

Lost in Transition: Educational Inequalities in Transitions after Secondary School

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Left Behind and Shaped by Stereotypes and Biased Guidance: Young People's Voices Reveal Inequalities in Post-Secondary School Pathway Choices

In the study conducted by Professors Aina Tarabini and Judith Jacovkis, 68 students enrolled in the first year of *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education) and vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) were interviewed

- Listening to young people's voices is essential to understanding the key elements of educational policy related to pathway choices after Secondary School.
- Young people report that the current guidance system is insufficient, biased, and offered too late. They also highlight that the post-compulsory Secondary Education provision is unequal, lacks equity, and tends to prioritise academic upper secondary education (*Batxillerat*).
- Ability grouping and curriculum adaptations have a negative impact on future educational trajectories, as they undermine learning and shape students' expectations.
- Planning and expanding the range of educational options, improving the training and coordination of guidance services, and enacting a regulation to ensure comprehensive guidance and transition support plans in all schools would help to address the structural issue of early school leaving.

The transition from compulsory education (Year 11, or 4th year of Secondary School) to post-compulsory education —either vocational upper secondary education (*Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio*, CFGM) or *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education)— represents one of the most decisive moments in a student's educational trajectory. It is the first time that young people are required to make a «real choice» about their future academic path, selecting between an academic or vocational route.

This transition is also one of the weakest links in the education system, as it coincides with the highest rates of Early School Leaving (ESL). In Catalonia, the majority of early school leavers drop out at precisely this stage. In 2020, 12.5% of students did not continue into post-compulsory education. This means that, in just one year, 9,905 young people did not enrol in either *Batxillerat* or vocational upper secondary education.

Giving priority to this critical educational stage and providing appropriate support to young people in their decision-making is essential for tackling early school leaving. But how is this decision shaped? What factors do young people take into account when choosing their educational future?

Based on 68 interviews with students in the first year of *Batxillerat* and vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) in Barcelona, the study «**Lost in Transition: Inequalities in Educational Transitions after Secondary School**» analyses how these transitions take place and reveals that the education system fails to offer equal conditions for all students to access and successfully complete post-compulsory studies.

This research, which also draws on international evidence in the field, was conducted by Professors **Aina Tarabini** (Department of Sociology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona), a specialist in the socio-logical analysis of educational inequalities with a particular focus on teaching and learning conditions for both students and teachers, and **Judith Jacovkis** (Department of Didactics and Educational Organisation, University of Barcelona), a specialist in the analysis of educational trajectories and transitions of children and young people, with a focus on socio-educational inequalities.

Analysing educational transitions through the voices of young people is essential both to uncover the depth of the educational inequalities reproduced in this process and **to identify key elements for educational policy**.

The students' accounts show that their choices are shaped by a range of factors developed over the course of their schooling, which influence how they envision their future. At the same time, the lack of robust policies to support decision-making and facilitate the transition to post-compulsory education limits the framework within which these decisions are made.

- Young people **make their decisions unsupported**, without sufficient information, and **influenced by their accumulated school experiences and prevailing stereotypes**. Often, choices are made «by default» —due to lack of knowledge or negative school experiences.
- **The provision of post-compulsory education is unequal** and inequitable, with a structure that prioritises *Batxillerat* as the default continuation pathway.
- **The guidance provided is insufficient, biased, and offered too late**, failing to ensure a successful transition.

The education system must be capable of offering the necessary support to enable all students —and especially those in more vulnerable situations— to acquire the knowledge, skills, experiences, and tools they need to make informed decisions throughout their educational journey, particularly during the critical transition from Secondary School to post-compulsory education.

«**Lost in Transition: Inequalities in Educational Transitions after Secondary School**» sets out several lines of action and measures, among which the following stand out:

