LUXEMBURG

Overview

Luxemburg lies at the heart of Europe, bordering Belgium, France and Germany. It is the smallest State in the European Union, with a surface area of 2,586 km². Its location at the cross-roads of two major cultures, linguistic situation, multi-ethnic society, economic situation and ambitions within Europe all create both constraints and opportunities for the school system.

In political terms, the country is divided into four voting constituencies. The surface area (2,586 km²) is too small for executive and legislative power to be vested in provincial and departmental bodies. The administrative division of Luxemburg is into three districts (Luxembourg, Diekirch and Grevenmacher), 12 cantons and 118 municipalities.

Most decisions in the field of education are made at the national level by the Ministry for National Education, Vocational Training and Sports and the Ministry for Culture, Higher Education and Research. In the field of education, only the municipalities share decision-making with the Ministry for National Education, and only for pre-school, primary and in some cases adult education.

In addition to more general provisions regarding freedom of worship and freedom of conscience, Luxemburg's constitution sets out the relationship between church and State, making no rigid separation between the two. Roman Catholicism predominates in Luxemburg. Religious instruction accordingly occupies and is likely to continue to occupy an important place in the public education system.

Luxemburg is officially a trilingual country. An act of 24 February 1924 states that the national language is Lëtzeburgesch, a Franconian/Moselle dialect which is the vernacular for the entire Luxemburg population. Legislation is drafted in French and administrative and legal affairs are dealt with in French, German and Lëtzeburgesch. For administrative requests made in any of these languages, for example, the law states that "the administration's response should wherever possible be in the language chosen by the applicant". The three official languages are supplemented by those of the country's immigrant population (Portuguese, Italian, etc.). The ability to switch readily from one language to another is part and parcel of everyday life for all residents.

All three languages are employed from the earliest years of a child's schooling.

In Luxemburg the great majority of the primary and secondary education is in state schools. Private schools are incorporated with legal personality. They are mainly denominational schools and institutions run under the aegis of the Roman Catholic church.

The establishment of a private school is subject to very strict State licensing procedures. To be recognized, a private school must teach the same subjects as a state school. The texts of the law of 10 August 1912 on primary education and that of 31 May 1982 regarding relations between the State of Luxemburg and private post-primary education set the conditions, which private educational institutions must fulfil in order to be granted government approval.

It should however be noted that the state does not intervene directly in the appointment of the directors and staff of private schools, or in the setting of school fees. State control is mainly exerted in the area of subject choice and curricula.

Furthermore, article 3 of the law of the 31 May 1982 states that “no persons may create, open or run a private post-primary educational establishment unless they hold a licence issued by Grand Ducal Decree and on proposal by the Minister for National Education.” In order to benefit for state support under this law, the

private educational establishment must fulfil a certain number of conditions regarding, inter alia, its educational aims. Thus the curricula implemented by approved private schools correspond in principle to the official curricula laid down by the Ministry for National Education and Vocational Training.

As is clear, Luxemburg, while avoiding the excesses of a real *guerre scolaire*, has been slow to recognize the benefits of widening choice and extending autonomy in education. Even more surprisingly for a Catholic country, it has been slow to give recognition and support to independent confessional schools. The law of 1982 safeguards, at least for the present, the existence of a relatively small number of confessional and lay independent schools and it seems unlikely in the short term that the political balance will change in favour of more radical left-wing views, despite some vigorous champions of a unitary, lay system of the kind which appeals to the Left in France and Spain (Mason, 70).

The independent sector is tiny, mainly for girls and preponderantly confessional (Roman Catholic). Its legal control stems for primary education from a law passed in 1912. This sets out the conditions under which independent schools must operate. They must be corporate bodies, have government approval from the local council after inspection, and have approved curricula. There are currently four independent denominational fee-paying primary schools which receive partial subsidy on a per capita basis from the State, and one nondenominational (Mason, 68).

The Structure of Schooling

The *primary* school system in Luxemburg dates back to the first half of the 19th century, when hesitant attempts were made to introduce schools at municipal level. However, "outside" events, such as the Belgian revolution, put an end to the initiative. The act of 26 July 1843 called for the reconstruction of these schools. The costs (wages) were shared equally between the municipal authorities and those parents who could afford it.

The watershed came with the Kirpach law of 20 April 1881, which in fact comprised three acts, one on the organization of primary education; one on compulsory schooling; and one establishing the system of school inspection by setting wage levels and rates for traveling and office expenses for school inspectors.

School attendance was made compulsory for all children between the ages of six and 12, although the municipal authorities were free to extend this to 13.

