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(BELGIUM)**

**“EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010”**

Ministry of Education and Training  
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## **CHAPTER 1: KEY COMPETENCES FOR LIFELONG LEARNING AS PART OF COHERENT AND COMPREHENSIVE LIFELONG LEARNING STRATEGIES**

### **QUESTION 1**

**In what concrete ways has your country developed its provision for Key Competences since 2006? Has there been any link to your country's lifelong learning strategy? Which actors have been involved? What use was made of the European framework and the work of the cluster on key competences (if possible, please provide concrete examples)?**

The principle of “learning outcomes” is very important in the Flemish educational administration. In Flanders there is a distinction between final objectives (“eindtermen”) and developmental objectives (“ontwikkelingsdoelen”). Final objectives are minimum objectives with regard to knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes, which the educational government regards as necessary and attainable for a specific population of pupils. Developmental objectives are minimum objectives which the educational government regards as desirable for a specific population of pupils. Final objectives and developmental objectives are used by the Flemish government for quality control.

The core curriculum defines the compulsory minimum objectives. This means that common objectives for all pupils at a certain stage are stipulated. Therefore subject related final objectives are formulated. These are minimum objectives for knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes which the educational authorities consider essential. Attitudinal subject related final objectives do not have to be reached but do have to be strived for. Next to the subject related final objectives there are also cross-curricular final objectives. These are minimum objectives which are not specific to one subject of study, but are strived for by means of several subjects or pedagogical projects.

So “learning outcomes” is an overall name, that will be used in this report for reasons of clarity.

Concerning the core curriculum content, developing key competences has always been a central feature to the Flemish education and training system and the core curriculum has always focussed on this. **Since 2006 a major revision of the core curriculum has been made for cross-curricular objectives, ICT, mother tongue, foreign languages, science and technology.** These key competences concern the basic education which aims to convey to people the right competences for their personal development and training throughout their entire life. **The European framework has been an evaluation instrument during the review process.**

**In defining the core curriculum, different actors are involved.** New proposals about the curriculum are formulated by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (see also on <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo/default.htm>) on the basis of scientific research and concepts, in collaboration with stakeholders such as teachers and pedagogical advisers. Afterwards the Flemish Education Council (“Vlaamse Onderwijsraad” - VLOR) gives advice about these proposals. In the Flemish Education Council all relevant stakeholders are represented, so a well-balanced comment on the proposal can be given. Once this has happened, the Flemish government has to decide whether it approves or not the proposal. Finally the Flemish parliament has to discuss and ratify the new curriculum. The core curriculum is thus part of the parliamentary procedure.

The implementation of the core curriculum is to be done by the umbrella organizations as well as by the teachers and the schools. This is due to the freedom of education, which is mentioned in the Belgian Constitution. The Flemish Community finances education organized by the Flemish Community and subsidises education organized by provinces/towns/public or private persons. In

that way schools (networks) obtain large competences: they can appoint their own staff; they stipulate their own timetables and schoolcurricula; they decide themselves which learning books and school books they want to use; they have their own educational methods, evaluation and assessments; and they deliver legally valid certificates/diplomas.

## **QUESTION 2**

**Describe briefly how each of the eight key competences (Mother tongue; Foreign languages; Maths, science and technology; Digital competence; Learning to learn; Social and civic competence; Initiative taking and entrepreneurship and Cultural awareness and expression) is included in (i) the national framework curriculum (or equivalent document, including for example at the regional level) for general education, and (ii) for VET?**

### **Communication in the mother tongue**

Learning outcomes of modern languages in compulsory education (7 – 18 years) have been revised. They are linked at the levels of the European Framework for learning and teaching modern languages. The new learning outcomes modern languages will be implemented in September 2010.

In addition to that each teacher is also a language teacher. By means of a perfect use of the teaching language an excellent knowledge of the mother tongue is pursued.

### **Foreign languages**

Two foreign languages are compulsory in general and technical education, one foreign language in vocational education.

Nine Flemish secondary schools embarked upon the CLIL project (Content and Language Integrated Learning) from the school year 2007 – 2008. Approximately 15 % of the total number of teaching periods is provided in French or English. A scientific research team will evaluate the project.

### **Mathematics, science and technology**

The learning outcomes of **science** in primary education (pupils from 7 until 12 years old) and the first grade of secondary education (12 until 14 years old) have been revised in order to match better with the competence “science literacy”. They will be implemented in September 2010. There is an action plan for Science Information and Innovation (policy and actions to promote Science, Technology and Innovation – STI). The action plan is issued and financed by the Flemish Government. It started in 1994 and is ongoing since then. The action plan is the instrument for implementing policies aimed to promote science, technology and innovation to the broader public. The policy is outlined in the (yearly) policy letter which covers the whole policy with respect to STI. In the action plan the policy is described in more detail and the actions to be undertaken are described as well. The current reference period (2005 – 2010) is a period of consolidation, where the best activities (including materials developed) and actors will be prolonged and where a better coordination and structuring of the activities will be organised by way of the establishment of a network of actors (supported by an electronic tool).

In September 2004 both the minister of Education and Training as well as the minister of Economy, Science and Innovation started the project TOS 21 (“Techniek Op School in de 21ste eeuw”- Technical Literacy at school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century). Within this project a framework of reference for **technological literacy** was developed on the basis of gathering available research and literature and the consultation of experts in science, technology and education.

August 2008 the project was finished and a general framework was delivered. The content of this framework is organised in 19 standards and 65 reference points and got the form of a matrix. The latter consists of dimensions of learning technology, components of technology and the developmental stage of the pupils. On the basis of this framework the existing learning outcomes for technology in primary (pupils 2, 5 – 12 years of age) and secondary education (1<sup>st</sup> stage, 12 – 14 years of age), are adapted. These will be implemented in September 2010.

