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The secondary education in Portugal

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1. In this brief paper we will try: (i) to give a general idea of the organisation of the educational system in Portugal; (ii) to outline the main education policy measures implemented in upper secondary education and training reform; (iii) to highlight some important policy options at vocational training, in particular the new vocational schools.

## The Portuguese education system: a brief introduction

2. Since 1986, Portugal has been undertaking a profound reform of its education system, with the aim of improving the social performance of the public service of teaching and education.

Between 1986 (when the new Educational System Law was adopted) and 1994, important transformations have been planned. Such changes, which will be described in this paper, have shaped the education system which has now the following characteristics:

- (i) Pre-school education covering 56% of children between 3 and 6 years.
- (ii) School education divided into basic, secondary and higher (polytechnic and university) education.
- (iii) Basic education of nine years, which coincides with compulsory and universal school attendance, divided into three successive cycles (see graph). This new nine-year basic education covers 80% of the population of school age, has a comprehensive design that is tending towards a common curriculum and lays the foundations for the

personal, social and vocational development of children and young people.

- (iv) A new system of secondary education<sup>(1)</sup>, which lasts for three years and comprises secondary schools and vocational schools. Secondary schools combine two types of courses - general courses (4) and technological courses (11) (Annex 1).
  - (v) A higher education system divided into two segments - university education and polytechnic education. This is the level of education which has expanded most rapidly at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.
  - (vi) An Out-of-school education system comprising different forms of recurrent education, vocational training, basic adult education and community education.
3. Schools attendance rates have evolved very favourably between 1985 and the present date, through the combined effects of an increase in social demand, a growth in the supply capacity (schools, equipment, teachers), a greater diversification of the education system and its progressive improvement and a growth of investment among 1987 and 1992.

Table 1  
School Attendance Rates

AGES	PORTUGAL		EC
	1987/88	1991/92	
3-5 years	30%	55%	80-90%
6-9 years	100%	100%	100%
10-11 years	90%	95%	100%
12-14 years	----	80%	100%
15-17 years	40%	70%	80%
18-24 years	11%	19%*	25%

Source: GEP

\* This is the average figure for school attendance rates between the ages of 18 and 24.

(1) This new system is restricted to upper secondary education, since the previously existing first cycle of secondary education, (lower level) has been integrated into basic compulsory education.

## Principal Measures for the reform of the education system (1988-1993)

4. Although it is difficult to deal with this vast and complex set of challenges, Portugal has embarked upon a reform of the education system which includes the following main policy measures:
  - (i) Revision of the network of schools, creating new basic education schools that are suited to the new nine-year period of school attendance, and integrating students and syllabuses;
  - (ii) Adoption of new curricula, both in basic education and secondary education, with new syllabuses and programmes in all subjects;
  - (iii) Revision of the student assessment system, making it less administrative and selective, and adapting it to fit the new educational perspectives of personal and social development for each student;
  - (iv) Reorganisation of the whole system of post-compulsory education through revision of the secondary school courses and curricula and the creation of vocational schools as an alternative form of training for young people;
  - (v) Alteration of the school management system, which is overdependent on the central administration and too self-centred around the teachers, creating a more autonomous school management, with greater social participation (parents, students, local authorities, local social and business organisations) and a higher degree of professionalism;
  - (vi) Development of a vast programme of continuous training for teachers, based both on institutions of higher education and locally-based Associated School Training Centres;
  - (vii) Revision of all art education, developing new art education opportunities for all students and better conditions for those who wish to follow a more vocational course of learning,

whether in music, dance and theatre, visual arts or cinema and audiovisual media.

In brief, these are the areas targeted by education policy measures. With the reform of the education system, the Portuguese government intends to improve the overall quality of the public education service, create new opportunities for the personal and social realisation of the future generations, and re-establish the "contract" between the education system and the society, a contract which had largely been broken off because of the school's difficulties in showing the necessary versatility to adjust to the very rapid and far-reaching social changes that have been taking place.

