

# Chapter 6

## Luxembourg: Small, Multilingual and International

### 6.1 Education System

Luxembourg has the highest share of students who do not speak the language of instruction at home and the highest number of foreign languages learnt per student. The annual taught time for foreign languages exceeds those of all other countries. (Eurydice and Eurostat 2012)

Luxembourg is a small country with just over half a million inhabitants who speak multiple languages. Luxembourgish (*Lëtzebuergesch*), the native language, exists alongside the official governmental language French, and German which is widely used and taught in schools (e.g., for alphabetization). This multilingualism represents an important theme in education: over 40 % of time is spent on foreign languages in primary education.<sup>1</sup> According to University of Luxembourg researcher Antoine Fischbach, ‘alphabetization happens in German as if German were the students’ mother tongue (which it is not for about 99 %). Luxembourgish is used as a language for “integration” and French is taught in a kind of integrative approach (not mother tongue and not foreign language either).<sup>2</sup> English is taught as a true foreign language. While German is the main language of instruction in elementary school and lower secondary education, most subjects in higher secondary education are taught in French (Eurydice 2014 – overview, Grand-Duché de Luxembourg 2012). The diversity of languages presents difficulties for all students, but especially for immigrant children who speak yet another language at home. At the University of Luxembourg, teaching occurs in English, French and German (Boxes 6.1 and 6.2).

The second important theme in Luxembourgish education involves international focus. At all levels, around 50 % of pupils are foreign nationals. In many cases,

---

<sup>1</sup> This is very high in comparison to other countries: the number is under 15 % in all other European countries. See Eurydice and Eurostat 2012, p. 12. Note that foreign language is defined as a language not usually spoken at home.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication from Dr. Antoine Fischbach, research scientist at University of Luxembourg, May 2014.

**Box 6.1: Luxembourg – The Basics**

- 0.5 million inhabitants
- Capital: Luxembourg
- Grand-duchy
- Luxembourgish, German and French are official languages
- 43 % of inhabitants are foreign nationals
- Social-democratic/green/liberal coalition in power

**Box 6.2: Education in Luxembourg**

- State education free at all levels
- Compulsory from age 4 to 16
- Primary education until age 14, mostly in German
- Two types of secondary education: general and technical, mostly in French
- One university, with selective access to certain study programs
- Around half the pupils at all levels have foreign nationality
- Primary and secondary education administered by Ministry for Education and Youth, higher education by Ministry for Higher Education and Research

these children do not have one of Luxembourg's languages as their mother tongue, which increases the number of languages these students must learn to at least four. National and foreign pupils are not equally represented in the different types of education, with foreigners overrepresented in the more vocational types (See Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse 2014<sup>3</sup>). To adapt to the needs of the pupils and taking into account the small size of the country, Luxembourg 'developed a range of measures allowing its residents to enroll in education and training in the Greater Region<sup>4</sup> or in other foreign countries. Especially in the field of higher education, a strong tradition of educational mobility has thus been established' (Eurydice 2014 – overview). One additional reason for this mobility is the simple fact that no university existed until the University of Luxembourg was founded in 2003 (see below).

Primary level, called *enseignement fondamental*, lasts until the age of 14. No differentiation between pupils on the basis of academic abilities is made (see Fig. 6.1).

<sup>3</sup>In secondary education, foreign nationals make up around 20 % of pupils in the general secondary education and over 40 % in technical secondary education.

<sup>4</sup>In the Greater Region of Luxembourg, a number of regions in Belgium, Germany and France cooperate with Luxembourg on economic and cultural subjects. Apart from the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, the region includes Wallonia and the German-speaking region in Belgium, the Länder of Rheinland-Pfalz and Saarland in Germany and the region Lorraine in France.

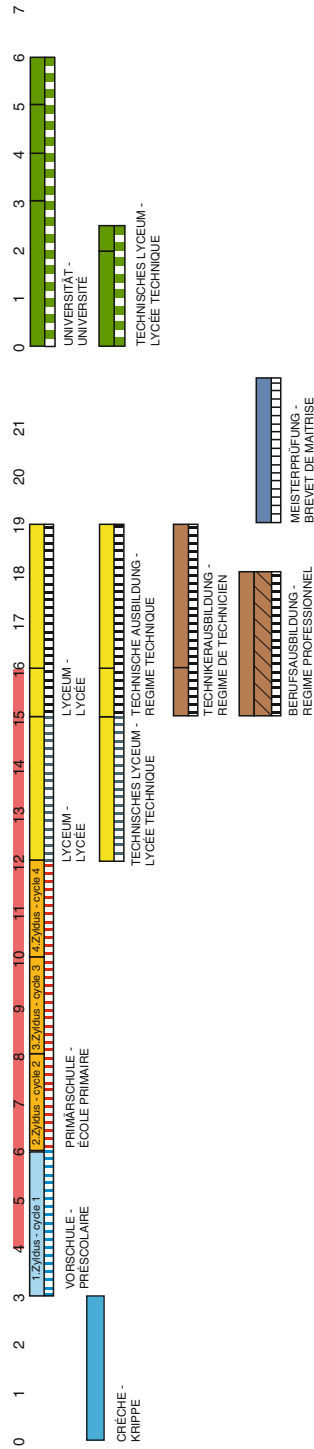


Fig. 6.1 Structure of the Luxembourgish education system (Eurydice 2014) see Fig. 3.1b for standardized legend

