

VET Study visit Koblenz, Germany, 14 - 16 May 2012

Visit details

1st day morning

Study visit participants:

- Maria Eugenia Caldas Blanco (expert from Spain)
- Fernand Sauer (expert from Luxemburg)
- Margit Theis-Scholz (expert from Germany and host)
- Laura Vesajoki (European Agency staff member)
- Harald Weber (European Agency staff member)



Fernand, Margit, Harald, Maria, Laura (left to right)

1st day morning

Visit of the School for Vocational Education and Training in Andernach



Welcome by **Rainer Finkenrath**, Deputy Headmaster of the public VET school. The school has currently about 1800 learners, 85 teachers and 86 classes. 1200 learners are enrolled in the dual system, 600 in full-time school.

Tom Lenz, a teacher, introduced the study visit team to the case of a young man with hearing impairment (see presentation [1-Andernach.pdf](#)). He is an apprentice for electronic technician. 1.5 days per week he attends the school, and 3.5 days per week he is in a large company. He does not like to have a special status and he didn't like signing, so he decided to leave the school for hearing impaired people because he felt that he didn't learn enough. Half of his study time has passed.

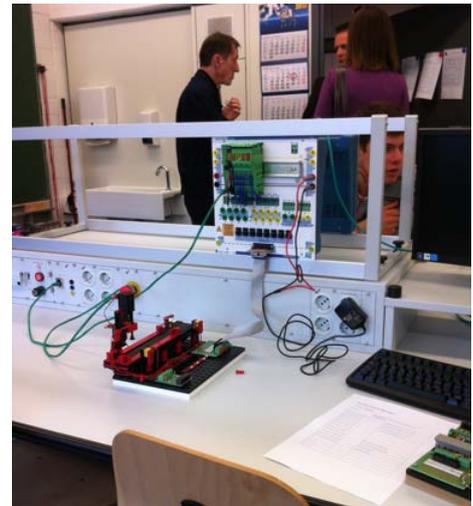
In July 2010 his teachers received for 1 day special information from teachers of a school for hearing impaired students. The student himself also has good support by a peer student, who always sits next to him. The student does not need any further technical support.

There were two other students in the past with hearing impairments as well, who studied car mechanics; they used sign language and managed their studies successfully. Else there are only 2 more physically disabled students at the school. When it comes to adaptations with regards to the examination due to certain disabilities, for those joining full-time school the school decides, for the vocational school (i.e. the dual system courses) it is the Chamber of Industry and Commerce ('Industrie- und Handelskammer', abbreviation: IHK).

Most companies provide more apprenticeship contracts than they need for filling in gaps / vacancies. During their apprenticeships, students get 600 Euro per month in average during their first year. This is not enough money to move out from their parents' homes, yet companies require mobile apprentices who move to areas where they are needed.

At the beginning of each course special days are performed so students can get to know each other and to build up social relationships. With regard to soft skills, teaching behaviour supports this during the school year (e.g. teamwork).

Visit of *technical classroom* of **Frank Barth**. Most of the students work in teams of two, trying to solve a problem (programming task). The class is split in a practical and a theoretical class. The theory class is preparing their programming task and will swap places when they are ready with the other half. (The young man introduced by Mr Lenz is part of the practical group but not easy to identify).



Visit of a *prevocational training course* of 1 year duration ('Berufsvorbereitungsjahr', abbreviation BVJ) with focus on woodworking. The course of **Martin Buchinger** is covering topics like German, mathematics, painting, sport, technical drawing and ethics. With regard to the profile of his students he summarised:

"The class consists of 16 students: 14 boys and 2 girls, between 16 and 17 years old. The majority of students comes from schools for children with special educational needs or from regional schools but without any qualifications. They shall gain occupational maturity here. The reasons for attending the BVJ are differing from difficult family situations, tendency/readiness toward violence within the family, separation of parents, loss of a parent by death, social environment (community attachment), up to petty crime, drug- and alcohol consumption, etc.

Very often parents are overburdened with the upbringing. Partly the pupils' behaviour is shielded by their parents. Approx. one third of the pupils have a supporting youth worker. The willingness of parents to cooperate with the school is very low. The participation level at parents' evenings is at 20%.

The students show noticeable ADS/ADHS symptoms - two cases are medically certified ADS. On the whole, the class is very restless, concentration falls rapidly, the frustration level is very low. The basic knowledge of orthography, reading, basic arithmetic operations is incomplete. Image of school and teachers is characterized negatively.

