed in schools with strong teaching involvement and intensive follow-up especially relevant for environments with similar business capabilities.

In France, the system stands out for its rigorous planning, its strong practical component and the clear definition of the roles of the school and the company. There is also a significant investment in the training of tutors.

Synthesis and proposal of interventions:

The best practices collected indicate that the most efficient vocational training systems are those that combine territorial and sectoral flexibility, human and technical pedagogical support, and structured collaboration between school and company.

Tools for monitoring and shared reflection:

To improve and adapt vocational training models to African contexts, it is proposed:

- Identify priority economic sectors and adapt the rhythms of alternate cycle system to their productive dynamics.
- Train local companions with specific short training to guarantee quality accompaniment.
- Establish simplified agreements with companies to formally recognise the training role of the internship position.

- Deploy accessible pedagogical tools, such as practice notebooks and spaces for dialogue, as an axis of collective reflection and monitoring.

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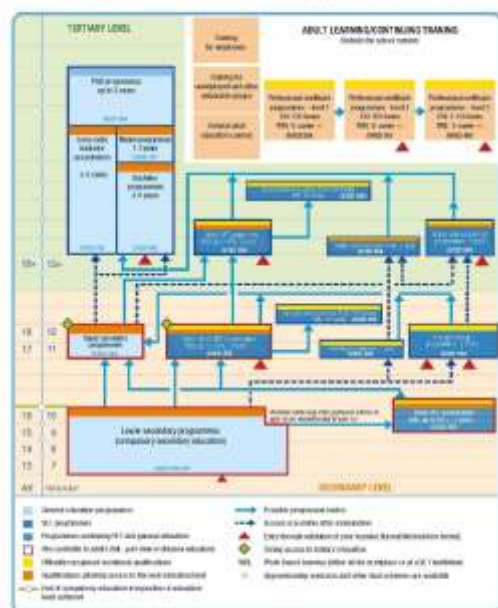
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Annexes

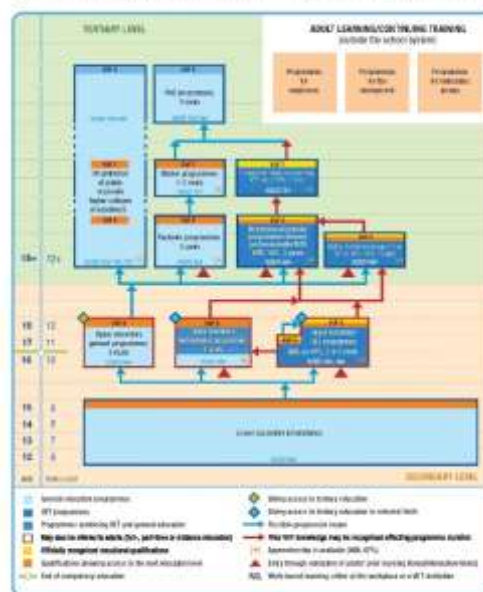
Education Systems in Belgium, France and Spain

Vocational education and training system chart: Spain



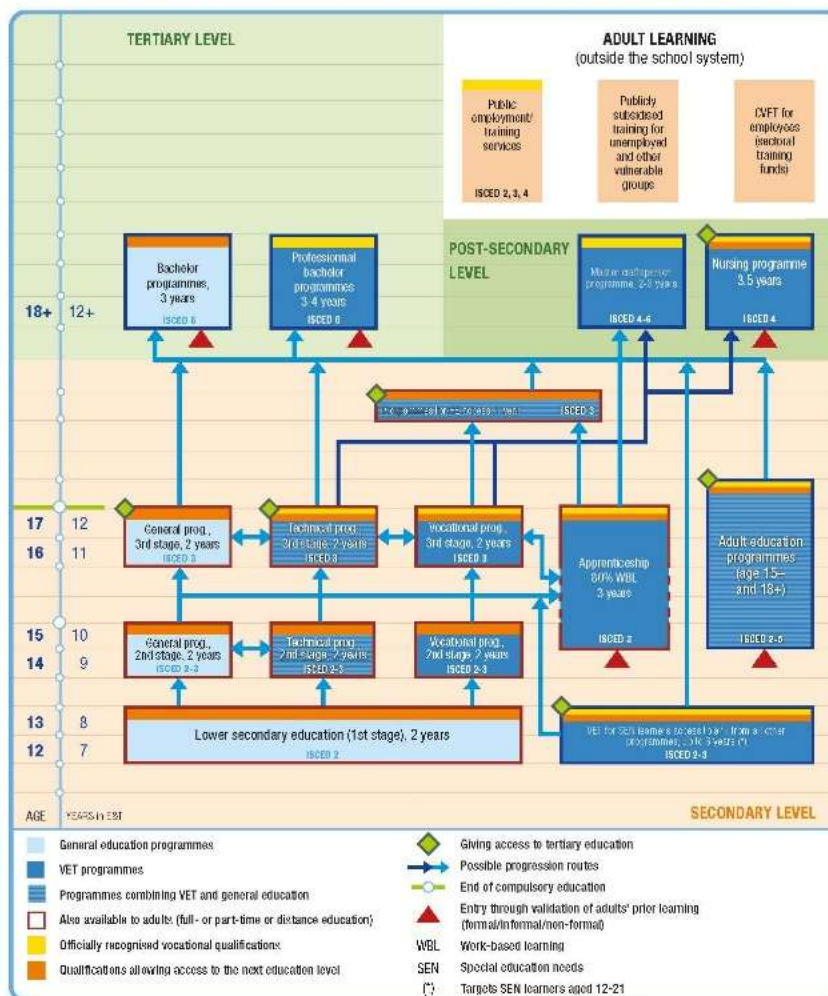
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Vocational education and training system chart: France



Source: Cedefop, & Centre for the Development of Enterprise (2025). Vocational education and training in Europe – France system description (Brussels, & Luxembourg, 2025). Vocational education and training in Europe – France system description (Brussels, & Luxembourg, 2025). Vocational education and training in Europe – France system description (Brussels, & Luxembourg, 2025).

Vocational education and training system chart: Belgium (DE)



NB: ISCED-P 2011 and EQF referencing has not yet been done. ISCED-2011 one digit code used in the chart is estimated by the Ministry of Education of the German-speaking Community.

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