- 1 **Increase the number of students enrolled in public vocational upper secondary education** (CFGM), with a priority focus on business sectors offering better employment opportunities, lower youth unemployment, and greater possibilities for specialised training. Tackle the oversupply of low-cost programmes (e.g., administrative management) that do not guarantee either continued education or access to skilled employment.
- 2 **Facilitate continuity in the educational offer between CFGM and CFGS within the same professional field**, by ensuring their provision within the same schools or in nearby centres.
- 3 **Ensure that all compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education centres have guidance plans and actions in place that enable all students** —especially those in vulnerable situations— to access the knowledge, skills, experiences, and tools needed to make sound decisions throughout their education, particularly during transitions between educational stages or from education to employment.
- 4 **Provide local guidance services coordinated with schools**, in line with the concept of Guidance-Oriented Cities. Develop integrated guidance strategies aimed at young people and their families, through the coordinated action of all educational agents in the city (families, students, teachers, school guidance counsellors, etc.).
- 5 **Roll out continuing professional development models for teachers based on the needs of educational teams**. This training should move beyond a bureaucratic, certification-driven approach, and instead be meaningful within each school's specific context and responsive to its needs. Training should also promote reflection on how teachers' beliefs influence young people's educational opportunities and trajectories.
- 6 **Increase coordination and planning time for teaching teams and invest in training** so that staff can develop competence-based curricular proposals, methodologies, and assessment approaches in all compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education centres in Catalonia.

«Students in group B were less prepared for Batxillerat than those in group A because they were taught less content, and it was easier... I don't think that's right» (Rubén, CFGM – Esports).

Young people make their educational choices without adequate support and shaped by the experiences and stereotypes accumulated over the course of their schooling

Organisational practices in Secondary Schools —such as ability grouping and curriculum adaptations— often negatively affect students' subsequent educational pathways. These practices tend to limit learning opportunities and lower academic expectations.

Scientific evidence shows that grouping students into homogeneous sets according to perceived ability leads to higher rates of school failure. In lower sets, rather than receiving more tailored or individualised support, students are often exposed to simplified and less demanding content. These groups are more stigmatised —by both teachers and peers— and tend to foster lower self-esteem, weaker academic self-concept, reduced effort, and lower motivation.

A similar pattern is observed in curricular diversification programmes, which involve reorganising the mainstream curriculum to support students with greater needs in reaching minimum objectives and competencies. These programmes frequently entail activities and curricula with lower educational value, reduced academic demands, and devalued content.

«If teachers think you're ready for Batxillerat, they put you all in one class and you spend all day studying. The rest of us get placed in lower groups and they start preparing us for vocational courses.» (Daniel, vocational upper secondary education – Vehicle Electromechanics)

«I had always wanted to do Batxillerat, well, I hadn't even considered there might be any other option, and neither had my family. It's true I didn't have brilliant marks, but I wasn't failing either—I was trying hard, I was getting through it. But the teachers never encouraged you, you know? On the contrary, all you'd get was the message that you were hopeless, that you'd never make it. That's how it was there —either you're good, or you're out. If they think you're not good enough, they stop supporting you; they write you off.» (Àlex, vocational upper secondary education – Nursing Assistant)

Teachers' expectations are a key factor in shaping students' own expectations and their confidence in their ability to learn. The image conveyed to students plays a crucial role in how they construct their own academic self-image.

The ways in which students are grouped —which do not necessarily lead to improved academic outcomes— are often a response to the challenges schools face in addressing student diversity. Frequently, schools lack the support and resources needed to implement more inclusive practices. Structural shortcomings —such as insufficient training in strategies for working with heterogeneous groups, lack of additional support staff, or inadequate time for lesson planning and tutorials— prevent schools from adopting inclusive classroom practices without resorting to ability grouping.

«To be honest, I ended up here by default. I liked cars, but it wasn't a real passion. It was more of a coincidence—I ruled out other options because I couldn't access them due to my grades or for other reasons. But once I started here, I realised I really enjoyed it and that this is where I belong.» **(Daniel, vocational upper secondary education – Vehicle Electromechanics)**

The Secondary School curriculum does not offer a sufficiently broad range of meaningful educational experiences to allow students to explore different options and develop a deeper understanding of their own interests, abilities, and potential.

Many young people feel that Secondary School relies on overly homogeneous pedagogical and curricular models. These do not enable them to experiment with diverse forms of knowledge and skills in order to discover what they enjoy and inform their post-compulsory choices. As a result, decisions regarding *Batxillerat* and vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) are often made through a process of elimination—avoiding what they dislike, what they believe they are not good at, or what they want to escape from.