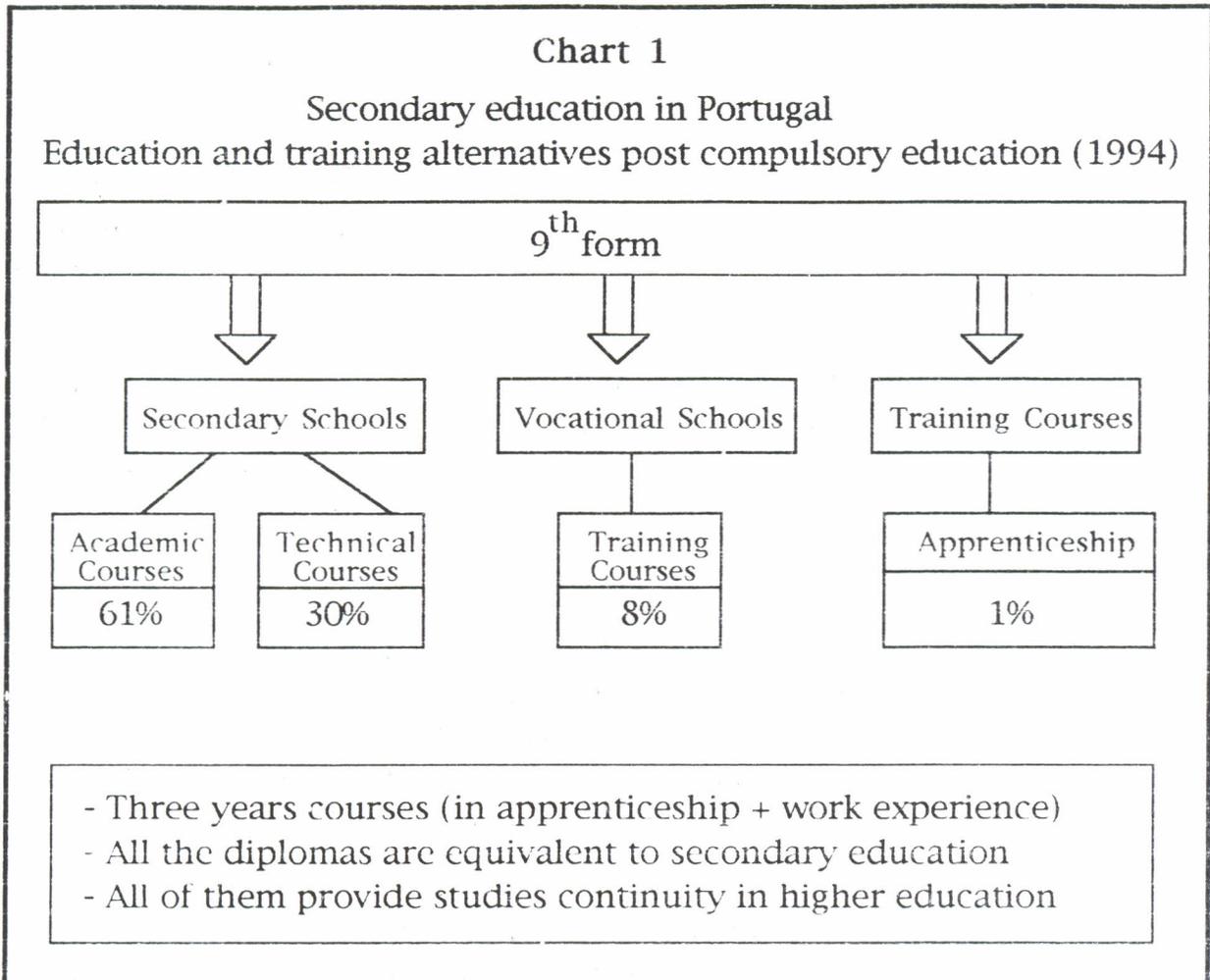
#### The important reform of upper secondary education

5. Despite both the present climate of continuing uncertainty and the fact that this is a traditionally critical segment of the education and training systems, the government has set in motion a profound alteration of its upper secondary education (16-18 years of age).

An attempt has been made to establish a core curriculum which is sufficiently solid and yet open to current social and economic mandates, while remaining multifaceted and polyvalent. We are aware of the limits of this new process, but we believe that we are closer to making an effective and efficient response to the new social challenges.

6. Nowadays, at the end of a 9 years period of compulsory and general education, students can choose the alternatives indicated in chart 1. In 1983 reappeared the "technical and vocational education" in secondary schools (as a new pathway) and later on, in 1989, a net of vocational schools emerged. The apprenticeship's system, based on the "dual system" is very incipient at this level.

