

European Commission
Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs
Economic Policy Committee

**Efficiency and effectiveness of public
expenditure
on tertiary education in the EU**

**ANNEX : COUNTRY FICHE
BELGIUM**

**Joint Report by the Economic Policy Committee
(Quality of Public Finances)
and the Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs**

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BELGIUM (FR)

Brief characterization of the tertiary education system

1. Main features

Since the adoption of the Act of 31 March 2004 (hereafter “Bologna Act”), the three-cycle structure leading to the graduation of bachelor, master and doctorate degrees has been progressively implemented in all higher education institutions (HEI). From the academic year 2008-2009 on, only bachelor, master and doctorate degrees have been granted by HEIs so that the structure is now fully implemented. Programmes in all cycles are defined in credits (which are legally defined) and all HEIs have started to base their programmes on learning outcomes.

Basically, within the higher education system, we distinguish university from non-university higher education:

- At university level, all programmes are structured in two cycles: the first cycle (or 1st cycle of transition) leads to the academic degree of bachelor; the second cycle leads to the academic degree of master after one year (60 credits), or two years (120 credits) at least, to a medical doctor after four years at least (240 credits), to veterinarian doctor after three years at least (180 credits). The master’s degree (120 credits or more) includes at least 30 optional credits which give this training one of the following objectives: *teaching objective* which includes specific pedagogic education; *in-depth study objective* preparing for scientific research; *specialization objective* in a particular discipline.
- At non-university level, the higher education provided is of either short- or long-type. Short-type programmes are organized in a single professionalizing cycle sanctioned by the academic degree of bachelor, including 180 to 240 credits. Long-type programmes are of a university level. The degrees awarded have therefore the same effects as the degrees awarded by universities.

In order to promote and facilitate flexible study paths, the Government has adopted several Acts allowing automatic bridging procedures (*passerelles* in French). Bridging is not only possible between different study fields, but also from one type of HEI to another.

The third cycle is exclusively organized by universities through the Academies (associations of universities). The third cycle is accessible to holders of master's degree or any equivalent training of 300 credits at least. The third cycle corresponds arbitrarily to 180 credits but lasts generally over 3 years. It includes, on one hand, a doctoral training (60 credits) under supervision of teams associated in a Graduate College and leading to the research training

certificate; and, on the other hand, the work related to the preparation of the doctorate thesis. The academic degree of doctor is conferred after the public defence of a thesis demonstrating the doctoral candidate's capacities of creativity, of undertaking scientific research and distributing its results.

In the view of promoting lifelong learning in the higher education sector, first and second cycle programmes are offered by the institutions of "social advancement" education (or adult education, *enseignement de promotion sociale* in French). Those programmes aim specifically at working adults with non higher education background. Therefore, all programmes are organised in modules and can lead to the award of bachelor and master's degrees, which have the same academic and professional as those delivered by other HEIs. Other instruments enhancing lifelong learning exist: the "continued education" (*formations continuées* in French), the recognition of informal and non-formal learning (*validation des acquis de l'expérience* in French), etc.

Responsible for the external quality assurance of higher education, the Agency for the Assessment of the Quality of higher (AEQES) was established by the Act of 14 November 2002 and reinforced through the Act of 22 February 2008. The Agency is an independent body in charge of reviewing externally all the first and second cycle programmes organised by all recognised HEIs of the French Community, in accordance with the European Standards and guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG).

2. Structure of institutions and funding arrangements

In the educational system of the French Community, we distinguish two networks of education:

- the official network, organised and managed by the French Community or any public entities;
- the free network, organised by the French Community but whose management assured by a private authority.

Despite this distinction, all HEIs, from both networks, are subsidised by the French Community.

The financing mechanism of higher education can be described as follows: the operation budget granted to HEIs is calculated on the basis of a fixed envelope which varies with the number of students, the expenses inherent to the organization of the study field in question and the cost of living index. Besides these basic subsidies, other allowances have been granted to specific ends, such as maintenance costs, interest of loans, social subsidies, the promotion of success, continued education, quality, the financing of higher education non profit-making organizations and of some centres of excellence, contribution to expenses for student mobility, etc. The Government has also given financial incentives for HEIs to merge and become more visible.