Secondary level (*enseignement secondaire*) becomes split in the general *lycée*, preparing for university, and the *lycée technique*, mostly preparing for vocational education.<sup>5</sup> A number of private and international schools, mainly aimed at the expat community in Luxembourg, also exist. Around 13 % of all pupils are in private education, 90 % of which are foreign nationals (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse 2014).

State lycées generally educate for a diploma called *baccalauréat*, which is also known in neighboring countries and makes admission into foreign universities easy for students from Luxembourg.<sup>6</sup>

Luxembourg has one university taking undergraduate students within its borders: the University of Luxembourg (UL).<sup>7</sup> In 2003, UL formed when several smaller institutions merged. Over half of the approximately 6,200 students come from foreign countries and thus the university has an extensive admission scheme.<sup>8</sup> Local students can enter with their high school diploma, which grants general access to higher education. However, for certain courses student numbers are restricted. The selection process depends on the specific program. For example, a bachelor in information science selection focuses on grades with particular emphasis on science grades, and for a bachelor in psychology selection occurs through a personal interview (see Eurydice 2014, chapter 7.2.1 and University of Luxembourg 2014 for more details) (Box 6.3).

### Box 6.3: Local Terminology

The word 'honors' is not used in Luxembourg. Due to its multilingualism, different terms are used to refer to gifted and talented pupils:

- *élèves à haut potentiel* (pupils with high potential)
- *élèves talentueux* (talented pupils)
- *begabt* (gifted)
- *leistungsstark* ('strong achievements')

<sup>5</sup>The highest track of the *lycée technique* prepares for university as well.

<sup>6</sup>Technical lycées have their own programs, which lead to a diploma called *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur*.

<sup>7</sup>Apart from the University of Luxembourg, there is also the Institut Universitaire International Luxembourg (IUIL), which is not taking undergraduate students, but focuses on continuing education and applied research. There is also a small number of foreign institutions with a campus in Luxembourg. These include:

- the private Brussels Business Institute for Higher Education focuses on tourism and hospitality and has a campus in the castle of Wiltz. It can award BA degrees recognized by the Luxembourg government;
- the European Center of the American Miami University;
- a college of business belonging to the Sacred Heart University, also from the USA.

<sup>8</sup>The University of Luxembourg actively takes part in EU exchange programs like Erasmus. Local bachelor students are required to spend a semester abroad.

## 6.2 Culture and Policy Towards Excellence

Providing special opportunities to talented students is not a focus point in Luxembourgish education policy. Instead, policy focuses on languages and on the relations with other countries, facilitating the flow of students to and from Luxembourg. Excellent students can distinguish themselves by participating in programs to study abroad. The university also has a number of other ways to stimulate excellent students. Since 2007, the Top Student Prizes are awarded annually to nine of its best students. The university is divided into three departments (faculties) and three students from each faculty are chosen.<sup>9</sup> The prize differs each year. In 2013, it was a 3-week summer school in Asian studies at Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan. In 2012, the best 18 students from the two previous years travelled to China for a month-long course in Chinese language and culture (University of Luxembourg 2013). Other awards for excellent students include scholarships to study abroad, for example grants to study in the USA funded by the American embassy (Box 6.4).

### Box 6.4: Key Players in Excellence

The key players in excellence in education in Luxembourg are:

- The Ministry for Education and Youth
- The Ministry for Higher Education and Research
- Centre for Documentation and Information on Higher Education
- The University of Luxembourg

The university also runs some programs for talented secondary school students. In the Uni@Lycées program, university professors visit a school to give a lecture in their subject and discuss it with students. To take part, students must send a motivated application letter.<sup>10</sup>

Additional provisions exist for talented children in primary and secondary education. Schools in Luxembourg ‘are allowed to individually develop special programs for groups of gifted pupils’ (Ziegler et al. 2013, p. 391). Children with good learning abilities can start primary education a year early and/or skip classes (Eurydice 2014, chapter 5.3). There are also some programs for children with higher abilities, especially in science subjects. One example is the enrichment program at a lycée in Diekirch (Lycée classique de Diekirch 2013), where smart students receive extra challenges in- and outside the school.

---

<sup>9</sup>Personal communication from Jenny Hällen Hedberg, Head of international relations at University of Luxembourg, March 2014.

