



# EVALUATION OF LEARNING IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING



The evaluation of learning is an integral part of teaching. QPAT has prepared this document to help clarify certain pedagogical and labour relations issues with respect to the evaluation of learning in vocational training.

### The Legal Framework

Instruction in vocational training centres is governed by the Education Act and the Basic Vocational Training Regulation. Other documents provide interpretations of the laws without being prescriptive (annual directives on vocational training), others complement it (Administrative Manual for the Certification of Studies and Info-sanctions), while others suggest orientations without being prescriptive (Policy on the Evaluation of Learning).

Below are certain principles that arise from these:

- ▶ The new programs are divided into competencies and the old programs into modules.
- ▶ Each competency in vocational education is subject to evaluation. The results of the evaluation are expressed as a pass or failure (Basic Regulation, art. 17).
- ▶ The teaching time specified for these modules/competencies is 15 hours per credit. This is the basis for determining the funding of vocational training centres (funding by certification) and the school organisation. On the other hand, it is possible to reduce this time if the objectives and the compulsory content of the program can be achieved more quickly (BR, art. 24).
- ▶ A vocational training student can sign up for the required tests to obtain credits without taking the corresponding course (BR, art. 20). The Policy on the Evaluation of Learning (p. 56) specifies that: "It is, however, up to the authorized institution to determine the individual's level of preparation for the examination and to consider the request, taking into account pedagogical requirements and organisational constraints".
- ▶ The student must satisfy all the conditions for admission to the program and obtain all the credits of the program to be entitled to his diploma (BR, art. 22).
- ▶ A person registered in vocational training receives a statement of learning achievement twice a year (BR, art. 18).



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## The Responsibility for Evaluation

The MELS Policy on the Evaluation of Learning states (p.55):

The **teacher is responsible for evaluation activities that serve to recognize a competency**. The teacher's judgment must be based on personal observations and on the validated information provided by the host company. The teacher thus plays a major and essential role in the evaluation of learning, whether during the learning, in dealings with partners or in evaluation to certify studies. The educational institution also performs an important role because it **helps its teachers** become familiar with the programs of study, plan learning activities and carry out evaluation practices that are consistent with the values and orientations of this policy.

This right and this responsibility are exercised in respect of:

- ▶ the Education Act and the legal environment of vocational education;
- ▶ The Basic regulation in vocational training;
- ▶ the program;
- ▶ the standards and procedures of the centre;
- ▶ the terms and conditions for application of the Basic Regulation and the implementation of the programs of study approved by the governing board.

Note that the division of responsibilities for the evaluation of learning is different depending on whether it is for purposes of learning or for the purpose of certification. **Evaluation for learning** is the responsibility of the teacher in respect of the programs of study. Article 19.2 of the Education Act reads:

## The teacher is entitled, in particular:

- ▶ to select methods of instruction corresponding to the requirements and objectives fixed for each group or for each student entrusted to his care;
- ▶ to select the means of evaluating the progress of students so as to examine and assess continually and periodically the needs and achievement of objectives of every student entrusted to his care.

**Evaluation for certification is**, on the other hand, shared among the teacher, the centre and the Ministry. The Ministry can impose provincial examinations for certain modules/competencies. The centre administration ensures the quality of services provided. Non-teaching professionals can provide pedagogical advice but do not have an authority relationship with teachers.

While a degree of collaboration within the program-team may be helpful to ensure common values in the training provided, teachers cannot be required to use the same situations or instruments as their colleagues.

While teachers may be the primarily responsible for the evaluation process, they should not be held responsible for the success or failure of a student. That being said, their judgements should be based on valid data, since they may be called upon to justify student evaluations.

## Evaluation of Internships

The host companies and other bodies receiving interns are required to participate in the evaluation of learning, particularly during the internships. On the other hand, responsibility for the evaluation of learning rests with the teacher.

The Collective Agreement indicates that the general duties of the teacher include supervising and **evaluating workplace internships**, administering and correcting tests and examinations, and filling out reports inherent to that duty (13-15.02). In the same sense, the Policy on the Evaluation of Learning (p.55) states that "The teacher is responsible for evaluation activities that serve to recognise a competency. The teacher's judgment must be based on personal observations and on the validated information provided by the host company".

It would be useful, therefore, to try to eliminate some of the confusion that arises, particularly with regard to the programs offered as part of a work-study formula.

## Disjuncture between the Program and the Reality of the Trade

We have noticed that, in the case of certain vocational training programs, there is a disjuncture with the practical realities of the workplace. The updating of vocational training programs by the MELS is slow and inconsistent. A number of programs have to be readjusted by teachers in order to maintain the quality of training. As a consequence, tensions have been known to arise when there is pressure to apply the program and its reference framework.