Moreover, in order to diversify the income streams of HEIs, some initiatives enhancing private financing have been taken in the field of doctoral, post-doctoral studies as well as scientific research. The centres of competitiveness (*pôles de compétitivité*, in French) are good example of the diversification of financing Higher Education and Scientific Research. A centre of competitiveness is a cluster of businesses, training centres and public research units (university research teams) or private research engaged in a partnership approach aiming at creating synergies around common projects with innovative character. This partnership gets organised around a market and around a technological and scientific field attached to it and must try to grow enough in order to reach both competitiveness and international visibility. Through this policy the Walloon Region wishes to emphasize the convergences between the research policies of the universities, the businesses and the public authorities.

3. Governance and regulatory framework

The “Bologna Act” has brought important reforms within the higher education sector. A harmonised system applies now on to all HEIs (universities, *hautes écoles*, art colleges, institutes of architecture, and institutions of social advancement education). The three-cycle structure was introduced, the use of credits in designing the programmes was confirmed, the award of the diploma supplement was made compulsory for all HEIs and a number of technical terms were redefined or simplified. The new measures and instruments brought by the “Bologna Act” apply to all recognised HEIs, either from the official or the free network. Even if there are some minor specificities, most of the principles (especially concerning management, governance and funding) are identical.

The HEIs of the French Community enjoy great autonomy in the realisation of their missions. Even previous to the adoption of the “Bologna Act”, the legislation has put in place mechanisms and procedures guaranteeing a high degree of autonomy for all types of HEIs. Basically, the Ministry of the French Community intervenes via the Government Delegates and Commissioners (*Commissaires et délégués du gouvernement* in French) whose main responsibility is to control the conformity of the decisions taken by the institutions’ authorities in regard to the legislation. In this view, they control amongst other things the legal conformity relative to the implementation, the composition and the functioning of management and consultation bodies, as well as the use of the financial means granted by the French Community.

The institutional autonomy also concerns the pedagogical methods and the designing of higher education programmes. Regarding the definition of programmes, we can nevertheless underline some differences between the universities and the non-university HEIs:

- The university institutions are free to define the content of the programmes leading to the award of an academic degree as defined in the legislation. The “Bologna Act” lists the study fields in which university institutions can organise their programmes.

- The non-university institutions (*hautes écoles*, art colleges and institutes of architecture) have to integrate the minimum hourly volumes of courses when defining their programmes. After consultation of the main stakeholders, each representing general council (General Council for the *hautes écoles*, the Higher Council for artistic higher education and the Higher Council for architecture higher education) propose the minimum hourly volumes of courses for every programme in their sector, which are afterwards approved by the Government. The minimum hourly volumes of courses amount for around 80% of a programme. Therefore, every single institution is free to define 20% of the programme, following their own projects and missions. Concerning the institutes of architecture, as mentioned hereafter, those institutions have merged with the universities so that those institutions are not bound to the minimum hourly volumes of courses.

Finally, the implementation of the Bologna Process has certainly accelerated the institutional merging processes since 1999. The objectives pursued by merging institutional range from enhancing the visibility, the competitiveness and the attractiveness to optimizing the use of public funds through large economy of scale. Even if it has concerned all types of HEIs, the merging has been more visible concerning the *hautes écoles*. In 1999, there were 30 *hautes écoles* while today we have 21 of those institutions. We can foresee that the number of *hautes écoles* will be consolidated with 15 institutions. The institutes of architecture are also facing main transformations as they are progressively integrated within the universities. The merging will be completed from the academic year 2010-2011.

Explanatory factors for efficiency

1. Staff Policy

1.1. Hiring/Firing

All HEIs enjoy a great autonomy in hiring academic staff. Dismissing and disciplinary actions are of the initiative of the HEIs but the legal procedures are stricter in order to ensure the rights of the defendant. The institutional autonomy regarding the staff policy guarantees freedom and autonomy for the academic staff within the institution.

The management committee (for the non-university HEIs) or the executive board (for the university institutions) is basically the responsible body for hiring academic staff and decides therefore, in cooperation with the competent authority (the French Community for the official network; the “private” body for the free network). As mentioned in point I.3, the Government Delegates and Commissioners are responsible for controlling the conformity of the decisions

taken by the institutions' authorities in regard to the legislation, including the decisions concerning hiring/dismissing staff.