In order to prepare the implementation of the learning outcomes for technology, a follow-up project has been started by the two ministers. During a period of two years (2008 – 2010), twenty pilot schools are working out good practices of implementing the learning outcomes for technology.

Pupils will develop insights into the application of technological concepts, processes and systems. They learn both to understand and to use technology, and get an insight in its effects on people, the environment and society. They will also be able to make a more informed and objective choice of study or profession.

Concerning **mathematics** the Ministry of Education and Training has proposed to revise the learning outcomes during the next legislature.

### **Digital competence**

Cross-curricular final ICT objectives for mainstream elementary education and for the first stage of secondary education were designed, as well as developmental ICT objectives for special education. Investments in ICT were increased and an integrated ICT policy plan has been presented.

### **Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence**

A new concept for cross-curricular learning outcomes has been developed, taking into account the European recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning. In September 2010 the following framework will be implemented. The framework focuses on personal development in relation to others and on the ability to participate in a multicultural, democratic society. This educational focus is first of all elaborated in a set of context free, rather broad objectives that can be applied to all subjects and contexts. For instance: critical thinking, creativity, empathy etc. Secondly, this starting point is used to develop final objectives for a number of contexts:

#### *Personal development:*

- Physical development
- Mental development
- Social-relational development

#### *In a multicultural, democratic society:*

- Environment, safety and traffic
- Political-judicial society
- Socio-economic society
- Multicultural society.

**Cultural awareness and expression:** learning outcomes for arts and cultural development are integrated through the contexts mentioned here above.

Objectives for **learning to learn** are being developed separately. Within the concept, though differently organized and formulated there is a substantial overlap with the European key competences learning to learn, social and civic competence, initiative taking and entrepreneurship and cultural awareness and expression.

### **Initiative taking and entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurial Education Action Plan (Flanders) for the sensibilisation on entrepreneurship:

- Knowledge Centre: the development of a virtual Knowledge Centre on initiatives (including materials, information, events,...) to stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurship;
- “Ondernemersklasseweek” (Entrepreneurial Class Week): is meant to highlight actions on entrepreneurship in schools and training centres (including a scription-contest);
- Research on drivers for success: Study on “How to promote Entrepreneurship within and via Education” and a symposium on the subject (oct. 24th. 2008);  
<http://www.competento.be/competento/databank.aspx?detail=824>
- Call for projects, building a bridge between Economy and Education to enhance the spirit of entrepreneurship;
- Funding of some initiatives on Mini-enterprises in schools;
- The secondary schools can use the optional part of the curriculum to supplementary subjects. In the third stage, the specific training component can be filled up with entrepreneurial competences;
- New federal law on the basic elements of the Business Management Certificate is integrated in the curriculum.

#### **QUESTION 3**

**By what means (e.g. learning material or learning support) does your country seek to support schools and teachers to ensure that *all* young people leaving initial education and training (i.e. including the educationally disadvantaged) have developed these competences to a level that equips them for adult life?**

Traditionally, the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training develops **guidelines** when new or revised learning outcomes are ratified by the Flemish Parliament. Schools are free whether or not to use these guidelines. **The Ministry finances the education guidance service of the educational networks in order to guide schools in implementing the core curriculum. The Ministry also offers financial support to selected schools that work out cross-curricular projects.**

Furthermore there is a wide range of organisations who, at their own initiative or supported by the Ministry of Education and Training or other ministries (for instance the Ministry for Environmental Issues or the Ministry for Economy, Science and Innovation), offer all kinds of support (f.i. extra means for organizing projects or competitions, development of didactical material). When the core curriculum has been revised, the publishers of learning material are informed by the Ministry of Education and Training about the changes and new issues in the curriculum.

#### **QUESTION 4**

**What progress has your country made towards ensuring that all adults have opportunities to develop and update their key competences?**

#### **New decree on adult education**

The new decree on adult education of June 2007 redefined and emphasized the mission of the Centres of Basic Education. From September 2008 there are 13 regional Centres for Basic Education that focus their activities on all adults who need a basic training in order to fully participate in society or follow further training. These centres provide a broad and varied range of

basic education programmes, in which the key competences are integrated: mother tongue, mathematics, social orientation, ICT, introduction in foreign languages (French, English) and participant counselling activities.

The new decree defines furthermore the structure of adult education in Flanders as completely modular. This modular structure gives more opportunities to motivate participants during their learning pathway by providing interim experiences of success. The flexible organisation of the courses and the investment in open learning centres and e-learning offer more possibilities for adults to combine their personal/professional life with learning pathways in adult education to develop and update their key competences.

In addition, the courses of basic education are free from tuition fees to avoid any financial barrier for adults to develop and update their key competences.

After following a course in a Centre for Basic Education a participant can enrol in another centre (e.g. Centre for adult education) or institution for adult education to continue their learning pathway and to obtain for example a professional qualification, a diploma of secondary education, etc... .

### **Strategic Literacy Plan**

At the end of June 2005 the Flemish government approved a Strategic Literacy Plan (“Strategisch Plan Geletterdheid”). It covers 35 actions in which a whole number of partners are involved: the training providers (Flemish Public Employment Service (VDAB), Flemish Agency for Training in Enterprises (SYNTRA), Centres for Basic Education, Centres for Adult Education and compulsory education), employers and employees and welfare organizations. Ten objectives are determined.