The subjects to be taught at primary level were laid down in Article 23 of the act of 10 August 1912. Religious instruction by a member of the clergy was top priority. The act of 6 June 1898 amended the Kirpach law on the matter of religious education (as well as introducing other major changes, such as fairer pay for teachers, although male teachers retained an advantage over their female colleagues), imposing the obligation of involvement on teachers where the priest so required. This "concordat" between church and school received a mixed reception.

However, the act of 10 August 1912 (which is still in force) introduced a substantial degree of liberalization. The episcopate responded immediately with a policy of non-cooperation, ordering the clergy to cease giving instruction in schools in autumn 1912.

The act contained provisions favored on all sides: compulsory schooling was extended to a period of seven years; primary education and post-primary instruction became free of charge with the abolition of school fees (although materials still had to be paid for); penalties were introduced for unjustified non-attendance; the natural sciences, drawing and gymnastics entered the curriculum; classes were restricted to no more than 70 [!] pupils.

The act of 2 August 1921 achieved a compromise between Church and State.

During the German occupation of Luxemburg (10 May 1940 to 10 September 1944), the teaching system was Germanized: French was banned and course content and structure were adapted to the German system. On liberation, the former structures were re-established; compulsory schooling was extended to eight consecutive years; and the 1940 curriculum was reintroduced.

The legislation in force today remains based on the 1912 schools act, which has been changed on several occasions since then. A revision of this act is being discussed for the moment.

The act of 23 July 1848 is the first item of legislation relating to *secondary* education. An athénée, which provided a full secondary education, and two progymnases, one in Diekirch and the other in Echternach, offering only the lower classes, were set up at that time. Secondary school - études moyennes (intermediate studies) as it was known at the time - lasted six years.

The act of 1911 authorized the establishment of schools to provide an "intermediate" education for girls too - previously the preserve of private associations, particularly religious orders.

It was not until after the second world war that the gymnases and the industrial and commercial schools were renamed respectively lycées classiques and lycées des garçons. It was also from this date that the education dispensed in such establishments came to be known as *enseignement secondaire* (secondary education). There were also changes to the school structure: the seven-year classics course was joined by a six-year modern studies course, divided into industrial and commercial streams.

This structure remained in place until 1968, when an organic law (10 May 1968) brought sweeping changes. The current classical secondary education system still bears the marks of this reform. History has thus bequeathed to Luxemburg a three-pronged system for post-elementary schooling, with a clear hierarchy between conventional secondary education (*enseignement secondaire classique*), technical secondary education (*enseignement secondaire technique*) and "complementary" education (*enseignement complémentaire*). The first of these has traditionally enjoyed the greatest prestige, and requires candidates to sit an entrance examination after primary school. There is an entrance exam for technical secondary education as well, but it is less demanding. Formerly, '"complementary"' education, linked to primary level, was designed for pupils who failed those exams.

The three streams are governed by separate laws, and consistent efforts have been made, particularly in the recent history of the education system, to narrow the gap between them. Over the past few years, the ministry has steadily upgraded technical secondary education, and “complementary"' education has been converted into a '"preparatory'" stream (*régime préparatoire*) linked to technical secondary education with a view to avoiding exclusion and promoting equal opportunities.

One other salient characteristic of Luxemburg's education system is the absence of a fully-fledged higher education structure (see Dondelinger 151-153).

The Legal Framework

The *Constitution* of the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg guarantees free compulsory education.

Article 23 of the *Constitution* states that “the State shall ensure that all Luxemburgers receive primary instruction, which shall be compulsory and free of charge. Medical and social assistance shall be regulated

by law. The State shall establish the requisite intermediate teaching establishments and higher education courses, and shall also establish vocational training courses, which shall be dispensed free of charge.'"

The system is highly centralized, and the legislation is strongly based on the principle of free, universal (i.e. compulsory) education.

There are current discussions looking toward the next revision of the law of August 10, 1912 about the organization of primary education, which stipulated that '"all children above the age of six at 1 September shall, for nine consecutive years, receive instruction in the subjects provided for in Article 23 of this act." Over the decades, the duration of compulsory education has gradually increased.

These provisions also apply to the children of residents who do not hold Luxemburg nationality and to those above the age for compulsory schooling but who continue to attend primary and post-primary schools.

The law further provides for compulsory schooling to take place in public or private establishments abroad, and schools in neighboring countries (Belgium and France in particular) attract large numbers of pupils among Luxemburg nationals and residents, chiefly at secondary school level (the phenomenon of "educational emigration").