1.2. Wages

Within the fixed enveloped received by each HEI, the institution should a proportion as salary for the academic staff. In order to promote salary equity amongst the academic staff, the legislation defines salary scales depending on the status, the nature and volume of work, the seniority, etc.

2. Output flexibility

2.1. Course content and exams

As mentioned in point I.3, the university institutions are free to define the content of the programmes leading to the award of an academic degree as defined in the legislation. The “Bologna Act” lists the study fields in which university institutions can organise their programmes.

The non-university institutions (*hautes écoles*, art colleges and institutes of architecture) have to integrate the minimum hourly volumes of courses when defining their programmes. After consultation of the main stakeholders, each representing general council (General Council for the *hautes écoles*, the Higher Council for artistic higher education and the Higher Council for architecture higher education) propose the minimum hourly volumes of courses for every programme in their sector, which are afterwards approved by the Government. The minimum hourly volumes of courses amount for around 80% of a programme. Therefore, every single institution is free to define 20% of the programme, following their own projects and missions. Concerning the institutes of architecture, as mentioned hereafter, those institutions have merged with the universities so that those institutions are not bound to the minimum hourly volumes of courses.

2.2. Offer of short studies and other diversifies studies

The “social advancement” education or adult education (*enseignement de promotion sociale* in French) organises programmes leading to the award of lower and upper secondary certificate as well as higher education degrees. Some higher education programmes do not conduct to the award of bachelor or master degree. However, they allow the acquisition of professional competences which are at a higher level than secondary education.

Those programmes lead to the award of the Higher Education Diploma (*Brevet d'enseignement supérieur* in French) which refers to the level 5 of the European Qualifications Framework. As defined by the article 49 of the Act of 16 April 1991 organising the social advancement education, modified by the Act of 14 November 2008, the Higher

Education Diploma is specifically and exclusively organised in the social advancement education. The programmes are professional-oriented and give access to a clearly identified profession. Via bridging procedures, the holder of the Higher Education Diploma can have access to a first cycle's programme. Those programmes specifically target adults since one of the access conditions is to be 22 years old at least. Finally, those programmes are using the "Bologna instruments" as they include 120 credits to be acquired in 2 years at least and the diploma supplement will be delivered free of charge, in French and English.

2.3. Student choice

Organisation of curricula

Short-type non-university higher education leads to the academic degree of *bachelier* in different areas of study (such as agronomics, applied arts, economics, paramedical subjects, social and technical subjects, and teacher education).

Long-type non-university higher education awards the academic degrees of *bachelier* and *master* in various categories (agronomics, economics, paramedical, social and technical subjects, translation and interpretation). The first cycle, known as transition, comprises 180 credits which can be acquired in at least three years of studies and lead to the academic degree of *bachelier*. The second cycle, known as professionalizing, includes 60 to 120 credits which can be respectively acquired in one or two years of studies at least and lead to the academic degree of *master*.

The first cycle university degree is that of *bachelier*, obtained after three years (180 credits). It ratifies basic training that is generally indispensable to embark in the second cycle. The second cycle leads to the degree of *master* obtained after one (60 credits) or two years of studies (120 credits) or for the degree of *veterinarian doctor* obtained after three years of studies (180 credits) or for the degree of *medical doctor* obtained after four years of studies (240 credits). As a general rule, it includes 'specialized' education as well as the presentation of a thesis at the end of the studies. The second cycle of master's studies of 120 credits or more includes a choice of at least 30 specific credits which give this training one of the following objectives:

- The teaching objective which includes specific pedagogic education in application of the decree of 8 February 2001 defining the initial training for qualified teachers for higher secondary education or the decree of 17 May 1999 concerning artistic higher education.
- The in-depth study objective preparing for scientific research; it includes, at the same time, in-depth study in a particular discipline and general training in the research profession. This option is only organized for certain areas of university studies.

- The specialization objective in a particular discipline of the domain with which the programme is connected, which aims at particular professional or artistic skills.