1. Working out of an operational definition of literacy (language, mathematics and ICT) on the basis of insights from relevant international research. This operational definition allows to aim the use of screening instruments towards priority groups;
2. Implementation of a quickscan instrument for the detection of literacy risk in job-seekers and of an instrument for learning pathway placements in adult basic education centres;
3. Development of an instrument for thorough literacy screening, to be used for placement in education and training and in the local or regional social policy;
4. More optimum application of existing instruments in the employment policy and of the financial opportunities in European programmes and actions for opportunity groups;
5. Further development of integrated training pathways taking into account the literacy level of the course participant. With even more collaboration between Centres for Basic Education and vocational trainings of Centres for Adult Education, entrepreneurial training (SYNTRA) and VDAB;
6. Promotion in the field of welfare and socio-cultural work:
  - a. Inclusion of objectives and actions of the literacy plan in the Flemish action plan poverty prevention;
  - b. Involvement in actions and projects of experience experts in poverty and social exclusion;
  - c. Promotion of accessible initiatives;
  - d. Sensibilisation of socio-cultural organizations for literacy and the possibilities for an integrated approach;
  - e. Integration of literacy training in newly developed initiatives for opportunity groups in socio-cultural work;

7. Flexibilisation and optimisation of the educational offer in adult basic education for efficiency enhancement and minimization of the cultural difference between adult basic education centres and other training providers. More attention must be paid to the literacy problem in teacher training, application of the possibilities of alternating learning and on-the-job literacy trainings;
8. Differentiation of the actions towards the different (risk) target groups: young school leavers, long-term unemployed people, seniors, the underprivileged;
9. Setting up of school projects in mainstream education and possible deployment of local consultations for coordinated actions;
10. Communication and sensibilisation actions towards the broad public and the different actors which are confronted with the literacy problem; linked to the general sensibilisation concerning lifelong learning.

The strategic literacy plan foresees the execution of the above mentioned actions during the period 2005 – 2011. The actions undertaken during the period 2005 – 2009 are currently being evaluated in order to formulate policy recommendations.

#### **QUESTION 4.a**

**What, if any, are the current adult target groups and the specific provisions put in place for them?**

#### **New decree on adult education**

“Equal opportunities for all” is the main theme in the Flemish educational policy, adult education included. This means that there are no specific adult target groups defined. The new decree on adult education aims at attracting as many adults as possible to develop and update their key competences, to obtain a (or another) professional qualification, to learn a second language, etc....

In order to eliminate financial barriers to participate in adult education, the new decree on adult education of June 2007 determined specific categories for participants who are free (entirely or partially) from paying a tuition fee.

Furthermore, the new decree foresees a total increase of the financial resources of the Centres for Basic Education and Centres for Adult Education with 2% to enable the centres to carry out their mission. This mission consists on the one hand in providing participants knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the personal development, the social functioning, the participation in further education and training, the excursion of a profession, the mastery of a language; and on the other hand in enabling participants to obtain recognized diplomas/certificates.

#### **Strategic Literacy Plan**

Within the scope of the Strategic Literacy Plan the Centres of Basic Education received from 2006 until 2009 an cumulative increase of financial resources with 5% per year, in order to carry out their task within the scope of the above mentioned Strategic Literacy Plan. In 2009 this extra financial resource for the Centres of Basic Education amounts to € 3.150.000.

**QUESTION 4.b**

**What national data are available on the participation of adults (and any adult target groups identified as priority) in provision designed to develop their key competences?**

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, and more specific the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Student Grants, disposes of data concerning the adult education (participants, staff, centres, subsidies, etc...). Flanders will also participate to the PIAAC survey.

**QUESTION 4.c**

**In designing the provision for adults, what collaboration is in place with representatives of other policy areas, social partners and other stakeholders?**

In designing the provision for adults there is collaboration with several representatives of other policy areas (e.g. Ministry of Work, the Ministry of Education and Training and the Ministry of Sports, Youth and Culture), the social partners, the representatives of the educational networks, the strategic advisory council for the education and training policy of the Flemish Community (VLOR), etc... .

**QUESTION 5**

**How have curricula, statements of teacher competence requirements, or equivalent guidelines, for (a) initial and (b) in-service teacher education been developed to ensure that teachers are equipped to implement a competence-based approach (e.g. the teacher as co-constructor or facilitator of learning, team teaching, collaboration between teachers and parents, participation in school development, formative assessment techniques, and self-directed professional development)? Have any specific measures been taken in the area of VET teachers and trainers?**

**Initial teacher education**

In December 2006 a new decree on teacher education was adopted. The decree introduces new pathways to teacher education and reformed teacher education courses on different levels:

- Introducing two pathways for initial teacher education, an bachelor course (180 study points) for pre-primary, primary and lower secondary school teachers, and a postgraduate course (60 study points) for lower and higher secondary school teachers.
- Special attention is given to vocation professionals entering teacher education after a professional career.
- Increase of preservice/in-classroom training: each student has to pass a minimum number of study points of practical teaching classes, which can be up to half of the teacher education programme.
- Increasing the teachers' knowledge of the subject they teach: enhancing expertise, lower secondary school teachers can graduate only in two subjects instead of three.
- Redefining the learning outcomes of teacher education curricula.