«I always thought maths were difficult because I always struggled with them. It all seemed so abstract—I didn't understand anything, and I ended up thinking it was something really important. I used to believe that the students doing the science Batxillerat were like geniuses... A lot of people are traumatised by Secondary School because we were forced to do maths that we didn't understand, that made us feel stupid—and that's why so many end up hating them.» **(Naila, academic upper secondary education – Social Sciences pathway)**

Theoretical knowledge carries more prestige than practical knowledge, and performance in academically valued subjects greatly influences students' own perceptions of their educational worth.

Within the school system, theoretical or academic knowledge—often associated with abstraction and generalisation—is seen as more prestigious and valuable. In contrast, practical or applied knowledge is regarded as accessible to everyone and associated with subjects of lower curricular status, linked to manual or physical skills. As a result, strong performance in practical subjects receives less recognition than achievement in more abstract academic disciplines.

This hierarchy shapes the organisation of the Secondary School curriculum and is further reinforced in the division between *Batxillerat* and vocational upper secondary education (CFGM). *Batxillerat* is composed of the subjects perceived as the most demanding, whereas vocational programmes are aligned with those considered more accessible.

Students perceive that teachers label them according to their relationship with and performance in these two types of knowledge. Struggling with high-status academic subjects, particularly those involving abstract thinking, leads to judgements about a student's quality and educational potential. Although designed to accommodate diverse learning needs, student grouping practices are experienced by young people as a powerful mechanism of distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge—distinctions that later determine their post-compulsory educational opportunities.

«Well, we're all kind of the same here—we're the ones who were always told we weren't good enough.» **(Àlex, vocational upper secondary education – Nursing Assistant)**

Batxillerat is still perceived as the only pathway to success.

Despite efforts to expand and improve the provision of vocational education and training (VET), young people still perceive *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education) as more prestigious than vocational studies. Choosing vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) is often associated with a «damaged» identity or with being a «poor student». In this sense, it is not so much a deliberate choice as a process of elimination. *Batxillerat* is regarded as the only valid option for students considered «naturally intelligent».

«Batxillerat is for the smart ones.» (Paula, vocational upper secondary education – Nursing Assistant)

«Vocational programmes are calmer, you go at a slower pace, they're very practical and connect directly with a specific job—that's their good side. In Batxillerat there's a lot more pressure, you have to study much more, there's less time, loads of exams... but the good thing is that it leads to more job opportunities and people—including teachers—think it's better.» (Alexia, vocational upper secondary education – Vehicle Electromechanics)

«Teachers say that nowadays vocational training and Batxillerat are equal, that there's no difference. They tell you you're not worth less for doing a vocational course, that it's just as valid, but then you see that they only recommend Batxillerat to the ones they think are smarter. I don't think that's right.» (Dèlia, academic upper secondary education – Science stream)

The young people interviewed perceive that vocational education remains, both in the public imagination and among teachers, a «second-tier pathway» for those who are not considered «ready» or «capable» of pursuing *Batxillerat*. Even though guidance around vocational pathways has increased, vocational education is still experienced as the option for those who cannot access the academic route.

A post-compulsory education system marked by distinct student profiles in *Batxillerat* and vocational upper secondary education (CFGM).

As a result, the student profiles in academic and vocational pathways differ significantly. Enrolment data from the academic years 2016–2017 and 2018–2019 show that the academic route (*Batxillerat*) had a higher proportion of girls, native-born students, and young people from higher socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Meanwhile, the vocational route (CFGM) enrolled more boys, students of migrant origin, those from lower socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and students with specific or special educational needs (Termes, 2022).

«This is the only mechanics course I found. There's another one at Monlau, but it's private and very expensive. And there's another one at Mare de Déu de la Mercè, but it's really far for me — it's in Zona Franca.» (Alexia, vocational upper secondary education – Vehicle Electromechanics)

Unequal provision between *Batxillerat* and vocational education conditions students' choices from the outset

Across Catalonia, the provision of *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education) is generally more accessible and widespread than that of vocational education (Formación Profesional – FP). The transition from Secondary School (ESO) to *Batxillerat* is relatively straightforward and intuitive; it is the pathway implicitly assumed within the structure of the current education system. By contrast, transitioning from Secondary School to vocational upper secondary education is more complex. It often involves stricter entry requirements, a limited number of publicly funded places, and, in some cases, the need to relocate to another city to access the desired programme. This disparity in post-compulsory education provision significantly affects young people's real capacity to choose, as well as their ability to pursue longer educational pathways on equal terms.

