

Liège School: symbol of gunsmithing in danger

Wednesday 18 December 2024, by Jean Pierre Bastié, President of the UFA, Jean-Jacques Buigné, Founder of the UFA (France)

The Léon Mignon Gunsmithing School, located in the heart of the city of Liège, is a vocational secondary school founded in 1897 by the City of Liège, on the initiative of the Union of Arms Manufacturers. It has long trained skilled armourers.

However, despite its worldwide reputation and rich industrial heritage, the school is now threatened by educational reforms.

The proposed measures are causing concern: funding cuts, fewer options and teaching hours, changes in teacher recruitment and training, leading to a loss of knowledge, and changes to teachers' status towards a pooling of resources.

In addition, options and courses that do not meet stricter standards could be phased out, with the closure of at least one-third of the options.

Ultimately, the school is at risk of closing permanently by 2028.

At a conference organised by the UFA in Paris last November, participants emphasised the importance of training institutes in the field of armoury. The closure of the Léon Mignon school would represent a considerable loss to the world's armoury heritage.

The six measures envisaged to 'kill off' the Liège armoury school:

- Prohibition of access to the 7th year for students with a CESS or equivalent diploma: This means that French students benefiting from exemptions will no longer be able to access the 7th year, which will probably lead to its closure in the short term;
- Prohibition of enrolment in the 3rd and 4th years for students of legal age who failed the previous year or are not following the traditional course: This measure would block access to the armourer's course for French students, with disastrous consequences for the school's teaching staff;
- Reduction in resources allocated to vocational education: Less funding for the school and a reduction in teaching hours, directly affecting the teaching staff;
- Change in teacher recruitment and training criteria: Anyone with professional experience in the armoury sector could become a teacher without specific teaching training;
- Change in the status of teachers: abolition of the appointment system, replaced by a flexible status allowing assignments to several schools without the right to refuse;
- Gradual abolition of options and courses that do not meet stricter standards: This could lead to the closure of a third of the options offered by the school.