The learning outcomes of teacher education are described as basic competences. By this we mean the knowledge, skills and attitudes a recently graduated teacher needs in order to function as a starting teacher. We know 3 groups and 10 subgroups of basic competences:

Responsibilities with respect to the learner

1. The teacher as a guide of learning- and development processes
2. The teacher as an educator

3. The teacher as a (subject - content) expert
  4. The teacher as an organiser
  5. The teacher as an innovator / researcher
- Responsibility towards the school/ the educational community
6. The teacher as a partner of parents
  7. The teacher as a partner of the school team
  8. The teacher as a partner of the external community
  9. The teacher as a member of the educational community
- Responsibility with respect to the society
10. The teacher as a participant of the cultural community
    - ◆ Socio-cultural field
    - ◆ Socio-economic field
    - ◆ Philosophical field
    - ◆ Cultural-aesthetic field
    - ◆ Cultural-scientific field

Within these 10 competences the decree stated to have special attention for:

- Perfect mastering of the Dutch instruction language, taking into account the idea that all teachers should be language teachers;
- Ability to communicate with non native speakers;
- All secondary teacher students should be familiar with characteristics of general and vocational education;
- Problems related to the metropolitan context (truants, aggression, language, ...).

### **In-service teacher education**

Although we do not have an official in-service period, the decree mentioned above introduced a new mentoring system, and extra funding. A mentor is funded for guiding both non graduated students during their in- classroom experiences and recently graduated students during their first years appointment.

The decree also stated the development of a job profile, which describes the knowledge, skills and attitudes an (experienced) teacher needs for his professional activities. It is composed of the same 3 groups and 10 subgroups as are the basic competences.

All teachers, but especially VET teachers have the opportunity to do an internship in an enterprise.

### **QUESTION 6**

**What approaches (including new ways to organise learning) does your country take to promote the acquisition of transversal key competences in general education (primary, lower secondary and general upper secondary), VET, adult learning and teacher training (in particular learning to learn, social and civic competence, initiative taking and entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness and expression)? Where appropriate please refer back to Question 2 on curricula.**

While the learning outcomes determine what the pupils minimally have to know and be able to do, they do not define how these objectives are to be reached. The schools are totally free in this respect. There is room for diversity and difference in approach.

(See also question 1: freedom of education)

**QUESTION 7**

**How is summative and formative student assessment used to help pupils/students acquire key competences, including the transversal ones? Please describe your current approach.**

In Flanders it is not the Ministry of Education and Training that works out student assessments. The schoolteachers make their own tests to assess the development of their students (both formative and summative). The team of teachers within a school decides whether a student can move along to a next level or not. Within the National Assessment Program (see question 8), parallel tests are developed. These tests are provided to the schools free of charge. The test items provide good practice in more competence-driven evaluation. Schools will receive feedback about their performance by giving those data in comparison with similar schools.

**QUESTION 8**

**How does your country – at national and or regional and local levels – evaluate the outcomes of education and training systems in relation to key competences? How is such evidence used for developing policy?**

Flanders participates in the **PISA surveys**. The PISA 2006 results show that pupils in Flanders perform very well in mathematical, scientific and reading literacy, though the impact of socio-economic background remains too strong.

A **National Assessment Program (NAP)** has been installed and provides valid and reliable output data on system level. A scientific research team develops tests (for Dutch, mathematics, biology, gathering and processing information, modern foreign languages) for a representative sample of schools and students. Knowledge, skills and competences (core curriculum) at the end of an educational cycle are tested. The results have no consequences whatsoever for individual pupils or schools. The surveys are imbedded in an assessment cycle of quality. The results are presented during a colloquium and discussed with all the actors involved in education (teachers, teacher training institutes, school heads, inspectorate, guidance services, publishers, policy makers) during a conference. Each participant takes up responsibility for his share in the learning process of students. The output of the assessment cycle is recommendations to all participants.

The **inspectorate** takes the final objectives of the core curriculum into account during the school audits. Concerning the cross-curricular objectives the inspectorate looks whether schools make enough efforts while respecting the schools' pedagogical freedom.

Scientific research feeds policy decisions. For example **in the context of a scientific research** into cross-curricular themes, ordered by the educational authorities, an interview with 57 school heads showed that implementing cross curricular themes (cct's) in practice is a mixture of several approaches. Nearly all schools involved applied cct's in different subjects. They all indicated that teachers cooperate with each other. Nearly all schools involved implemented cct's in separate projects or one-off events and nearly 80% of the schools worked on cct's within the school culture.

## CHAPTER 2: TRANSVERSAL LIFELONG LEARNING ISSUES

### QUESTION 9

**What progress has your country made in the development and implementation of a coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategy (including the development of national qualifications frameworks linked to the EQF, systems for the validation of non-formal or informal learning and learning outcomes based approaches)?**

Through the policy briefs and notes of the Flemish Minister of Education, Training and Work on respectively *Education & Training* and *Employment* a **comprehensive lifelong learning strategy** has been designed for the 2004-2009 legislation period and has been implemented systematically, supported by additional financial resources. Meeting the twin challenges of efficiency and equity is central in this strategy that covers all levels of education and training whether formal or non-formal.

On 1 September 2008 a **new Decree on financing compulsory education** (i.e. pre-primary, primary and secondary education) came into force. Among other things, it resulted in the adjusting of the financial resources of the schools to reflect better the socio-economic profile of their pupils. Before, the funding of the schools by the Government was related to the type of network wherein the schools were situated (f.e. network of official schools or network of free subsidized schools). This Decree foresees an additional budget of € 85 million for primary education and € 41,3 million for secondary education. The philosophy underpinning this decree is that **pre-primary, primary and secondary education lay the foundations for lifelong learning and it is particularly important that disadvantaged groups are given the resources and opportunities to participate.**

With the same objective, scholarships for pupils and students have been adjusted. Applications can now also be made for **scholarships for children attending pre-primary and primary education** (next to secondary and higher education). Hereto the total budget is increased from € 11,9 million to € 60,8 million in the period 2008-2010. The target group of potential applicants constitutes 280,000 individuals, i.e. a quarter of the total school population.