One female student (17 year-old) has a 2-year-old daughter, one student has entered drug treatment, three students are expecting imprisonment for 2-4 weeks during summer holidays - the reasons are various types of offences, such as personal injury, theft, drugs. One student was given the condition to complete successfully an alcoholic treatment. In order to get a positive social forecast, they all have to attend school lessons regularly."

The teacher is 20 hrs a week in this class, 4 hours he's leading an arts class. He is on his own, does not get support, has no team behind him or any kind of supervision, due to limited money and strict school structures. Of his 16 students, only between 4 and 12 attend each day, due to low motivation and other factors. He also does visits at home, and very rarely together with the police. The whole school has only 0.5 social worker, which he considers insufficient.

Much of the information about difficult students given from previous schools is not valid in the teacher's opinion. He allows the students to have a fresh start into his 1 year course and ignores the information.

Students are characterised by him as being quite passive and consumer-oriented. To motivate them, they can design and paint their own school tables which they will then use the rest of the year.

Visit of a *prevocational training course* of 1 year duration ('Berufsvorbereitungsjahr', abbreviation BVJ) with focus on metal work. Students of **Norbert Retterath** were just in the process of designing a clock made of metal.

Students of prevocational classes select the focus themselves. But they come with a transition plan, where they had to identify beforehand the school they wished to go to. This helps to ensure that no student gets lost in the system.



The students present the two tasks they are currently doing (clock design and creating a screw clamp) to the study visit team.

In these prevocational courses students also have 8 weeks of internships. Teachers are then obliged to visit the companies where they work.

More or less from one third to half of the students at the prevocational classes continue to the real education at the school. There are however no follow-up statistics of students who have left / finished the course available. The city of Koblenz wants vocational schools to try to collect this data. The school does have questionnaires for companies where students have concluded their apprenticeships in order to get feedback from the labour market.



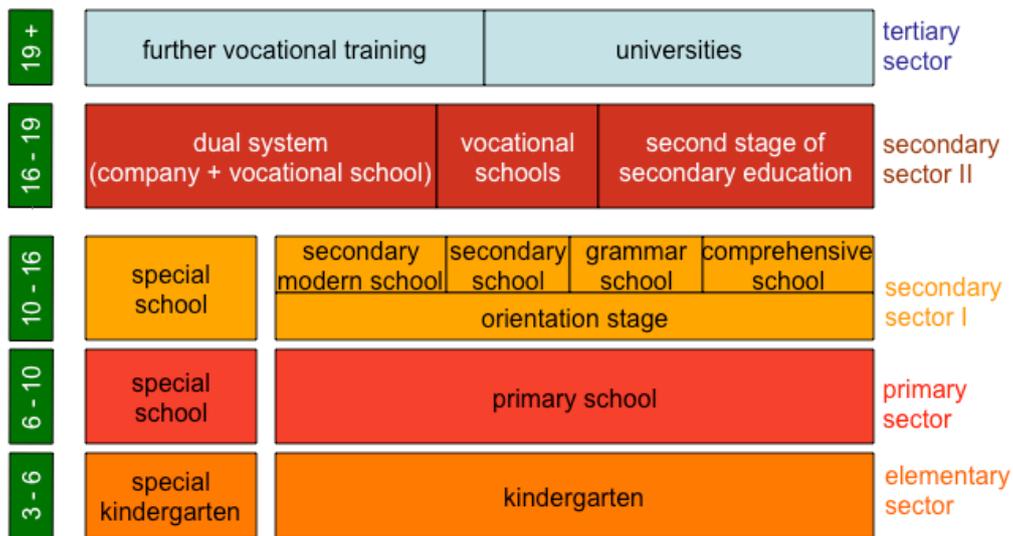
1st day afternoon

Meeting at the School Board (ADD) to talk about the key elements and basic principles of Vocational Education Training in Germany and of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate.