School Choice not limited by family income

Although freedom of education is a recognized principle, in practice freedom of choice regarding the institution attended does not generally apply until secondary level, i.e. following the entrance examination for secondary education (*enseignement secondaire*) or technical secondary education (*enseignement secondaire technique*). There is generally no choice as far as pre-school and primary education are concerned, and parents may apply for transfer to another school only as an exceptional measure.

There are just two alternatives beyond the regular public schools:

- from the primary level, denominational schools offering the public curriculum;
- at the pre-school, primary and part of the secondary level, the private Waldorf School, which applies different teaching principles, based on the work of Rudolph Steiner.

In principle only the public education system, which is free and compulsory, is fully State-financed. The denominational schools follow precisely the same curriculum and in effect form part of the State system, but are fee-paying.

Education is in the public schools is free, but a school tax may be levied at pre-school and primary level on children whose parents or guardians are not resident in the municipality.

Course books and all other equipment are paid for by the municipal authorities. It should also be noted that the act of 14 July 1986 provides for payment of an allowance for school children.

School transport is free of charge.

Study grants are also available for students who show outstanding merit or have special needs, in particular on account of their financial or family circumstances.

From the primary level on, a non-means-tested allowance for school children has been available since 1986, as authorized by the act of 14 July of that year. This is payable annually at the start of the school year and is calculated on the basis of the number of children in the family and the number at school (at primary level and

above); a supplement is available for children over the age of 12. At first, only families with two children or more were eligible for the allowance, but that restriction was lifted by the act of 1 August 1988.

Parents pay a contribution towards the running costs of denominational schools and the Waldorf School, based upon family income. The Waldorf School also benefits from financial subsidies from the State, which began in 1986 - three years after the first pre-school class opened. As the Waldorf School does not consider itself to be a private school, instead claiming the status of a “public” establishment run by a non-profit-making association, it has not to date received grants for the classes it now runs at secondary level.

Grants at pre-school and primary level are calculated per child and awarded on the legal basis of the State budget (under "subsidies" or another heading); the same rates are available for private Catholic schools (primary level only). At secondary level, State subsidies are granted to the denominational schools under the terms of the 1982 act.

The international schools (i.e. the European School, the American School, a French school, a Japanese "complementary" school, etc.) are another alternative. These operate outside the Luxemburg system and target specific groups. Admission is restricted and parents are often required to make a substantial financial contribution.

The international schools are not subject to inspection by the Luxemburg authorities, unlike the denominational schools and the Waldorf School which have to set the same examinations as their State-run counterparts.

Peter Mason synthesized as follows the political debate over subsidies of non-government schools:

> Until 1980 pupils in the Catholic independent day and boarding secondary schools were not subsidized by the state and only very few girls were enrolled in their primary classes. Both these schools and the lay technical schools found themselves in very real financial difficulties in the 60s and 70s over rising costs. A long-standing argument about their right to state subsidy was partially resolved in 1979 by a decision of government to give them an annual grant which, despite indexation, covered less than half of their annual working costs. In January 1982 government, increasingly aware that if the schools disappeared the whole cost of education would devolve on themselves, proposed a new law (no. 2555) which finally confirmed the right of existence to the independent sector in the name of freedom of choice, variety and competition and proclaimed the duty of government to protect the legitimate interests of pupils in its schools. The measure was fiercely debated in parliament and in the press with all the usual arguments deployed on both sides, including the charge that the state system would be deprived of resources which went to independent schools and that the Church must not be allowed to dominate a pluralistic and essentially lay society. The Christian Democratic Party and its allies finally succeeded in putting the law on the statute book and independent schools came under the new system in September 1982. It provides for approved schools a contract similar to that applying to French schools and depending on a rigorous examination of management, ethos, buildings, terms of admission and promotion, finance, examinations and certificates. Under the contract they receive 80% of the cost of salaries of qualified teachers and 40% of those of others, with a complicated system of capitation allowances for other costs (Mason, 68-69).

At present, there is a consensus among all the major political parties (except the Greens) that a public, compulsory and free education system run on centralist, but not necessarily secular, principles should be maintained.

A distinction must be made between the pre-school and primary levels, where the school attended depends in principle on the place of residence, and post-primary level, where in principle the choice of school is free.

Choice of school at pre-school and primary level

The school attended depends on the place (district) of residence of the person responsible for the child, except in the case of private schools and schools abroad. In exceptional circumstances, transfers from one school to another can be arranged on request to the schools board, for example in situations where the child is looked after outside school hours by someone other than the parents who does not live in the same area. In most cases, this applies to the children of single-parent families or parents who both work outside the home.