Characteristics of Post-Compulsory Educational Pathway Provision

ACADEMIC UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION (BATXILLERAT)	VOCATIONAL UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION (CFGM)
Broadly distributed across the territory	Selectively distributed provision
Often located within the same school as Secondary School	Usually offered in a different centre than Secondary School
Three educational pathways or specialisations available	26 vocational fields or professional families
Guaranteed access to a free place	No guarantee of universal access to public provision

Source: Author's own elaboration.

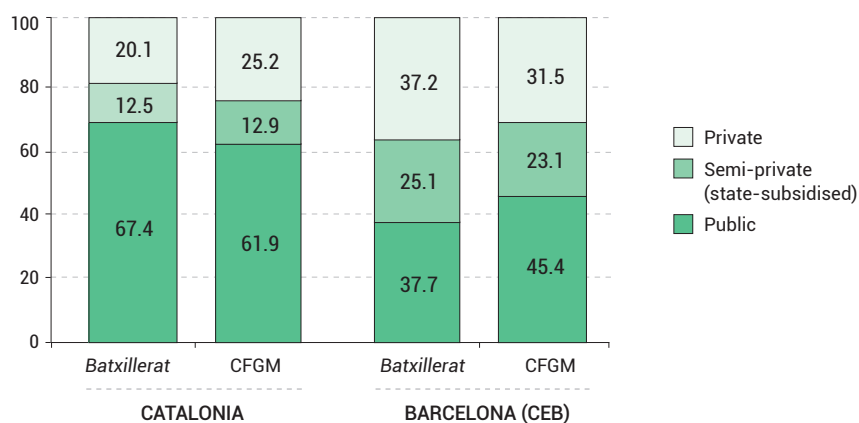
Post-compulsory secondary education provision is unevenly distributed across the territory. *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education) is more widely available and generally more accessible than vocational upper secondary education (CFGM).

While *Batxillerat* centres are spread throughout the region, allowing students to access almost any specialisation relatively close to home, the availability of CFGM programmes —particularly certain vocational fields and specific training specialities— is far more irregular. As a result, some young people lack nearby options for continuing their studies and must travel long distances to access certain CFGM programmes. Commuting to other municipalities to pursue further education is not a viable option for everyone and represents a significant burden for those living in more socially segregated or disadvantaged areas.

The public provision of vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) remains insufficient to ensure equitable access conditions for all students.

Despite a gradual increase in the number of vocational training places in recent years in Catalonia, there is still a significant shortfall in the availability of publicly funded places. Furthermore, there is a lack of robust scholarship or grant policies to offset the higher costs of tuition for students who, due to limited public provision, are forced to enrol in semi-private (*concertados*) or private institutions. In the case of Barcelona, enrolment in post-compulsory secondary education is highly imbalanced in terms of school ownership, as illustrated in the following chart. While public enrolment in the *Batxillerat* pathway approaches 70% across Catalonia, in Barcelona it falls below 40%. For CFGM programmes, although the proportion of public enrolment is slightly higher than in *Batxillerat*, it still remains below 50% in the city.

Enrolment by Educational Pathway and Type of Institution. Catalonia and Barcelona (CEB), Academic Year 2021–2022 (%)



Source: Own elaboration based on Education Statistics. Academic Year 2021–2022 (Department of Education, 2022).

Despite the significant presence of private provision, there is no scholarship system in place to offset the cost and prevent students from being excluded from further education for financial reasons.

The lack of sufficient public provision —together with the absence of a grant policy that would enable students to afford tuition at private institutions— places students from less advantaged economic backgrounds at a clear disadvantage.

«At that time, I wanted to study Emergency Medical Services, and we found that there were only two public centres — all the others were semi-private or private. So I applied to those two, and I didn't get into either. (...) In public [vocational programmes], admission is based on your final grade from Secondary School, and if I, for example, have an average mark of 5, and I can't afford a private school, and there's another student who also has a 5 but can pay for private education, then obviously they'll get in —because private centres don't ask for a specific grade, you just pay. So that student gets a place, and I'm left without one.»
(Sònia, vocational upper secondary education – Microcomputer Systems and Networks)

Transitioning to *Batxillerat* Is Easier Than to Vocational Education (CFGM).