<sup>10</sup>More information at [www.uni.lu/universite/science\\_public/uni\\_lycees](http://www.uni.lu/universite/science_public/uni_lycees)

Lycées can also apply at the ministry for funding for an extra project outside the regular curriculum. Such projects are called *projets d'établissement*. They are used to inspire and motivate students and some of them are specifically aimed at high-potential students (CCPE 2013).

Broadly speaking, however, no clear policy on the subject of excellence in higher education exists.

### 6.3 New Developments

Two recent developments may serve as a 'trigger' to develop policy on the issue of excellence in education: the 2012 PISA results and the recent installation of a new government.

Luxembourg took part in the PISA research on competences of 15-year-olds since 2003. In all years, Luxembourg scored around or below the OECD average for all subjects (OECD 2013<sup>11</sup>). The results have prompted renewed discussion about the multilingualism in schools where the government has been studying new policy options (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle and Université de Luxembourg 2013, p. 160).

At the time of writing, a new government had recently been installed in Luxembourg, for the first time without the christian-democratic party.<sup>12</sup> It remains uncertain yet what consequences this will entail for policy towards higher education.

This concludes our overview of Luxembourg, as there are no honors programs at the single university in the country.

Concluding our discussion of the Benelux countries, we found honors education highly developed in the Netherlands and starting to develop in Belgium. The Netherlands and Flanders share the same language and this facilitates easy sharing of information about the development of honors education. Also, the local culture towards excellence seems to develop in similar ways, although government support is mostly lacking in Flanders. In the Walloon region of Belgium and Luxembourg, some facilities to promote talent development in compulsory education were found, but apart from the inter-university program Université Métropolitaine, no honors programs have developed yet.

We now move to the north of Europe, to discuss the situation in the five Nordic countries.

---

<sup>11</sup>The trend in the 2012 results is slightly upwards. The reading score improved by 16 points compared to 2009, but is still below average.

<sup>12</sup>The new government came into power in December 2013. Claude Meisch is the new minister for both the Education and Youth ministry and the Higher Education and Research ministry.

**Open Access** This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License, which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

## Literature<sup>13</sup>

- CCPE (Centre de Coordination des projets d'établissement). (2013). *Les 18 projets d'établissement de l'année scolaire 2012–13 – Descriptifs succincts*. Retrieved from: [www.ccpe.lu/media/pe-2012-2013.pdf](http://www.ccpe.lu/media/pe-2012-2013.pdf). 9 Dec 2013.
- Eurydice. (2014). *Eurydicia – European Encyclopedia on national education systems*. Retrieved from: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php>. Data for different countries gathered November 2013–May 2014. Last checked 22 May 2014.
- Eurydice, & Eurostat. (2012). *Key data on teaching languages at school in Europe 2012*. Retrieved from: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/143EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/143EN.pdf). 11 Dec 2013.
- Grand-Duché de Luxembourg. (2012). *Education et formation*. Retrieved from: [www.luxembourg.public.lu/fr/societe/education-formation/index.html](http://www.luxembourg.public.lu/fr/societe/education-formation/index.html). 9 Dec 2013.
- Lycée classique de Diekirch. (2013). *Encadrement des élèves à haut potentiel*. Retrieved from: [www.lcd.lu/projets/eip/](http://www.lcd.lu/projets/eip/). 9 Dec 2013.
- Ministère de l'Éducation nationale et de la Formation professionnelle, & Université de Luxembourg. (2013). *PISA 2012 – Nationaler Bericht Luxembourg*. Retrieved from: <http://www.men.public.lu/fr/publications/secondaire/etudes-internationales/pisa-2012/index.html>. 8 Dec 2013.
- Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse [Luxembourg]. (2014). *Key figures of the Luxembourgish education system*. Retrieved from: <http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/systeme-educatif/statistiques-analyses/enseignement-chiffres/2012-2013-depliant/en.pdf>. 5 Mar 2014.
- OECD. (2013). *PISA 2012 results*. Retrieved from: [www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm). 12 Dec 2013.
- University of Luxembourg. (2013). *An international experience for the university's top students*. Retrieved from: [http://www.uni.lu/university/news/slideshow/an\\_international\\_experience\\_for\\_the\\_university\\_s\\_top\\_students/%28language%29/eng-GB](http://www.uni.lu/university/news/slideshow/an_international_experience_for_the_university_s_top_students/%28language%29/eng-GB). 9 Dec 2013.
- University of Luxembourg. (2014). *Application – Choose bachelor*. Retrieved from: [http://www.uni.lu/students/application\\_re\\_registration/eu\\_application\\_choose\\_bachelor](http://www.uni.lu/students/application_re_registration/eu_application_choose_bachelor). 14 Jan 2014.
- Ziegler, A., Stoeger, H., Harder, B., & Balestrini, D. P. (2013). Gifted education in German-speaking Europe. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*, 36(3), 384–411.

---

<sup>13</sup> **Note:** Literature used to prepare this book is included on this list. Some of the entries are in local languages and have not been read completely by the researchers. Instead, they have been searched with keywords to retrieve relevant information.