

Mobile Squads in Belgium-Flanders

1. Need/challenge addressed

The “Mobile Squads” exist to support schools, while addressing a range of factors that may lead to early school leaving (ESL), including absenteeism or drop-out. The services of the “Mobile Squads” are requested by the school governing body and may refer to:

- Absenteeism and school drop-out, i.e., when a child is not registered in school or for home education, or when a student is enrolled in a school but has never attended. In these circumstances, representatives of the “Mobile Squads” can intervene at the home of the young person concerned and work with the family.
- Behaviour problems.
- Conflicts between adults, i.e., between teachers; between teachers and the school management; between parents and the school; and, between educational and administrative staff in the school and administrative staff from the Ministry.
- To support teachers, for example: those who may be struggling to manage behavioural issues in the classroom; or, school heads in their role as manager/leader.
- To prepare educational staff to respond to situations of tension by providing training on management of emotions, conflict resolution etc.
- To assist students, members of the educational staff and school leaders in situations such as deaths, disappearances and sexual abuse. In these circumstances, emotional and psycho-social support is provided, offering the individual the opportunity to express their emotions and be listened to. The “Mobile Squads” agents intervene as soon as possible, preferably within one hour after the event or after having been informed. Representatives of the “Mobile Squads” may be faced with other kinds of complex problems/situations and can therefore refer the case to more appropriate services.

2. Level of intervention

This is a selected intervention targeted to a group of pupils at risk.

3. Intensity of the intervention

The purpose of the intervention of the “Mobile Squads” is that the situation in the school returns to normal as soon as possible. The intervention in the school is therefore temporary but requests can be addressed to the service throughout the year.

4. Target group and age group

The target groups depend on the issues for which an intervention is required:

- For absenteeism problems: The service is intended for pupils in primary schools (usually children between 6 and 12 years old);
- For other types of interventions (outlined above): The service may be provided for children between 2-and-a-half and 18 years old, as well as the school staff.

5. Conditions and different steps necessary for the implementation of the measure

The “Mobile Squads” were created in 2004 to prevent school dropout, exclusion and violence in schools. The political decision to create the “Mobile Squads” was transposed in legislation¹, hence attracting an operating budget and providing the legal basis for the recruitment of dedicated staff. A Central unit has been created within the government to manage requests and organise the interventions of the “Mobile Squads”.

6. Stakeholders involved in identifying the appropriate type of support.

Upon receipt of a request for assistance, the Central unit checks whether the request meets the conditions for intervening.

¹*Décret du 12 mai 2004 portant diverses mesures de lutte contre le décrochage scolaire, l'exclusion et la violence à l'école, as amended by the Décret du 21 novembre 2013 organisant divers dispositifs scolaires favorisant le bien-être des jeunes à l'école, l'accrochage scolaire, la prévention de la violence à l'école et l'accompagnement des démarches d'orientation scolaire*

Next, a mission is assigned to one or two Mobile Squad agents that will contact the person who requested the intervention in the first instance and analyse the request.

7. Delivery of the measure

Depending on the results of the analysis, the type and level of intervention required will be defined, as well as the stakeholders to be involved. This may include the school governing body, the school heads teachers, supervisors (“éducateurs”), students, parents psycho-medico-social services (CPMS), youth services and/or social services (CPAS and AMO).

8. Overall responsibility for implementation of the measure

The Government of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels and, in particular, the Directorate-General for Compulsory Education, where the Central unit is located.

9. Obstacles encountered and how they were overcome

Thanks to a large political consensus around the creation of the 'mobile squad', no significant obstacles were encountered during the set-up of the service. However, in December 2012, due to budgetary constraints, it was no longer possible to reimburse representatives of the mobile squad for their travel expenses for a few days. The situation has been solved due to the importance of the service missions, but since then, the travel expenses have been monitored on a monthly basis to ensure that the expenses don't exceed the quotas imposed by the government.

10. Monitoring/assessing the measure

The Central unit prepares an annual activity report for the Government, with qualitative and quantitative appreciation of the activity, and an evaluation report is transmitted every three years.

School leaders who have requested an intervention from the “Mobile Squads” are invited to complete an evaluation form after each intervention.

11. Results

Questionnaires completed by school heads show that the results of interventions are generally positive. The number of interventions is increasing year-on-year.

12. Resources/funding

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels covers the salaries of the agents and the operating costs of the service.

13. Current status of the measure

The service still exists. The aims and objectives of the intervention have since been further defined following the Decree of 21 November 2013.