Choice of school at post-primary (secondary and post-secondary) level

In principle, every pupil has the freedom to choose a school; the pupil applies to the establishment of his or her choice. Following the abolition of the entrance examination, suitable procedures remain to be defined for determining which applicants will be admitted.

If an imbalance is found to exist in the distribution of pupils between secondary schools, subsequent regulatory measures may have to be taken. Corrections will be made by Ministerial decision. The criteria applied will in all probability be proximity and existing family ties (priority will be given to applicants who have a brother or sister who is already a pupil of the school).

In the technical secondary education (*enseignement secondaire technique*) sector, since not all schools are able to offer the full range of courses and optional subjects, pupils sometimes have to change school to study the course or option of their choice.

School distinctiveness protected by law and policy

As noted, parents and pupils have just four alternatives to the State system in Luxemburg:

- denominational schools,
- the private Waldorf School,
- international schools,
- education in one of the neighboring countries.

The denominational schools offer the same syllabus as the public system. The Waldorf School dispenses the official curriculum in accordance with its own teaching principles.

In comparison with the state schools whose curriculum and examinations they share the independent schools are valued for the usual variety of reasons - better discipline, their (mostly) Christian affiliation, the involvement of teachers, pupils and parents in the school community, and smaller classes. In terms of patterns of education and variety as yet only the Steiner school offers a wider choice to the general public (Mason, 70).

Decisions about staff

Teachers in State schools at all levels are public sector employees, and as such bound by civil service staff

regulations. The following conditions apply for admission to the civil service:

> Luxemburg nationality; possession of civil and political rights; the requisite guarantees of moral rectitude; compliance with the physical requirements for the post; compliance with skills and vocational training requirements; evidence of command of the country's three languages (French, German and Lëtzeburgesch); completion of a practical placement.

Inspectors are responsible for supervising teaching staff, but there is no formal, regular assessment of teachers. A note is only given by the inspector in case the teacher wishes to change school.

Teachers have a relatively free hand provided they comply with curriculum requirements on the standards to be achieved by the end of each year. There are no prescriptions regarding the methods and tools to be used. The ministry provides teachers with the necessary resources.

Accountability for School Quality

The inspectors monitor compliance with the curriculum and intervene in cases involving individual problem pupils (see below)..

The national curriculum boards for general subject areas comprise specialist teachers and representatives of the education minister. In practical and theoretical vocational areas, curricula are prepared in conjunction with the relevant professional associations, and the national curriculum boards may therefore include representatives of those bodies and of the relevant ministries.

Appointments to curriculum boards and decisions on syllabuses, curricula and teaching methods are a matter for the minister. School hours and curricula are updated and published at the beginning of each school year. The board then makes curriculum proposals for validation by the ministry.

The *education committee* within each school is a consultative body comprising representatives of the school management and elected members representing teachers (*professeurs*), parents and pupils. It is a forum for dialogue on all school matters, and has particular responsibility for extra-curricular activities. Every school has its own committee.

The committee's responsibility has been extended with the advent of the school work plans scheme, which introduces a substantial degree of decentralization. Every State school can draw up a project of its own, the aim being to “promote educational initiatives and action; organize extra-curricular activities, particularly cultural and sporting activities; take action to facilitate access to vocational training, the transition to working life, and occupational reintegration, particularly by means of in-company placements, partnerships with a company or public authority, and initiatives to develop educational activities."

School work plans are drawn up by individual education committees, submitted to the co-ordination centre for an opinion and authorized by the minister. There is provision for an assessment procedure.

The *school work plan co-ordination centre* is a financially independent public body with legal personality set up by the ministry for national education and vocational training to promote, co-ordinate, manage and assess the projects implemented. The centre's management board comprises three ministerial representatives, a representative of each of the professional associations concerned, and four representatives of head teachers of general and technical secondary schools. A government commissioner attends meetings of the management board in an advisory capacity.

The *conférence des professeurs* (conference of teachers) brings together the assembled teaching staff of a given school. It is consulted on all educational issues, and particularly on matters directly affecting the school.

The *conseil de classe* (class council) is responsible for decisions on matters of discipline and educational decisions on which pupils should move up to the next class (within the framework of existing regulations).

The *education council* was set up under the ministerial regulation of 29 October 1981 and comprises 42 members appointed by the minister for a renewable term of two years and representing: the clergy; the ministry of national education, vocational training and sports; the ministry of physical education and sport; the ministry of health; the ministry for the family and social solidarity; the ministry of the interior; the two committees of head teachers; the inspectorate; teachers from the various levels of education (delegated by their unions); parents' associations (four representatives); school sports and cultural associations; industry; private denominational education (one representative).