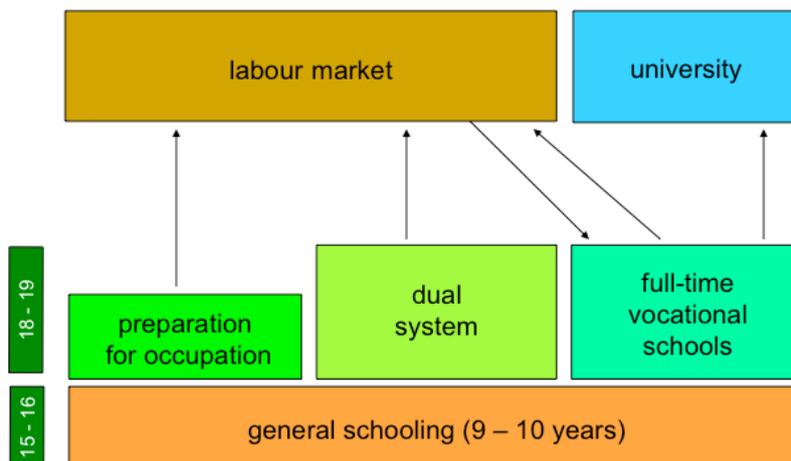
Welcome by **Margit Theis-Scholz**, host of the study visit and responsible for special schools at the School Board.

Presentation by **Monika Hahn**, responsible for dual VET schools in this area of Rhineland-Palatinate (see presentation **2-Dual-system.pdf**).

The German education system:



The German system of Vocational Education and Training:



The dual system is a good example because of its close links between the labour market and education, and due to the high chances for learners to get a job afterwards. The examination of learners is done by the school and by the company, to ensure joint educational responsibility. There are about 1.5 million students in the dual system per year. 52% of pupils decide to join the dual system after school. Although there are about 350 recognised professions available, 10 – 20 belong to the most famous ones, such as car mechanics, hairdressers, office managers. In total 500 000 companies provide apprenticeships.

35% of their times apprentices stay at the VET school. Their time at school is made up of 4 lessons in general subjects and 8 lessons in specific subjects. With regard to soft skills, this is not yet implemented in the curriculum as an own topic, and therefore needs to be addressed more implicitly in the curriculum and in teachers' practice.

The social partner defines the skills needed, while the Federal government and the Länder define the framework with regard to training and education. About 80 000 students leave school without certification each year, an estimated number of 20% drop-out. A national institute (BIBB) analyses drop-outs and gives feedback to the National Ministry of Education.

Presentation by **Margit Theis-Scholz** (see **3-SNE-in-VET.pdf**) on the inclusion of students with special needs in VET.

BF1 is an abbreviation for classes with certificate but with no company that hires the students as apprentices. But as the students still have to attend school for at least 12 years, these classes are needed. There is also the concept of stepwise apprenticeships to reach a helper level status in the respective profession.

The job centre makes a (psychological) statement in the last year of grammar school which of the two types of a curriculum (either normal or reduced) is recommended for a student. This statement should be written up together with the school, but this is the case mainly in special schools. Normal schools often just send students there and only the parents of the student get to know the result. This is a procedure in Rhineland-Palatinate, but other Länder have similar approaches.

The entrance qualification (eQ) for weaker students is recognised by companies. It involves practical phases in companies.

Possibilities of support VET schools in trying inclusive ways:

- Social work at schools: more social workers are needed
- Counselling by psychologists: not regularly in schools; they should work both on student and on teacher level
- Further education offerings of the institute for teacher training
- Consulting by special advisers for inclusion: while these exist in primary and secondary education, they don't exist in VET
- Integration help in case of handicaps and severe special needs

2nd day morning

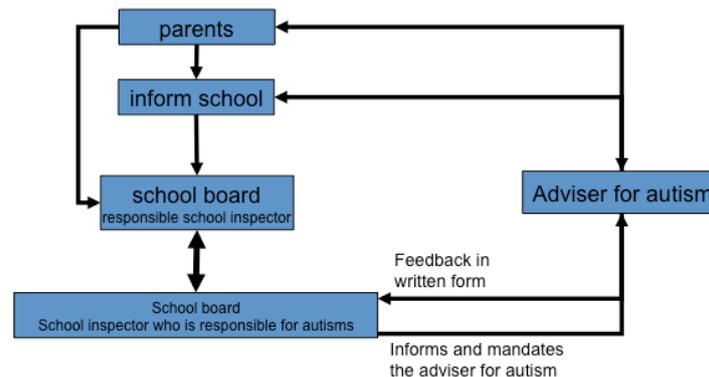
Visit to the vocational training centre Rommersdorf