Transitioning into *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education) is often easier for students because it is typically offered in the same schools where they completed Secondary School (ESO). Moreover, *Batxillerat*

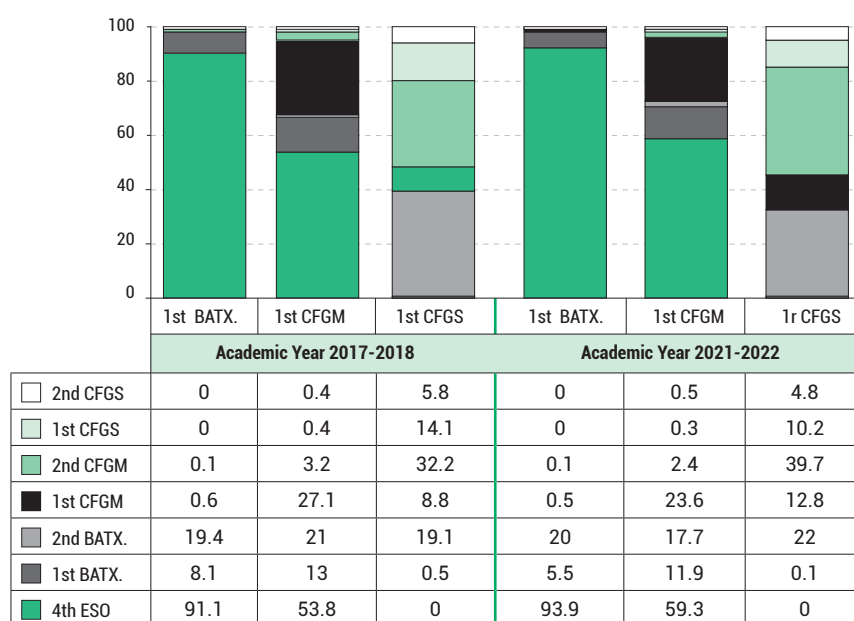
offers only three broad academic pathways and does not require students to make a defined professional choice at the age of 16. In contrast, moving into vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) entails a more demanding and active choice for students. Firstly, because this transition often involves changing schools—and sometimes even moving to a different locality—which also means changing peer groups and learning environments. Secondly, choosing a vocational pathway requires more detailed knowledge of the available educational offer, with nearly 70 different options to consider. Furthermore, while all students are guaranteed a free place in *Batxillerat* (either public or semi-private), no such guarantee exists for CFGM. When demand exceeds available places, admissions are based on students' final marks from ESO.

«At first I was absolutely sure I wanted to do vocational training, but when I started researching, there were too many options, and I really started to doubt what to do. The teacher told me I should go for Batxillerat instead (...). There was so much information... and the minimum grade requirement became a problem because I was failing quite a lot.» (Silvio, academic upper secondary education – Arts pathway)

Students from Vocational Upper Secondary Education (CFGM) Face Greater Barriers to Progressing into Higher-Level Studies Than Those from *Batxillerat*.

Until now, the rules for continuing education beyond post-compulsory secondary education have differed depending on whether a student completed vocational upper secondary education (CFGM) or *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education). This situation is set to change in the upcoming academic year. At the time of conducting the study, 60% of places in higher vocational education (CFGs – *Ciclos Formativos de Grado Superior*) were reserved for students coming from *Batxillerat*, 20% for those progressing from CFGM, and the remaining 20% for applicants who had passed a specific entrance examination. As a result, students from *Batxillerat* consistently had priority access to CFGS programmes. From the next academic year onward, this priority will no longer be reserved exclusively for *Batxillerat* graduates, potentially opening up more opportunities for students coming from CFGM to access higher vocational education.

Distribution of Students by Destination Course According to Previous Education Academic Year 2021-2022 (%)*



*Although the Department does not state this explicitly, these data appear to exclude students enrolled in the Institut Obert de Catalunya (IOC), as it is specified that only face-to-face and blended learning enrolments are included, and the IOC operates entirely online.

Source: Own elaboration based on Education Statistics. Academic Year 2021–2022 (Department of Education, 2022).

«People from different professions came and talked about what they were good at. But it wasn't useful for me, because they had all done Batxillerat.» (Àlex, vocational upper secondary education – Nursing Assistant)

School-Based Career Guidance Is Insufficient, Biased, and Delivered Too Late to Ensure a Successful Transition

Teachers have unequal levels of knowledge about the various post-compulsory education options.