Recognition of prior learning

In higher education recognition of non-formal and informal learning was introduced by the Acts of 16 April 1991 in Adult Education, 5 September 1994 in universities and 5 August 1995 in the *hautes écoles*. Universities were then authorized to organize, under specific conditions, the access, without holding the required degree, to a limited number of second-cycle programmes as well as to grant exemptions in order to reduce the length of programmes. Concerning the recognition of non-formal and informal learning by the *hautes écoles*, the Act specified more precisely the recognition procedure: in the case of entering a second-cycle programme, applicants have to prove 4 years of professional experience at least and having the required knowledge and skills through an assessment procedure; in case of benefiting of exemptions, applicants have to prove 3 years of professional experience and the exemptions cannot exceed 20% of the total programme. Recognition of non-formal and informal learning in art schools was introduced by the Government Act of 17 July 2002 and it concerns only the access to a second cycle programme based on professional experience.

Bridging procedures

As mentioned in article 51 of the Bologna Act and the following complementary texts up to 13 June 2008, any bachelor's degree gives access to the second cycle as far as it concerns the same study field. Therefore, we can assert that 100% of first cycle qualifications give access to the second cycle. Moreover, in order to promote and facilitate flexible study paths, the Government has adopted several Acts allowing automatic bridging procedures ("passerelles"). Bridging is not only possible between different study fields, but also from one type of HEI to another.

In general terms, there are two possibilities of bridging:

- The student must follow a preparatory year including 60 credits before acceding to the second cycle programme;
- The student must undergo an admission procedure in which the required knowledge, competences and skills are examined. The admission procedure can be organised through a university or inter-university examination. Depending on the results of the examination, the student will be granted direct access to the second cycle with the possibility of 15 additional credits maximum, or will not be granted access to the second cycle and must follow a preparatory year.

In order to make the system as transparent as possible, the website of the Ministry provides all information needed as well as an overview of the bridging possibilities.

Social advancement education

As mentioned in point I.1, first and second cycle programmes are also organised by the institutions of “social advancement” education. The programmes lead to the award of academic degrees which have similar legal effects as those delivered by other HEIs. Besides aiming specifically at working adults and therefore proposing higher education in a lifelong learning perspective, the higher education programmes offered by the institutions of “social advancement” differ from other higher education full-time programmes in the modular organisation of the studies.

2.4. Numerus clausus

General requirements for access to higher education

The French Community does not apply a limited admissions system (*numerus clausus*): all students holding the standard required diplomas may be admitted. To enter higher education, a student must hold an upper secondary education certificate (*Certificat de l'enseignement secondaire supérieur, CESS*), awarded upon completion of a full secondary education cycle by a French Community full-time secondary school or social advancement school, or conferred by the French Community's board of examiners. Holders of a *CESS* that was awarded upon completion of a 7th vocational year are the only students that are required to sit for exams administered by the Board of Examiners of the French Community to earn a higher education access certificate (*DAES*). HEIs are also free to organise admission exams for those not holding a secondary school certificate. In addition, no one may be admitted to exams for a first-cycle study year without proving sufficient command of the French language.

The circumstances under which a university institution, *haute école* or art college may refuse enrolment are defined, and a recourse procedure against enrolment refusal is foreseen.

In addition to the general requirements legally defined, each HEIs is free to impose entrance requirements. Such supplementary requirements aim generally at regulating the access to certain studies. However, it concerns a very limited number of programmes i.e. civil engineering and artistic studies.

Students freely choose the higher education institution in which they wish to enrol. The choice may be made until December 1 of the academic year underway, without prejudice of the right to recourse. The government, upon opinion of the Category Council, may however exceptionally authorize a student to enrol between December 1 and February 1, if justified by the invoked circumstances.

Various measures have been taken aiming at facilitating the re-direction of students:

- system of “bridges” as explained in point II.2.3.3;
- personalised enrolment, i.e. the possibility left to examination boards to grant exemptions to students who have already completed certain study years;
- recognition of informal and non-formal learning as explained in point I.1.

Numerus clausus in dentistry and medicine

The Act of 1 July 2005 modifying the ‘Bologna Act’ has introduced a limitation of access to the second year of the first cycle programmes in medicine and dentistry. The measure has been taken as a consequence of the quotas for the access to the profession of medical doctor and dentist, set up by the Federal Public Service for Public Health.

Basically, only the students who has successfully passed the first year and have been granted with an ‘access certificate’ (*attestation d’accès* in French) depending on the marks obtained, will access to the second year of the first cycle programmes in medicine or dentistry. Each year, the Government of the French Community determines the number of access certificates, taking into account the number of second cycle graduates who have granted with the access to the profession by the Federal authorities. The Act also defines a repartition of the number of certificates available by universities, taking into account the size and the population of the institution.