Welcome by **Gisela Schiffer-Sommer**, head of Case Management, at the Vocational Training Centre Rommersdorf of Heinrich Haus in Neuwied, and introduction to the centre. Heinrich Haus offers the following areas:

- school-based education: 1 school with 400 pupils with focus on motoric development, 1 school with 70 pupils with focus on holistic and motoric development, 1 pre-vocational school with 450 pupils with focus on motor, learning, sensor and psychological disabilities
- vocational education: entry diagnostics, vocational preparation and vocational education and training (e.g. administration, metal work, electronics, wood technology, interior design, house keeping, agriculture)
- employment: sheltered workshops for people with disabilities, day care centres, integration service, supported employment, diagnostics with regard to ability to work
- production and services: manifold offers including gardening services, renovation and interior work, woodwork, packaging, data archiving, label printing, laundry, car service
- living / residence: 54 places for children with motor or complex disabilities, 135 places for adults with motor or complex disabilities and 80 places for seniors older than 65.
- medicine / therapy: various medical services, physiotherapy, ergo therapy, logopedics, supported communication
- ambulant care
- culture and leisure

A group of experts gathered to discuss in particular the situation of people with autism in VET.

Presentation by **Margit Theis-Scholz** on the coordination of consulting for autism. The number of students with autism is increasing. Therefore, 6 special school teachers act meanwhile as advisors for autism. Twice per year a conference with these advisors is arranged for mutual exchange.



A round-table meeting for performing a diagnosis in the form of a dialogue is proposed, addressing teachers, parents, autism advisors, potentially also therapists, the Lebenshilfe

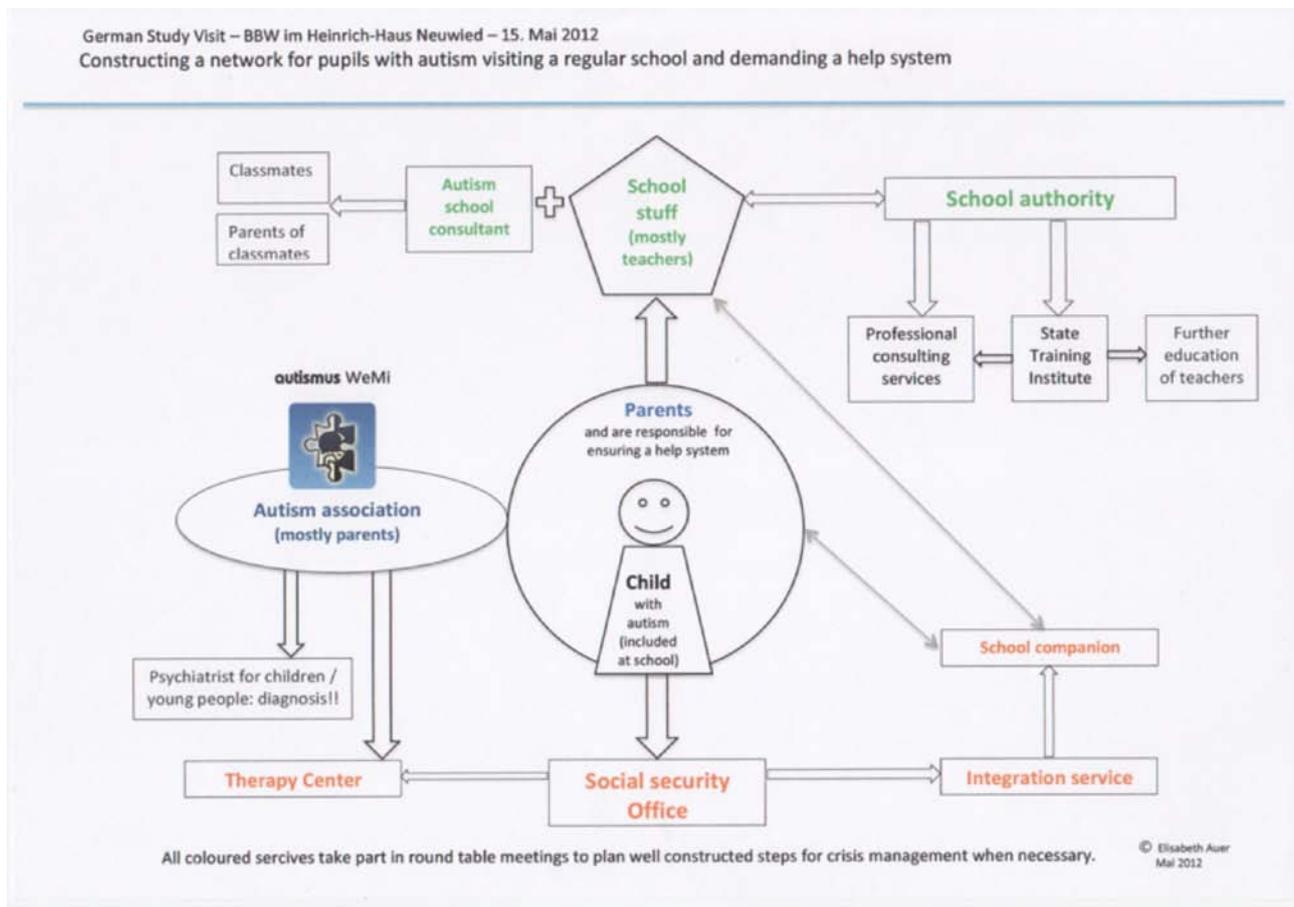
(see below), a personal support person, headmasters. Assumptions for making this round-table successful:

- Participants are experts
- Advancement of multidisciplinary collaboration and activation of different competences
- Solving of problems “on location“ has priority
- Direct participants have primary responsibility
- Leading idea is to find a common consensus as a key element of quality
- Necessity of reliable structure in the on-going process of consulting

The network that needs to be set up to work effectively consists of:

- Working with parents
- Youth welfare offices
- Educational institutions (Lebenshilfe, centre for special therapeutics, Foundation Bethesda, authorized person for people with handicaps, ...)
- Service for integration

Presentation by **Elisabeth Auer**, mother of a daughter with down syndrome, and head of the regional autism association.



In her presentation Mrs Auer highlights the important role of school companions. However,

there are no regulations about how school companions work together with parents or with school staff, which is problematic in the case of conflicts. Therefore, round tables should happen way before a crisis is happening, but too often it only takes place afterwards. The schema shown above shows how the autism association would like to see things happening, and what it works towards. Still problematic is, that too much needs to be done and initiated by the parents, and that responsibilities of the different stakeholders in the network are not clarified / defined.

Presentation by **Monika Schuh**, Bethesda-St. Martin foundation, providing, among others, services to support people with special needs in the transition from school to work (kind of job coaches). The Bethesda-St. Martin foundation was founded 1855 and is today working in a variety of areas including help for elderly, youth and people with special needs. They have c.600 workers and the foundation is supported by the state. Their services to integrate people with special needs has set up a new offer 3 years ago called 'ÜSB' focusing on the transition from school to work. It currently works with 11 schools of which 1 is a regular school.

Integration services

- give assistance and support starting in school until the transition into work and beyond
- have many years experience in integration of handicapped people into employment
- know the employment market and the main players
- know the current funding sources and employment possibilities
- familiar with disabilities / illnesses, have experience with the target group
- think systematically, individual-centred work.

The service has a fixed schedule when they are available in each school. Pupils can ask for an appointment. The support starts two years before the school finishes by providing information on vocational choices. In the process single consultations and parents' evenings are offered, and the service also acquires suitable internships for the pupils. The network in which the service works consists of parents, schools, the school board, employment agencies, employers, associations, organisations and initiatives, chambers of trade, and youth welfare.

Internships are used to inform and prepare the pupils for their future work environment. Pupils get support in the preparation of applications for employment and coaching support for upcoming interviews. They also offer an evaluation to adapt the transition plan together with the school. Finally, they also identify support needs in the social environment and organise support possibilities accordingly.

After transition support does not end necessarily. There is a possibility to further support after leaving school, e.g. by other job coaching activities or by additional support during qualification measures.

Areas of internships presented as pictures: Working in a garage and working in homes for elderly people.

Presentation by **Elfi Höfer-Mendling**, from Lebenshilfe Koblenz e.V. Ambulante Hilfen. Lebenshilfe is a self-help association founded by parents and experts in 1958, with 135000 members in 527 local and regional chapters today. The board of this association consists of at least 50% people with a disability, their parents or relatives and the main offices can be found in Berlin and Marburg.