Another Decree of March 2009 introduced the **obligation for parents to send their children at least one year** (minimum 220 halve days) **to pre-primary education before entering into primary education.** This obligation starts on 1 September 2010, but has already an impact on the participation of (5-year old) children in the last year of pre-primary education since 1 September 2009. By this obligation children should have better knowledge of Dutch language speaking when entering primary education. Evidence from research showed that children who participate not long enough in Flemish pre-primary education have a considerable disadvantage in Dutch language proficiency at the start of primary education and this causes also disadvantages in other subjects that are very difficult to remediate during the following years.

In 2007 the Flemish “**Competence Agenda 2007-2010**” has been signed by **all stakeholders:** public authorities as well as social partners, education and training providers and the public employment service. This agreement not only means a significant progress in involving the stakeholders, it also gives a boost to the Flemish LLL strategy by aiming to recognize and deploy the skills and competences of students, job-seekers and employees alike. An extra budget of € 38 million has been allocated for these actions in the period 2007-2009.

The Competence Agenda is focused on the following 10 **priorities**:

1. Developing competences in education & training, and improving study guidance;
2. Acquiring competences through learning and working (to enhance alternating pathways in vocational education at secondary level);
3. Action plan for entrepreneurial education;
4. Recognition of acquired competences on the labour market;
5. Scaling up the approach to youth unemployment;
6. A sound competence policy within companies and organisations;
7. An age-conscious personnel policy;
8. Competence development for the individual employee;
9. Dealing with changing careers;
10. The sectors as pivots for competence policy.

These 10 priorities are also selected as the national objectives of the Flemish Community of Belgium for setting up Leonardo da Vinci projects.

For the period covered by the Competence Agenda (2007-2010), a covenant is drawn up between each of the c.30 professional sectors involved and the Minister. These covenants present the **specific commitments** made by the professional sectors on a yearly basis to help realise the Competence agenda. For example, it refers to the Competence Agenda's objective of providing 75,000 trainee places annually to pupils of secondary education and 30,000 trainee places every five years for teachers. Subsequently, each professional sector inserts its commitment for a particular year (e.g. 2,200 trainee places for pupils per year to be provided by the catering business sector).

As mentioned in the previous report, since 2005 the *Project Strategic Education and Training Policy* – situated in the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training – constitutes the interface between education, employment and culture policy. It deals with the **coordination and implementation of the Flemish LLL-policy and the Competence Agenda**.

Within the spirit of collaboration between these policy domains, significant progress has been reached in the following domains.

### **The development of an overarching Flemish qualification framework (NQF)**

Inspired by the EQF, the *Project* developed an overarching (national) qualification framework comprising 8 levels. After two years of consulting all relevant stakeholders and of setting up pilot projects, the Decree on the Flemish qualification framework (“Vlaamse kwalificatiestructuur”) has been endorsed by the Flemish Government in February 2009 and adopted by the Flemish Parliament in April 2009. As the descriptors of the Flemish framework are compatible with the descriptors of EQF, referencing the Flemish qualifications levels to the EQF levels will be relatively easy. In the meanwhile, the self-certification process of the Flemish HE qualifications levels to the Dublin descriptors has been successfully finished in March 2009.

This NQF will be an important instrument to enhance LLL. It will deliver **transparency** into the diversity of qualifications in the domains of general education, VET, higher education and adult learning. By using a learning outcome approach, it will be a **support for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning and for increasing the relevance of the education and training system** by adapting the curriculum to societal expectations and demands of industry. Therefore, the Decree on the Flemish qualification framework prescribes that the the social partners within the Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV) will be responsible for developing the qualification references for VET by e.a. the description of professional profiles.

Designing an overarching qualifications framework is **also an equity issue**. Increased participation of low-skilled people and immigrants in continuous learning is critical to enhance their employability. Giving special attention to the lowest levels of the qualification framework, f.e. by linking the basic education for adults to level 2 of the Flemish QF (equivalent to EQF level 2), this framework could motivate these people to go upwards the qualification “ladder” with the aim to obtain a qualification of the next level (“one step up”).

Finally, the Flemish overarching qualification framework can be a **support for lifelong guidance** and for **human resource development** in public organisations and enterprises.

### **Clear progression routes between level 4 and 6 of EQF/the Flemish NQF**

During 2007-2008 plans have been discussed with the relevant stakeholders, including the social partners, to increase the transparency of the existing and new VET qualifications at level 4 (i.e. specialised qualifications awarded after 1 year of post-secondary VET) and at level 5 (i.e. qualifications awarded after approx. 2 years of post-secondary VET). These consultations resulted in the Decree on Higher vocational education (“HBO5”) and Secondary-post-secondary VET (“Se-n-se”) that has been endorsed by the Flemish Government in February 2009 and adopted by the Flemish Parliament in April 2009.

### **Improving the quality of workplace learning**

In 2008 a lot of work was done to establish a full time activity for all pupils in part-time vocational education and training, if possible with work, and when that is not immediately possible, with preliminary courses and guidance. September 2008, the new Decree on alternating learning and working became effective, **introducing fulltime compulsory education for youngsters until the age of 18**. Before, part-time compulsory education was allowed between the age of 16 and 18. At the same time an IT-system has been developed for monitoring this fulltime engagement.

During the school years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 policy lines concerning the quality of workplace learning have been drafted in **concise guidelines on quality assurance** and these have been distributed by the Ministry of Education and Training to the Flemish Centres for Learning and Work and to the professional sectors.