Therefore, the ‘numerus clausus’ is not applied in the first year by limiting the number of subscriptions available. But it is the access to the second year of the first cycle programmes in medicine and dentistry, which is limited. Therefore, it is not relevant to provide statistics in the above table.

However, considering the evolution of the labour market in the field of medical and dentist practitioners, the Government decided to suspend the ‘numerus clausus’ for the students who subscribed in the academic year 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009 or 2009-2010.

Non-resident students' measures

With the decree of 16 June 2006, the Government obliges the authorities of universities and *hautes écoles* to limit the number of non-resident students (as defined in the decree) who enrol for the first time in a *haute école* of the French Community in courses leading to bachelor degrees in midwifery, occupational therapy, speech therapy, podology/podiatry, physiotherapy, audiology, educator specializing in psycho-educational accompaniment.

3. Evaluation

3.1. Institutional evaluation

As mentioned in point I.1, the AEQES is the independent body responsible for the external quality assurance of higher education. The Agency was established by the Act of 14 November 2002 and reinforced through the Act of 22 February 2008. The Agency's main missions are:

- Make sure the study programmes offered by the institutions are regularly assessed. The assessments have to point out the good practices, the weaknesses and the problems to solve;
- Implement external evaluation procedures ;
- Contribute, through the cooperation of all stakeholders, to the enhancement of quality in each Higher Education institution;
- Provide the government, the stakeholders and the students *with an adequate* information about the global quality of higher education;
- Give policymakers suggestions in order to improve the global quality of higher education
- Express any proposal that AEQES finds useful to accomplish its missions, either on its own initiative or on the government request ;
- Represent the French Community of Belgium at national and international meetings dealing with quality assurance in higher education.

The Agency consists of the Management Committee, the Bureau and the Executive Cell. Decisions are taken by the Management Committee, which includes 25 members representing the main stakeholders of the higher education, i.e. academic and administrative staff from HEIs, the students, the trade unions, the public administration, the employers and social partners. On the advice of HEIs councils, the Management Committee also selects teams of international experts responsible for assessing the programmes. Basically, a same committee of experts will be appointed to assess HEIs organizing the same or similar curricula. The external assessment will consist in an analysis of the self assessment report, a visit of the HEI, a preliminary report transmitted to the academic authorities concerned and a general report.

Concerning the internal quality assurance, all HEIs have the freedom to organise the internal procedure, according to the legislation. Therefore, academic authorities will form a commission and appoint a quality coordinator. This commission gathers representatives of the academic, scientific, administrative and technical staff plus students. This commission draws up a confidential report that will be handed over to the experts committee. This report must analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and identify what can be improved. In addition to this and always with a view to the improvement of quality well

before it was made compulsory, many academic authorities had chosen to have their institutions analyzed using different tools, such as Quickscanproza, ISO (International Standard Organization), EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management), CAF (Common Assessment Framework), etc.

4. Funding rules

4.1. Public funding

See section I.2.

4.2. Impact of quality assessments on funding

So far, there is no impact of quality assessments results on the funding of HEI. However, it should be underline that the external quality assurance guaranteed by the AEQES, as well as the financial incentives for internal quality assurance, has enhanced very quickly the quality assurance within the HEIs. However, it was politically decided not to establish an accreditation system *stricto sensu* and therefore there is no direct impact of the quality assessments.

4.3. Private funding

4.3.1. Tuition fees and/or households

Students who enrol in non-university higher education must pay fees (the *minerval*). The minimum payment is set by legislation (there are special fees for certain foreign students). Subject to certain pedagogical and financial conditions, students can be awarded study grants or loans. The forms of assistance offered also include other benefits, such as low-cost meals, assistance by the social services connected with *hautes écoles*, season tickets for transport, etc.

University enrolment fees were laid down in a clause in the Law of 27 July 1971 on the financing and supervision of university institutions. Subject to fulfilment of certain educational and financial conditions, students can benefit from student grants or loans. This assistance is supplemented by other benefits such as low price meals, assistance granted by welfare services linked to the universities, season tickets for transport, etc.

Every year, students must pay a **registration fee**. The amount of this fee varies depending on the higher education establishment and the type of programme followed.