In 1993 the "technical and vocational education" in secondary schools has been reformed and a new system of eleven "technological" courses is now developed (Annex 1).



7. This reform of the secondary education system has the following main features:
- (i) It diversifies the curriculum, courses and type of schools, in order to produce a more suitable response to existing personal, social and vocational expectations, while maintaining a common framework for all post-compulsory education.

Thus all courses at secondary and vocational schools:

- are three years in length;
  - have three training components, sociocultural, scientific and technological, with a different bias for each course;
  - have different certificates but are globally equivalent;
  - provide access to further studies.
- (ii) It is based on the belief that, whatever may be their future educational or vocational career, all young people leaving secondary school at eighteen or nineteen years of age must have solid and extensive sociocultural, scientific and technological skills;
- (iii) It is based on the supply of a diversified range of courses, which are much more in keeping with the personal options of young people, although all of them provide preparation for a broad group of related professions and are never restricted to one specific job.
- (iv) In its more general courses, which are still chosen by the largest proportion of young people (60%), it includes an optional area designed to give each student greater opportunities for choosing the school career which is best suited to his needs and expectations (technological or artistic training, with 20% of week schooltime).
- (v) It presupposes that the existence of a permanent supply of intermediate technicians, or highly skilled workers, may act as a factor of renewal for the labour market, leading to an improvement in processes and products, and an increase in competitiveness, and that it may further contribute to a gradual improvement in the quality of social life.

These characteristics are product of a common matrix that integrates all the post-compulsory and training pathways. This matrix is developed as follows:

**Chart 2**  
**Common Matrix of post-compulsory education and training in Portugal**  
**(1993)**

Characteristics Pathways	Access Level	Length (years and hours)	Components of training (% of total timetable)		
			Sociocultural	Scientific	Technological
Secondary schools 1. General Courses	9 year	3 years (3.270h)	34%	45%	21%
2. Thecnological Courses	9 year	3 years (3.270h)	34%	30%	36%
Vocational Schools	9 year	3 years (3.600h)	25%	25%	50%
Apprenticeship (Level III - EC)	9 year	3 or 4 years (4.800h)	19%	19%	62% (includes work experience)

Until this moment the principal consequence of the recent evolution of secondary education and training is the rapid growth of the demand of "thechnological courses" and vocational schools. In fact, in 1983, in consequence of the total unification of secondary education (vocational training has been eliminated in the 70.ies), only 1% of the students went to vocational education and training; in 1991/92 they were 15% and in 1993/94 they are 39%.

#### Vocational schools: a new model for training

8. Vocational schools emerged in Portugal in 1989. They were strategically voted to young people having completed their basic general education and open to people between 16 and 18 years

old. These schools (160 at this moment) combine the following main features:

- (i) They are not state-owned schools, as they come from the local initiative of companies, local authorities, business and other associations, unions, cooperatives and foundations which freely and responsibly assume the role of promoters; these schools represent a new model of social partnership;
- (ii) they were set up to meet local and regional needs as defined by their local promoters, and are closely linked to the social, economic and cultural activities of each area territory;
- (iii) they offer programs leading to professional certified qualifications, at Level III, in general after three years (3,600 hours), or equivalent to the 12th grade or secondary education. They also give access to studies in polytechnics and universities;
- (iv) They have institutionalised a system of progression based on a very demanding modular structure, which is unlikely to lead to waste;
- (v) They qualify a new generation of intermediate technicians and all courses have three training components: socio-cultural and technological this last component normally accounts for about 50% of the total hours.

On the one hand, it is an example of an educational model which is essentially centred in the training context, while including various types of on the job training and work experience throughout the training period. In these aspects it is different from the dual system. On the other hand, we are looking at a model of private initiative, locally controlled but with a clear regulatory role of the State which also provides technical and financial support. Here it can be distinguished from the completely autonomous independent systems.

## 9. Characteristics of vocational schools

We will attempt to sum up the principal reasons for the relative success of this new approach in educational policy in some key-questions:

- (i) Vocational schools have benefited from the atmosphere of reform in the educational system, and from the expectation this has created. They were created with the decisive support of local authorities (municipalities, companies and business associations, unions, cultural groups, cooperatives and other political, social and economic groups of the local area): a significant number of local leaders were directly involved in setting up the schools, leading them prestige and social recognition; the vocational schools were in this way set up in the heart of an active and characteristic social partnership (Table 2).