### **Stimulate the recognition of prior learning and work experience (RPL)**

Since the Decree on the professional title of 30 April 2004, employees and job-seekers can receive a **certificate for work experience** (“ervaringsbewijs”) if they can demonstrate, by an assessment procedure in a by the Flemish Government accredited centre, that they have learned or acquired the professional skills and competences needed to exercise an occupation. End February 2009, about 60 different assessment standards were already developed by the social partners within the Social Economic Council of Flanders (SERV). About 40 assessment centres were operational and 950 of these certificates were awarded.

The procedures for **recognition of prior learning in higher education** which were already integrated in the Decree on flexible learning in Flemish Higher education (2004) have been simplified and improved in the Decree on the establishment of measures for restructuring and flexibility in higher education (2006). Each “association” (cooperation platform between universities and university colleges) has now set up an agency for the validation of prior learning. This validation of prior learning and/or of professional experience in higher education may lead to:

- access to higher education programmes
- shortening of study duration.

In 2008-2009 **pilot projects** on RPL were running within the Flemish central administration to find out how RPL can be introduced as an alternative for or a complement to the formal diplomas that are required to get a function in this administration.

The **Flemish qualification framework** will be used as **the reference framework for RPL procedures** in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Once the qualification standards are developed, linked to the Flemish QF and adopted by the Flemish Government, they will be underpin the assessment of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning. In this way these assessments will be comparable in content with those for the learning outcomes of formal learning. Skills and competences will be assessed to the same reference standards, independent of the learning context, provider or assessment procedure.

Within this logic, the Flemish QF will become the basis for the **recognition** of diplomas and certificates awarded by the different Flemish competent bodies and, via the EQF, by other Belgian or foreign competent bodies.

June 2009, **an expertise network for RPL has been launched including an official RPL website** (see: [www.vlaanderen.be/evc](http://www.vlaanderen.be/evc)). The aim of this network and website is to support and enhance the quality of RPL procedures, and to inform the wider public on the different RPL possibilities. The members of the network are experts in RPL, working in different sectors as: higher education, adult education, assessment centres for the certification of work experience (“*ervaringsbewijs*”), continuing vocational training, de cultural sector, youth and sport sector.

To enhance the quality of RPL procedures, two tools for self-evaluation are now tested: the “quality kit” for RPL and the common principles and criteria for portfolio use. Both tools are the result of research financed by the Flemish authority.

### **A new Flemish Quality Agency coordinating quality assurance for all education, training and RPL systems**

Within the perspective of the overarching Flemish qualification framework, it became logic to merge the following services into one central Agency: the Education and Training Inspectorate, the Curriculum Development Service, the Qualification agency and database, NARIC, the coordination of RPL procedures and central examinations, and the secretariat of the RPL expertise network. A Decision of the Flemish Government on that topic has been adopted on 20 February 2009. Once operational, this new Agency could take up the roles of National Coordination Point for EQF.

### **Flemish targets and European benchmarks**

In search of further innovation, the Flemish Government is also implementing the “national” action plan “*Vlaanderen in actie*” (Flanders in action), which includes several measures **to foster innovation in the domain of education and training**. This action plan contains 20 objectives for the future and concrete targets for the next decade under the title *Pact 2020*. Three targets are relevant for the Flemish LLL strategy and these are in line with the European benchmarks in the updated framework Education and Training 2020:

- To reduce with 50 % the number of unqualified school-leavers at the end of secondary education by 2020;
- To increase the participation of adults (25-64 years old) in LLL to 15% by 2020;
- To increase the participation in higher education by 2020, with special attention for the children of non-higher educated parents.

## **CHAPTER 3: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

### **QUESTION 10**

**What progress has your country made in increasing the attractiveness of VET programmes and their relevance to the labour market?**

#### **Investment Operation**

In 2005 the Flemish government has decided to start an investment operation in all VET-schools in Flanders in order to improve the machinery of these schools. About € 10 million has been reserved each school year during 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

The aim of this operation is to improve the quality of VET education in Flanders by keeping the infrastructure and machinery in the schools up-to-date in the conviction that when students learn to work on these new machines their competences will improve and the transition to the labour market will be more smoothly. In this way the Flemish government has increased the attractiveness of VET programmes and their relevance to the labour market.

#### **A subsidy for VET-students who study for “critical jobs”**

The Flemish government has decided in 2005 to subsidize students in VET-programmes who study for critical jobs. This initiative is repeated till 2009. The aim of this subsidy (about € 250 per student) is to contribute to the costs of material that is needed to fulfil the study programme. The study for butcher, for example, needs specialised and expensive butcher knives and this can discourage students to follow this study programme. It is the aim of the Flemish government to eliminate the financial obstructions of some study programmes who lead to the completion of critical jobs (used for vacant jobs with a low degree of applications).

#### **The Regional Technological Centres**

In 2001 the Regional Technological Centres (private corporations) were created to enhance the co-operation between the field of education and the field of the labour market. The key objective is to assure, through cooperation between public as well as private training providers, to get the high-technological machinery and equipment to the disposal of technical and professional secondary education. Not only students, but also teachers can make use of the opportunities an RTC can create.

Regional Technological Centres are not investment corporations. Their first aim is not to buy machinery for schools, but to search for available infrastructure in other fields, i.e. in other schools, at the VDAB (public training service), Syntra, private training companies,...It's basic strategy is to make an efficient use of the available infrastructure.

In 2007 an evaluation report was written by the Flemish Ministry of Education. In this report the schools welcomed the initiatives of the Regional Technological Centres. The RTC-actions were perceived as “the finishing touch” in technical and profession secondary education.

The Flemish government has agreed with the 5 Regional Technological Centres (one per province) to start a new management agreement for 2008-2010. In these management agreements the government formulates the objectives the RTC's have to reach. The objectives are translated by the RTC's in a strategic plan for 2008-2010 and an action plan for each year, to be approved by a assessment commission composed by the Flemish Minister of Education.