For example, for the academic year 2008-2009, the **registration fee** for Belgian and EU students is set as follows:

- To register with a university: €811.00. On top of the usual fees, students from outside the European Union will be required to pay additional annual fees. To find out the exact amount, please contact the university in question.
- To register with an institute of higher education, a college of the arts or a higher institute of architecture:
 - for a long-term course: €330,07 (and €428,56 for the academic year in which the qualification is awarded);
 - for a short-term course: €165,03 (and €214,28 for the academic year in which the qualification is awarded).
- To these amounts must be added a specific fee for non-EU nationals whose parents are not resident in Belgium. The sum amounts to around €1,500.00 for the first cycle and €2,000.00 for the second and third cycles.

4.3.2. Business, other

See section I.2.

4.3.3. Grants/loans

The French Community also foresees, for students coming from less favoured environments, different types of financial assistance: study grants (or scholarships) and study loans.

- **the study grant or scholarship** is a grant (not refundable as a rule) granted by the French Community to students with limited financial resources. The award depends on educational conditions, financial conditions, conditions linked to age, and conditions linked to nationality.
- **the study loan** is financial assistance, refundable with interest, granted to the student's parents by the French Community. The granting of this depends on educational conditions, financial conditions, conditions linked to age, conditions linked to nationality, and conditions linked to the composition of the family.

At the moment, grants and loans are also made portable in the case of the student is undertaking studies abroad that are not offered in the French Community.

5. Impact on Employability

Due to the federal structure of Belgium, employment is a regional competence while education is a Community competence. Therefore, as the French Community, the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region are three different entities, it is up to now still difficult to provide aggregate statistics and data which would cover the whole population

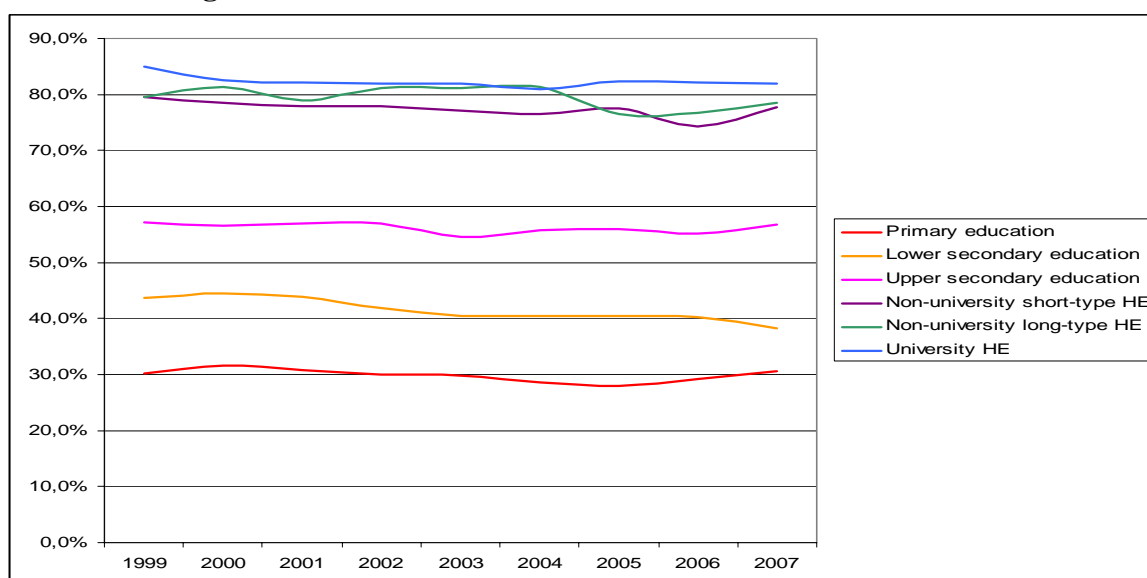
enrolled or graduated from the French-speaking higher education. However, the following tables and graphs give a clear overview of the situation in the French Community.