The council serves the ministry of national education, vocational training and sports in a consultative capacity. Its responsibility is to investigate general problems relating to education; issue opinions on questions put to it by the education minister; submit any proposals or suggestions it may wish to make on educational issues and legislative reforms and innovations in the field of school and extramural education, on its own initiative.

Control and inspection in pre-school and primary education

The inspectorate is responsible for maintaining standards in pre-school and primary education, reporting directly to the government (the ministry of national education, vocational training and sports).

The inspectorate operates nationally, with each of its 16 inspectors covering a specific geographical area. They report to the inspector-general, who in turn reports to the minister.

The inspectorate ensures compliance with legal and statutory provisions, the observance of national curricula and the use of suitable methods in each establishment - in short, all matters pertaining to education - and acts as an intermediary between schools and the ministry. It is consulted on matters concerning admission to primary school and other specific educational issues (such as the admission of disabled children) and decides on how remedial structures and new methods should be applied, etc.

The act of 9 August 1993 establishing an inspectorate of primary education was intended to "co-ordinate the monitoring of schools and the educational and administrative work of the inspectors in their respective areas of responsibility" by placing the 16 inspectors under the authority of a general inspector of primary education.

There are no head teachers at pre-school and primary level; teachers are directly answerable to the inspectors.

Controls and inspections in post-primary (secondary and post-secondary) education

Control and inspection at post-primary level are the responsibility of the head teacher, whose role in relation to the teaching staff is the same as that of the inspector in the primary system.

Up to now, systematic evaluation has not been a feature of the Luxemburg education system. No one body had previously been given that explicit task.

However, current laws and regulations do provide for a degree of assessment: the inspectorate assesses the

work of primary school teachers, and head teachers assess the work of secondary school teachers.

A number of one-time studies have been carried out in the past at the initiative of various organizations, but they were not part of a co-ordinated whole. Now, however, the role of the recently established Service de Coordination de la Recherche et de l'Innovation pédagogiques et technologiques (SCRIPT - co-ordination service for pedagogical and technological research and innovation) includes co-ordinating the assessment of the education system.

Self-assessment is not really an institutionalized practice. Within the pre-school and primary systems, assessment is a task for the inspectorate; in post-primary education, it falls to the head teacher.

There is no self-assessment procedure at post-primary level. Head teachers are responsible for supervising teaching staff, but there is no formal, regular assessment of teachers.

Based on the analyses of the SCRIPT (the co-ordination service for pedagogical and technological research and innovation) concerning the school results on a national level, schools can compare their own results with those of other schools.

Language

The 1989 curriculum guidelines, still in effect, state that:

> The teaching language shall, in principle, be that of the textbook. That is to say that German shall be used to teach German, mathematics, science awareness and the natural sciences, history, geography, religious education and civic instruction; Lëtzeburgesch shall be used to teach Lëtzeburgesch and French to teach French. In the self-expressive disciplines, Lëtzeburgesch may be used in music lessons, physical education, sports and creative activities, and for 'options and various'. However, written explanations shall be given in German. In science awareness classes, Lëtzeburgesch may be used for experiments and practical work

Teaching of Values

Traditionally, secularism is not a key principle of the Luxemburg system. Religious education remained at the forefront in primary education until 1998. In secondary education the choice between religious and secular courses has existed for twenty years. In general, religious education is integrated into the official school programmes as a regular part of the curriculum, and school achievements in this domain, as in others, are accounted for in the school reports. Instruction for preparation for first communion takes place very often during normal school hours. Nevertheless, secular courses have been functioning in several local communities for several years. The law of 10 July 1998 concerning the organisation of primary education, completed by regulation of 3 August 1998, has introduced the generalisation of moral and social education courses in primary education for children not participating in religious courses: the courses, of two hours duration, are held in parallel.

The current syllabus (August 1989) is based on the following philosophy:

> The fundamental vocation of primary school is to ensure that everyone receives the basic education which is indispensable for all subsequent learning and training and for the process of adjusting to new circumstances. While it is true that certain elementary cultural skills such as reading, writing and

arithmetic are a priority concern, so too are the development of rational thinking, problem-solving faculties and communication abilities. This basic education should also develop suitable attitudes and behavior towards society, the natural and cultural environment, technology and the individual him- or herself.

The function of education is to help every child to become a free, independent, responsible, caring adult, by developing individual aptitudes, attitudes and behavior, by teaching skills and by imparting basic knowledge.

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