To guarantee the performance of the Regional Technological Centres, the government has formulated some restrictions or conditions in the financial field. For instance, they can spend no more than 30% of government funding to overhead and wages. Actions can only take place when there is at least 25% cofinancing from others than the Flemish government, for instance from a private (training) company. This is to guarantee the actions the RTC takes are also supported by other stakeholders and that this support gets actually translated in a financial support. Interesting to note is that the decision makers in these RTC's are partially composed of members in the education field and of members of the private field (public-private cooperation). They decide together on which themes they will focus and which actions will be developed.

The Regional Technological Centres are very popular the last years as they are one of the few organizations that provide opportunities to strengthen the link between education and the labour market in a concrete way. As each RTC had only 1 manager in service, the Flemish government has decided in 2007 to give an extra government funding to each RTC so they can recruit 3 employees.

### **Education contracts with associations of representatives of the private sector**

To strengthen the relations with the private sector, the Flemish government has made an agreement with representatives of the private sector to increase the attractiveness of VET programmes and to strengthen the alliance with the private sector. Thanks to these contracts schools can cooperate with the private sector to gear their study programmes to the concrete needs of the private companies. This cooperation takes place under the supervision of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training that fulfils a facilitating role between these two parties.

### **Ad hoc government subventions**

The Flemish Minister of Education and Training has the competence to allocate a subvention to a particular approach. In 2007 for example, the Minister decided to give a government subvention for a local VET-school project, named "The Eight". Eight last year students of the study programme "Construction" renovated an old public building to a social building in eight weeks. In this social building young and old people can meet each other. The renovation by the students was filmed and broadcasted on national television in prime time. The aim was to contribute to the image of constructors and to increase the attractiveness of the construction study programme.

### **Legal changes in the procedure of submitting study programmes**

The offer on education in VET has to keep in line with societal, economic and technological developments. The actualisation of that offer is a constant matter. That's why the government - in cooperation with representatives of schools and private sectors- regularly screens the offer on education. The result of such a screening may lead to keep, to modernize or to abolish an education programme. The involvement of representatives of the field of education and the field of private sector not only guarantees that the screening procedure takes place on a professional way, but also that support and acceptance of the stakeholders is guaranteed. Next to the screening procedure, there is also a flexible procedure to submit proposals for organising new education programmes. Every organization has the right to submit such a proposal. This proposal is followed by an investigation on the relevance and the quality of the proposed education programme.

Flanders will also introduce a new qualification structure in which educational and professional qualifications are incorporated. This new structure will also be the reference point for new

education programmes. As soon as a new education programme is added to the official offer, schools can take the initiative to move over to offering this programme in their schools.

The Flemish government believes that the involvement of the representatives of the private sector to the programme and screening procedure will increase the attractiveness of VET programmes and their relevance to the Labour Market.

### **Innovation through experimental pilot projects (“proeftuinen”)**

To stimulate innovation without imposing hasty changes in the education policy rules to the entire education sector, the policy chooses to support the so called “proeftuinen” (experimental pilot projects). These are temporary projects organized by (groups of) schools. In the context of the Flemish “skills agenda”, new pilot projects were organized about educational and professional choices and workplace learning for the period 2007-2010. The first fitted in “improving access to and equity in VET” the second in “Improving quality of VET” and “strengthening the links between VET and the labour market”.

#### *1. experimental pilot projects about educational and professional choices*

Within the action “an informed educational and professional choice”, a call was launched for temporary projects which work on the following topics:

- to discover and develop talents at different ages;
- to increase the knowledge about educational offers in secondary schools and in higher education and the opportunities on the labour market, all from the view that schools and school communities are responsible for a proper orientation;
- an individualized educational portfolio over the entire school career.

Primary and secondary schools were invited to submit projects in which educational choices departs from the talents of their pupils. Starting with this view in primary schools and in the first grade of secondary schools, we hope that 14 years old students consciously choose for a course leading to a profession or for courses that apply to their talents. This will also allow more students to make a conscious choice for courses in technical and vocational schools.

#### *2. experimental pilot projects about workplace learning*

Within the action “Certified workplace learning”, a call was launched for temporary projects which work on the following topics:

- to develop certified workplace learning in a systematic and structural way;
- to optimize and expand internship for students;
- to optimize and expand internship for teachers.

In the context of a more competence-oriented development of the curriculum in technical and vocational courses, secondary schools get the opportunity to integrate more realistic learning environments in the learning process of their pupils. The submitted projects develop materials and methods to get a better alignment of the goals pursued in the educational training and the goals pursued during the internship. If workplace learning becomes an important part of the education, there will also have to be made good agreements on monitoring and evaluating students who are learning and working in a company. Some experimental pilot projects design evaluation tools that can be used to evaluate skills within the classroom as on internships or during periods of workplace learning. In this way, the contact between education and the labour market is also strengthened. Both partners learn to know each other and each others expectations in a better way. There will also be a better match between educational and job profiles.

About the **Technology Literacy at school** (TOS 21): see question 2.

## CHAPTER 4: HIGHER EDUCATION

### QUESTION 11

In the area of Modernisation of Higher Education what progress has your country made in relation to:

- Plans/measures to diversify the income streams of Higher Education Institutions?
- Plans/incentives to encourage Higher Education Institutions to open up to lifelong learners?

The communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament “Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation” suggests diversification of income streams of higher education institutions as a policy instrument in order to realise changes in higher education and to modernise higher education.

**Diversification of funding** may have many meanings: diversification between public and private funding, diversification between teaching and research funding, diversification between core and competitive funding, between input-based and output-based funding, and others.