Despite efforts and genuine interest in improving guidance in many schools, the current guidance and support system remains overly sporadic and still heavily focused on the simple transmission of information. Moreover, the guidance offered during Secondary School (ESO) is shaped by the fact that teachers tend to be more familiar with the *Batxillerat* pathway, allowing them to gradually introduce information about this academic route throughout the entire stage. In contrast, guidance on vocational education and training (CFGM) usually takes place only in the final year of ESO and is provided in a more explicit and purely informational manner. This limits teachers' ability to provide equally thorough support and advice for both educational pathways.

«Yes, it's true that some former students came to tell us about their experience —university, what they'd studied... but I think they'd all done Batxillerat, maybe except for one person, and there were about ten of them. It's like vocational programmes aren't taken seriously; it's like they want you to do Batxillerat. I felt like Batxillerat was the only way to go, and that's why they didn't really explain what vocational courses were.» (María, International Batxillerat)

Personalised Support Through Tutorial Action Is Not Widespread Enough.

Although many schools have Tutorial Action Plans in place, evidence shows that tutors often lack the time and training needed to carry out curriculum-integrated activities that help build meaningful relationships with all students throughout ESO. As a result, students often experience guidance as a series of generic, information-based activities —such as talks, group visits, or career tests— concentrated in the final year of Secondary School.

Guidance Practices Often Rely on Biased Understandings of Educational Pathways and Student Profiles.

Guidance practices frequently link young people's perceived capacities —typically based on qualifications— with their supposed suitability for one educational route or another, thus reproducing social inequalities. Students with higher marks are systematically directed toward *Batxillerat*, particularly the science pathway, as any other choice is seen as a «waste» of talent and potential. This stems from a binary conception of intelligence: «academic intelligence» associated with books and abstract thinking is attributed to students seen as fit for *Batxillerat*, whereas «practical intelligence» is linked to vocational learners. These perceptions are strongly rooted in schools and shape the guidance students receive.

Proposals: Expanding Opportunities for Long and Successful Educational Pathways

This study demonstrates that the Catalan education system is not currently able to offer equal conditions for all students to access and complete post-compulsory education. Inequalities in access and territorial distribution of provision, insufficient, biased and delayed guidance, lack of financial support to pursue preferred pathways, and the impact of school-based labelling and stereotypes often leave young people facing educational choices unsupported. Without addressing these structural issues, it will not be possible to make meaningful progress in reducing Early School Leaving (ESL) or in achieving the goal of ensuring that all students continue studying after Secondary School (ESO).

As highlighted throughout this report, the voices and testimonies of young people confirm the many obstacles they face when making informed and positive decisions about their futures. Supporting successful transitions and preventing the rupture of educational pathways must be a top-priority equity policy. To that end, we propose:

1 Plan the Provision of Post-Compulsory Secondary Education to Ensure All Young People Have an Appropriate Option

The mismatch between supply and demand in vocational upper secondary education (CFGM), combined with limited public provision and restrictive access conditions, places vocational pathways at a disadvantage compared to *Batxillerat*. Despite recent investment in vocational education and an increase in the number of places, current provision remains insufficient to meet the needs of all students wishing to pursue vocational training after compulsory education. Addressing this requires:

- **Expanding the number of public CFGM places**, especially in sectors with stronger employment prospects, lower youth unemployment, and greater opportunities for further specialisation. It is also vital to counter the oversupply of low-cost courses (e.g., administrative management) that neither guarantee continued education nor lead to quality employment.
- **Ensuring a sufficient, high-quality, and territorially balanced public vocational offer**, to reduce the need for students to travel in order to pursue vocational programmes —just as they can access *Batxillerat* locally.
- **Balancing public and private provision across the region**, to avoid reproducing highly unequal patterns, such as those currently seen in many municipalities where private institutions account for over 50% of available places, especially in emerging vocational sectors.