Table 2  
Vocational Schools Promoters

PROMOTERS	CUMULATIVE TOTAL	%	P'ERS 1989	%	P'ERS 1990	%	P'ERS 1991	%
Municipal Councils	51	21	14	15	18	21	19	31
Public Bodies	24	10	6	6	10	12	8	13
Private Companies	50	21	23	24	21	25	6	10
Associations	69	28	33	35	19	22	17	28
CO. Associations	29	12	11	12	8	9	10	16
Unions&Union Assoc.	12	5	4	4	8	9	0	0
Others	7	3	4	4	2	2	1	2
TOTAL	242	100	95	100	86	100	61	100

- (ii) Vocational schools did not develop because other existing schools or modes of training were suppressed, or through

exclusion of the past (for example technical education and apprenticeship schemes). Instead, they incorporate positive characteristics of previous systems and find their own field of innovation.

- (iii) Vocational schools are formed by the establishment of a new social contract between the State and the civil society, with a view to providing citizens with a professional qualification. The schools are formally created with a detailed contract. The State has therefore abdicated its traditionally centralising bureaucratic practice of preplanning and regulating everything, and moved to providing incentive and supporting the development of autonomous projects, opening space for creativity; between the maximum and the minimum intervention of the State we have opted for a regulatory State, catalysing hopes, expectations and initiative, via subsidiarity;
- (iv) The launching of vocational schools was supported by a new administrative body with a new working style (the Technological, Artistic and Vocational Educational Bureau - GETAP), which is institutionally and geographically decentralised, having head quarters in Oporto and not in Lisbon. Fostering synergy and mobilising resources, this body has been simultaneously responsible for personally following-up these schools (each school has an attached advisor responsible for its follow-up). This involves technical support and evaluation; GETAP built a model replacing the Taylor pyramidal structure with a management model based on "project networks".
- (v) The small schools will always have a place in the vocational schools project. There is no provision for the State to authorise the schools' growth beyond more than 400 students in day courses. However, there are some which will grow by the internal division, spinning-off into new and more specialised units/sections.
- (vi) Vocational schools have gained the political support - difficult with some ideological groups - from all political

and social sectors and all economic partners. Therefore, the main employers associations and trade unions are themselves school promoters.

- (vii) Vocational schools have appeared at a time in which there was a latent social demand waiting to be tapped. In fact, this was called for both by the work market and the economic course, and also by a grouping demand for education beyond the compulsory stage; in addition, the demand reacted against uniformity and rigid curricula, and the formal organisation of the general education system.
- (viii) Vocational schools offer several standards of achievement: equivalence, access to higher education, certification and community recognition. These have without doubt contributed to stimulating previously reticent demand.
- (ix) In the professional qualification - traditionally technical, reproductive and specialised - vocational schools have picked-up technological areas with other scientific, humanistic and social areas. Artistically-oriented vocational schools have also been created. The concept for professional qualification has been enriched, and the curriculum has gained in breadth, with areas of integrated studies.
- (x) Vocational schools have had their own source of finance, with the support of the National Budget and with the decisive contribution from the European Social Found through a specific programme, PRODEP. This relative autonomy created a "nest" for development which wasn't vulnerable to sudden changes in the technical and financial support. The local promoters themselves have invested considerable sums in infrastructure and equipment.
- (xi) Vocational schools have been opened throughout the country, covering all the regions and various areas of training.
- (xii) The major role was always performed by local initiatives, by local promoters. The complementary or residual role was

performed by public administration, whether in the conception, the design or implementation of these schools. Public administration did provide a strong component of technical assistance in project implementation and finance, as well as in the launching of training. The initiative and the prime responsibility rested with the promoters.

The educational project of vocational schools is still in a stage of institutional maturity. Some problems require permanent attention: a greater level of personal satisfaction in the social integration process; the training of trainers; the new requirements of economy and employment in very quickly changing; the work experience in training process and the integration of excessively segmented subjects.

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Annex 1

Secondary schools new courses (1993/94)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
1. General Course 2. Chemistry 3. Electronics 4. Mecanics 5. Informatic 6. Building and Construction	7. General Course 8. Design 9. Arts	10. General Course 11 Administration 12. Commerce	13. General Course 14. Communication 15. Social services