In spite of the prescriptive nature of the programs, situations arise where it is essential to intervene, both as a teacher and as a trade specialist, in order to take into account the current reality of the trade being taught by making certain adjustments to the programs and the evaluations.

## Ministerial Examinations

The Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS) imposes examinations for certain modules/competencies. The list of these prescribed examinations (compulsory) is found in the appendix of the annual directive for vocational training.

It is possible to modify a prescribed MELS examination at the local level in order to adjust a compulsory test containing technical errors or a significant disjuncture with the reality of the trade in question. Once the director has been informed, a request may be sent to the MELS at the "*Direction des programmes et de la veille sectorielle, Secteur de la formation professionnelle et technique et de la formation continue*".

## Reference Framework for Evaluation

The new programs are accompanied by evaluation benchmarks for certification, and the old programs by analysis and planning tables or specification tables. The latter are extremely useful for devising evaluation, which is less the case with the new benchmarks that offer a far greater flexibility.

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## Pressures from Administration

Research on working conditions in vocational education conducted by the FSE in 2008 indicates that 40% of teachers have felt pressure from the administration to **give passing results for modules/competencies to students who have not achieved the competencies required**. This can largely be explained by the phenomenon of funding by certification. More specifically, certain administrations apply pressure to:

- ▶ increase the number of times an examination can be rewritten;
- ▶ grant an internship even though the prerequisite module/competency has not been passed;
- ▶ retain students who are frequently absent;
- ▶ make inappropriate adaptations of evaluations and, finally;
- ▶ offer remediation to “teach to the test”.

It would be a good idea to urge the union to protest such practices, which are damaging both to teachers and to the value of the diploma.

## Retesting

The Policy on the Evaluation of Learning states: “Students in initial training have the right to retake an examination certifying a competency after having failed the examination. To avail themselves of this right, **students must demonstrate that they have done the necessary remedial work**. The result obtained on the retake examination will become the official result.”

The standards and procedures are a way teachers can create guidelines for the **retaking of examinations**. These might include a maximum number of times a test can be retaken, the obligations of students entitled to a retest, and the responsibility of the teacher in this context.

## The Evaluation of Cross-Curricular Competencies

The cross-curricular competencies are found in the new programs and remain to be developed. On the other hand, the Basic Vocational Training Regulation does not require that they be evaluated, mentioned in communications with students or commented on in any way.

## Non-traditional Teaching Methods

The Basic Vocational Training Regulation permits the student to pursue Cycle 2 general studies **concurrently** with vocational training. A student who has achieved only the secondary 3 credits for the three core subjects may, therefore, begin a vocational training program that requires having passed the core subjects for secondary 4. The evaluation of learning in general education is then subject to the same rules as that of the sector (youth or adult) where the general education occurs.

Despite the notable differences between the **individualised** mode of teaching (individual progress, variable entrance and exit, organisation by work stages, etc.) and **work-study programs** (special and extended relationship with the workplace), the general principles that are presented here remain applicable.

The evaluation of learning in the context of the **recognition of competencies (RAC)** involves a distinct procedure. A document on the subject is available.

## Standards and Procedures

The development and revision of the standards and procedures in a centre are a useful occasion to talk about the rules and the values governing the teaching staff with respect to evaluation. The participation of everyone ensures that all views and situations will be taken into consideration.

We believe that this procedure should result in a proposal that is **sufficiently general to be applicable to everyone without impinging on anyone’s professional autonomy**. It may be helpful to include certain specifics in the standards and procedures, such as the number of times an examination can be retaken and an affirmation of autonomy in the preparation of evaluations.

We are aware of certain situations where administrations have ignored the standards and procedures approved by the centre. In such a case, it may be necessary for the union to intervene with the school board.

## Devison Evaluations

The devison of evaluations can become a significant aspect of workload in a number of situations, among them:

- ▶ programs where there are few students have few evaluation instruments available in the "*Banque d'instruments de mesure*" (BIM) or in local test banks and do not have access to materials produced by publishing houses;
- ▶ the introduction of a program or its updating;
- ▶ change from a traditional approach to an individualised approach or a work-study model.

When a particular situation involves an increased workload as a result of the need to devise new testing instruments, it may be helpful for the union to negotiate an agreement to ensure acceptable conditions.

## Time for Evaluation

The debate around the calculation of evaluation time (including time for retesting) within the average teaching time (635 hours/year) is complicated. We do not have the space to deal with the ins and outs of that question in this document, which is primarily concerned with pedagogical issues.

This document was prepared in the winter of 2011. Modification by the government of the applicable laws and regulations is always a possibility.

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