Employment rate by level of education in the Brussels-Capital Region and Walloon Region

		1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
TOTAL	Total	54,5%	55,5%	54,6%	54,7%	54,3%	54,6%	55,5%	54,8%	55,9%
	Male	62,4%	63,3%	63,1%	62,6%	61,3%	61,8%	62,8%	62,0%	62,8%
	Female	46,6%	47,7%	46,2%	46,9%	47,4%	47,4%	48,1%	47,6%	49,0%
Primary education	Total	30,2%	31,6%	30,7%	30,1%	29,9%	28,6%	27,9%	29,3%	30,7%
	Male	40,2%	42,8%	41,1%	40,3%	39,2%	37,7%	37,5%	38,5%	39,9%
	Female	20,4%	21,1%	20,7%	20,0%	20,9%	19,9%	18,9%	20,3%	22,0%
Lower secondary education	Total	43,6%	44,5%	43,8%	41,8%	40,5%	40,4%	40,6%	40,3%	38,2%
	Male	53,5%	53,8%	54,3%	51,4%	48,2%	49,1%	49,5%	48,7%	45,7%
	Female	33,3%	34,3%	32,8%	31,4%	32,2%	31,4%	31,1%	30,9%	30,1%
Upper secondary education	Total	57,2%	56,7%	57,0%	57,0%	54,6%	55,7%	56,1%	55,1%	56,8%
	Male	65,5%	64,4%	66,3%	66,0%	62,5%	63,9%	64,3%	63,7%	65,8%
	Female	48,7%	48,9%	47,5%	47,7%	46,5%	47,1%	47,3%	46,5%	47,5%
Non-university short-type HE	Total	79,6%	78,6%	78,0%	77,8%	77,2%	76,4%	77,6%	74,2%	77,7%
	Male	85,9%	84,2%	82,9%	80,7%	81,6%	80,8%	81,4%	79,4%	82,1%
	Female	75,7%	75,2%	74,9%	76,1%	74,5%	73,5%	75,0%	70,9%	74,6%
Non-university long-type HE	Total	79,5%	81,4%	78,9%	81,2%	81,2%	81,3%	76,6%	76,7%	78,6%
	Male	82,3%	85,1%	83,3%	85,7%	84,3%	86,9%	81,4%	80,3%	80,2%
	Female	76,1%	77,2%	74,3%	76,1%	77,9%	75,2%	71,7%	72,9%	76,9%
University HE	Total	85,0%	82,6%	82,2%	81,9%	81,9%	80,9%	82,4%	82,1%	82,0%
	Male	87,7%	86,2%	85,9%	85,9%	85,0%	83,9%	86,9%	85,5%	85,3%
	Female	81,2%	77,5%	77,1%	76,3%	77,7%	77,0%	76,9%	77,6%	77,9%

Source: IWEPS, Institut Wallon de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique

Evolution of the employment rate by level of education in the Brussels-Capital Region and Walloon Region



Source: IWEPS, Institut Wallon de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique

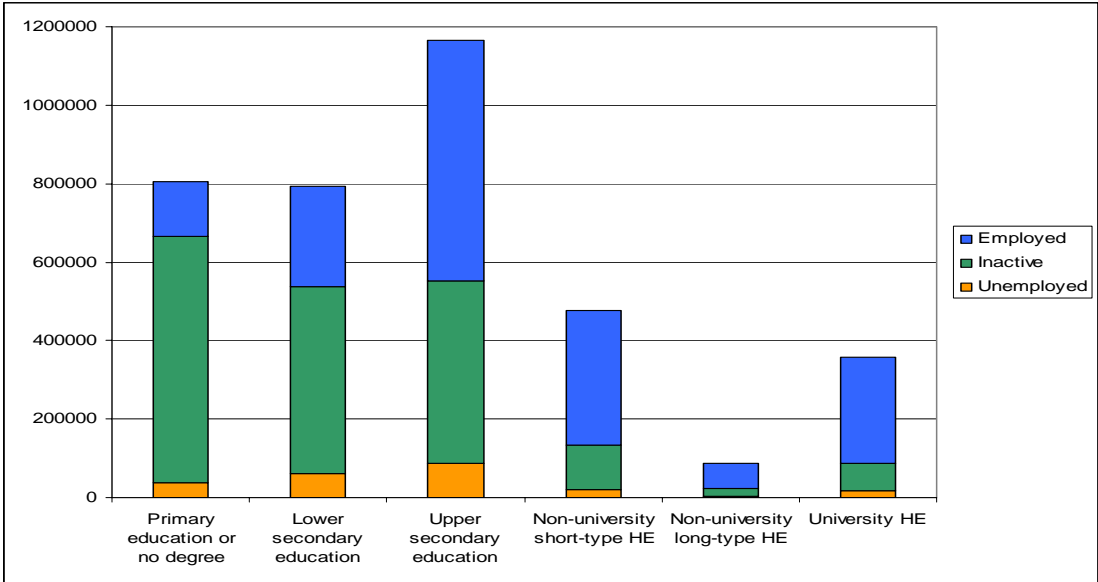
The previous table and the graph indicate the evolution of the employment rate by level of education in the Walloon Region and the Brussels-Capital Region since 1999. It shows that the level of education has an important impact on the employment rate so that highly-educated individuals are more likely to find jobs. This trend has been constant, showing a gap with those with upper secondary education only. When analysing the case of individuals holding a higher education degree, we can observe that the employment rate has decreased for all types of degrees. The most important decrease concerns university education. Finally, from the recent years statistics, we can underline that individuals with short-type HE degrees (which are professionally-oriented) are as employable as those with long-type HE.