Another area that needs to be addressed is the **financial support available to young people, in order to prevent lack of resources from becoming a barrier to accessing** and completing education. The current education system does not include a scholarship policy aimed specifically at young people and households in vulnerable situations, nor one that offsets the cost of post-compulsory education. It is essential to move towards a robust scholarship system that ensures no student is forced to abandon their studies for economic reasons. We propose:

- Guaranteeing a «scholarship wage» for all young people aged 16 to 18 who are at risk of poverty, so they can continue with post-compulsory secondary education: 32,000 potential beneficiaries. If coverage begins with those aged 16 to 18 in situations of severe material deprivation, there would be approximately 11,500 beneficiaries.
- Also guaranteeing 13,000 transport grants for young people with fewer resources who need to travel in order to access the post-compulsory education programmes of their interest.

2 Improve the connection between different educational levels and pathways, especially in vocational education

Despite the existence of bridging routes between studies, students finishing a CFGM (vocational upper secondary education) have fewer opportunities to access CFGS (higher vocational education) than those coming from *Batxillerat* (academic upper secondary education). For this reason, it is essential to:

- **Facilitar la continuïtat d'oferta formativa entre CFGM i CFGS d'una mateixa família** professional en els mateixos centres educatius o en centres propers.
- **Millorar l'articulació entre exigències i models curriculars** de CFGM i CFGS de manera que en possibilitin una transició exitosa per al jovent que segueix aquesta via.

3 Make progress in curricular reform in both compulsory and post-compulsory education to ensure that, in ESO, Batxillerat, and CFGM, curricular and pedagogical models are implemented based on the principles of globalisation, personalisation, and meaningful learning

One of the main reasons for Early School Leaving is the lack of meaning that many young people attribute to their learning environments. Overly homogeneous pedagogical and curricular models leave little room for personalisation, flexibility, and the diversification of teaching approaches and curricular content, and thus have a significant impact on processes of school disengagement. The current curricular framework creates possibilities for diversifying pedagogical methods and content, and for integrating theory and practice across all stages of education. Therefore, it is necessary to:

- Increase coordination time and collaborative work among teaching teams, and invest in teacher training so that staff can develop competence-based curricular proposals, methodologies, and assessment strategies in all compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education centres in Catalonia.
- Move towards more flexible curricula with practical components across all educational stages, making intellectual quality and relevance key elements of the curricular offer for all students. Integrate knowledge from different subject areas in all educational pathways, ensuring that the articulation between theory and practice characterises curricular provision across all levels of education.

The transition to post-compulsory education is the first real moment of choice for many young people. Our system is excessively rigid, penalising those who wish to change their path and often leading them to drop out. Expanding options through hybrid and flexible pathways and reducing the cost of «wrong» choices through accessible transitions makes educational continuity easier. To increase flexibility and permeability between educational pathways, we propose:

- Advancing hybrid and cross-disciplinary approaches between educational stages and pathways through measures such as joint optional modules shared between *Batxillerat* and CFGM, or by strengthening opportunities for vocational experimentation during ESO.

4 Ensure that all compulsory and post-compulsory secondary schools have guidance and support plans for students' educational transitions

Guidance practices are key tools in supporting transitions between educational stages and play a fundamental role in shaping young people's choices throughout their educational journeys. However, as previously noted, guidance remains delayed and marginal in many schools. The forthcoming approval of a new Guidance Decree presents an opportunity to develop processes of orientation, support, and accompaniment during educational transitions — starting from the first cycle of Secondary School (ESO) through to the second year of post-compulsory education. For this reason, it is necessary to:

- Ensure that all compulsory and post-compulsory secondary schools implement **guidance and orientation plans and actions** that allow all students — especially those in more vulnerable situations — to access the knowledge, skills, experiences, and tools they need to make informed decisions throughout their education, particularly during key transition points or when moving from education to employment.
- **Provide support to teaching teams** from the Educational Administration by creating structured spaces, time and frameworks to ensure that their guidance responsibilities can be carried out effectively throughout compulsory schooling and maintained during the post-compulsory stage.
- Roll out continuing **professional development programmes for teachers based on the specific needs of each school's educational staff**. This training must go beyond a bureaucratic logic centred on certification, and instead be meaningful within the context of each school and tailored to its particular needs. Training should promote critical reflection on how teachers' beliefs affect young people's educational opportunities and trajectories.
- Develop **local guidance services coordinated with schools**, in line with the concept of «Guidance-Oriented Cities». This involves designing integrated guidance strategies aimed at young people and their families, through coordinated action among all educational stakeholders in the city (families, students, teachers, school guidance staff, etc.).

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