In Flanders the income streams of higher education institutions are diversified in all meanings as mentioned above:

- diversity between teaching and research funding;
- diversity between core and competitive funding;
- the funding formula includes a wide range of parameters related to input, output, quality, ...
- the funding model includes block grants and targeted allocations.

There are no plans to increase **tuition fees**. Tuition fees are low and are to a certain extent income contingent. **Low tuition fees are considered in Flanders as an instrument/tool to keep higher education accessible and affordable** and are also related to the progressive income taxes although the progressiveness of the taxation system was lowered.

The income streams of a typical university include the following:

- a core funding for teaching and research allocated as a block grant;
- an additional block grant for basic research;
- an additional block grant for applied research and innovation;
- a targeted allocation for teaching;
- a targeted allocations for research;
- a capital funding;
- a targeted allocation for student facilities;
- a project-based competitive income stream from the Research council: basic research projects, PhD grants and postdoc positions;
- a project-based competitive income stream from the Institute for Innovation by Science and Technology (IWT): strategic research projects, PhD grants and postdoc positions;
- an income from research contracts with the industry: pre-competitive technology and development projects;
- revenues from licensing and the exploitation of IPR;
- a project-based income from the EU Research Framework Programme;
- tuition fees.

The income streams of a typical university college include the following:

- a core funding for teaching and research allocated as a block grant;
- a targeted allocation for teaching;
- a capital funding;
- a targeted allocation for student facilities;
- a project-based competitive income stream from the Institute for Innovation by Science and Technology (IWT): technology transfer projects with SME's;
- an income from research contracts with the industry: pre-competitive technology and development projects);
- a project-based income from the EU Research Framework Programme;
- tuition fees.

Most allocations are formula-based including several of the following parameters:

- a volume of study points as a measure of the number of enrolled students;
- a volume of credits awarded;
- a number of bachelor and master degrees awarded converted to a number of credits;
- a number of master and PhD degrees awarded;
- a number of researchers;
- a number of publications and citations;
- a number of patents;
- a number of spinouts;
- a volume of revenue from licensing;
- a volume of research contracts with industry;
- a number of newly appointed women;
- a number of newly appointed external professors;
- a number of disabled students;
- a number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- a number of students combining working and learning.

**Those parameters encourage universities to take responsibility for their own long-term financial sustainability and they encourage universities towards a pro-active diversification policy of their research and innovation portfolios mainly through collaboration with enterprises and European and global academic collaboration.**

The core funding for Teaching and Research represents less than 50% of the overall budget of a university. Many universities have the feeling that the right balance between core and competitive funding has been disturbed to the detriment of the core activities and staff sustainability. This feeling has been increased since the formula used to calculate the block grant includes already a lot of competitive elements and since at the end of the day the allocation model is basically a distribution of an overall budget among the universities. Within certain limits it is a zero sum. There is an adjustment of the overall budget if the volume of teaching activities increased with 2%. In that sense a diversification of the income streams leading to a further decrease of the core funding – although it has positive effects – may strike the long-term financial and staff capacity and sustainability of the institution.

Challenges:

- the funding of research projects does not cover the full economic costs and by that way may erode the core funding;

- another threat to the financial and resource sustainability is the under-adjustment of the overall budget to increases in pay costs and the overall inflation rate;
- as a consequence of the less than 100% cost recovery there is an under-investment in real estate and research infrastructure and space leading to a backlog of deterred maintenance; research infrastructure is more and more funded by cross-subsidization from non research sources;
- a uniform funding model for all higher education institutions does not justice to the diversification of missions and profiles and may threaten the diversity of higher education; the question rises whether it is good to run all HEIs on a single system of incentives.

Apart from the lump sum the funding model includes multi-annual agreements between the minister and each higher education institution setting out agreed objectives and targets and the commitment of the institution to deliver on them and the amount of funding involved. The performance agreements cover objectives aimed at a **widening participation and an incentive for the institutions to support student achievement and progression and to improve academic success** (in terms of completing credits and gaining a qualification), especially the achievement and success of students from more vulnerable backgrounds (low cultural capital). The targets include an **increase of participation of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, of students from ethnic minorities, of students with a disability** but also an increase in the number of graduates from those target groups. Attracting second chance students could also be one of the actions funded under those agreements.

### **Lifelong learning**

The new funding model rewards higher education institutions to develop provisions for lifelong learning:

- there are no age limitations for students in the funding model;
- there are no limitations of the number of funded degrees: students are allowed to take a second bachelor or a second master;
- students are allowed to study at a variety of paces: students are given many opportunities to study flexible and to enrol at another institution;
- students who are undertaking a single course are also funded: the number of credits awarded on completion a single module are counted; those courses can be accredited to count toward a formal higher education qualification;
- students enrolled for a bridging programme (between a professional oriented bachelor degree and a master course) are also counted;
- we are applying a premium for students who already in work and who are undertaking courses delivered in a flexible manner (distance education, online education, evening and weekend, specific teaching and learning material fit to self-directed learning, alternative assessment methods) while maintaining the academic standards.

**There is a framework for recognising prior learning fully integrated in the qualifications framework; prior learning is recognized on an assessment against the learning outcomes of the qualification concerned.**

Next to that, all higher education institutions can offer courses during the evening or weekend, and organise distance-learning. By the new Decree on Higher vocational education (“HBO5”) and Secondary-post-secondary VET (“Se-n-se”) of April 2009, the Flemish higher education institutions are now allowed to organise vocational education on level 5 of EQF. This was not possible before. For the development of curricula at level 5, the professional sectors will be involved.