The service offered by Lebenshilfe supports and accompanies children, youths and adults

with disabilities in schools and at work. Lebenshilfe is one of the actors in the network for supporting people with autism in educational institutions. 15 employees currently support 12 male and 1 female student with autism. These employees are called integration helper or school companions. Their tasks are:

- accompany and support pupils at school,
- instruct, empower, provide hints for self-help,
- guide teachers, co-students and parents to understand what autism means and how to best intervene,
- initiate and moderate contacts between the student and co-students,
- create a supportive environment in regular settings,
- facilitate individual achievements of the student.

This service is complemented by autism-specific guidance and qualification of school companions via in-house courses and further qualification, regular exchange meetings of all relevant staff, and counselling and support of children, youth and their parents as well as all others involved with regard to autism, i.e. diagnostics, therapies, leisure, self help groups, etc).

Finally, **Mr M.** presented himself. He is currently learning to become an industrial clerk. His Asperger syndrome was detected late, after several visits at hospitals. He considers Asperger not just as a problem, as it brings as well some benefits. So he is interested in languages and in music and has several hobbies. But often he is lacking power, so he prefers thinking than doing. His first visit to the VET institution was 2008, but he says that he had too many problems at that time and consequently didn't start yet then. In 2010 he went through an assessment and industrial clerk was proposed to him due to his intellectual capabilities.

His biggest problem is that he is often tired, sometimes he even has sleep attacks. Also, he doesn't like people telling him what to do, which of course is difficult in an education and training phase. Personally, he considers the dependency from his parents as a problem (especially when it comes to transportation). He works in a so-called competence workshop, a cooperation between the VET centre and a sheltered workshop. His plan is to study Sinology, but he needs to go through VET first and master again his A-levels.

Picture: Job advertisements collected from newspapers at public display at the VET centre Heinrich Haus



2nd day afternoon

Visit of the chamber of crafts (HWK) in Koblenz



The study visit team was welcomed at the chamber and shown around the premises. The first visit was at the construction workshop. All participants are disadvantaged and follow a reduced curriculum in the 1-year pre-vocational class (BVJ). In case strengths or skills are detected, then higher standards can easily be aimed at any time. There are 3 different degrees possible, two of them for 2 years (practitioner in building construction, and building construction practitioner) offering an opportunity for continuing to get the certificate for the 3-year education and training (e.g. bricklayer). The students have 80 days of internship per year by order of the employment office. In Germany, the 'Gesellenbrief' (certificate of apprenticeship) is usually the minimum certificate needed to get a job, without this certificate it is quite difficult or job offers are not well paid.



In a neighbour room, a roof was built to allow roofers who had an accident at work to rehearse walking and working on roofs again (part of the rehabilitation process).

The study visit team also observed students in the painters workshop where a simulation of an exam under real conditions took place. Students who take this examination have 1 day of theory exam and 2-2½ days of practical exam. There can be a translator as a 'helping aid' for a student in order to complete the exam.

Three students were interviewed and offered their views on the vocational education and training opportunities.

Student 1: He first visited a special school, then a pre-vocational class to make his educational certificate. But he did not get a job afterwards, so he started qualification and training at the Chamber. He just succeeded with the interim examination and seeks a company so that he can proceed with the vocational examination in summer. His biggest challenges are written tasks, as he is dyslexic and also has problems with fine motor movements of his hands. He received ergotherapy which helped him a lot already.

Student 2: 20 years, visited a special school, then a secondary modern school and made his certificate. Afterwards he joined the pre-vocational class at the chamber of crafts and started an apprenticeship meanwhile. His best experiences were during a 2-week internship in Austria, as he learned completely different techniques.

Student 3: 21 years, visited a special school but did not succeed in getting the educational certificate due to high absenteeism. He worked for some time on low-paid jobs, then approached the chamber after a recommendation by the labour agency.

All three students agreed that the offers at the chamber helped them to mature, and to face reality. They stopped to escape from own problems and learned to face them and finally solve them where possible. They valued the offers of the chamber as fully sufficient.

Teachers, trainers and instructors create a complete package for each student. The teacher-student ratio is 1:8, trainer-student ratio is 1:12, and the social pedagogue-student ratio is also 1:12. Problems external to the educational field are also addressed to some extent, e.g. by visiting students at home, helping them when being called to court.



Finally, the study visit team was invited to visit a completely new building (Center for Alimentation and Health) that shortly will be officially opened. Butchers, bakers and hairdressers will get an opportunity to learn there in very modern facilities.