Labour position by level of education in the Brussels-Capital Region and Walloon Region in 2007

	All degrees	Primary education or no diploma	Lower secondary education	Upper secondary education	Non-university short-type HE	Non-university long-type HE	University HE
Total	3681920	803615	791841	1165893	476969	86243	291409
Unemployed	230553	38990	61951	88276	21065	4089	16183
Inactive	1768401	625050	474320	464849	113153	18791	72238
Employed	1682966	139575	255570	612768	342751	63363	268938

Source: IWEPS, Institut Wallon de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique

Labour position by level of education in the Brussels-Capital Region and Walloon Region in 2007



Source: IWEPS, Institut Wallon de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique

The previous table and the above graph indicate the labour position by level of education of the population of the Brussels-Capital and the Walloon Regions in 2007. As stated in the previous table and graph, the level of education is a key element on the labour position: the higher educated the individual is, the more easily he/she will get in the labour market.

6. Recent and planned reforms of the tertiary education system

6.1. Description of recent reforms

- Act 31 March 2004: full implementation of the three-cycles structures in all HEIs since 2008-2009;
- Government Act 20 April 2007: new financial modalities for promoting lifelong learning and recognition of informal and non-formal learning;
- Government Act 13 July 2007: creation of the Superior Mobility Council;
- Act 19 July 2007: ratification of the Lisbon Recognition Convention by the Parliament and the Government of the French Community
- Government Act 19 July 2007: creation and administrative, budgetary, financial and accounting management of the French-speaking Agency for LLL
- Act 22 February 2008: new provisions to guarantee the independence and the efficiency of the Agency for the Assessment of the Quality of HE;
- Act 9 April 2008: setting up of the HE Qualifications Framework;
- Act 18 July 2008: creation of the HE Observatory and new measures for enhancing the democratization of HE;
- Act 28 August 2008: official recognition of a new students' union: "Union des étudiants de la Communauté française" (Unécof) ;
- Act 30 April 2009 : transfer of the higher education in architecture to the university

6.2. Planned reforms (or reference to ongoing policy debate)

- Access to medical and dentistry programmes;
- Self-certification of the HE qualifications framework;
- Use of the learning outcomes;
- Regulation of non-resident students;
- Harmonisation institutional procedures for RPL;
- Cooperation agreements between the three Belgian Communities, in particular for secondary language teachers;
- New merging of HEIs.

BELGIUM (VL)

Brief characterization of the tertiary education system

1. Main features

The structure of the Higher Education in the Flemish Community has been reformed in 2003 to comply with the Bologna Principles (Higher Education Act of 4 april 2003). The new system reflects a binary system consisting of professional oriented (ISCED 5B) programmes leading to Bachelor degrees and academic oriented (two-cycle ISCED 5A) programmes leading to Bachelor and Master degrees. In general, a Bachelor degree (professional or academic) requires at least 180 ECTS credits. A Master degree requires at least 60 ECTS credits. Apart from the initial programs the institutions can organize postgraduate- programs (all institutions) or doctorates (only universities).

The general prerequisite to start in a Bachelor programme is a diploma of secondary education. In the case of refugees or displaced people there are exceptions. The general entry prerequisite to a Master programme is a diploma of an academic Bachelor programme. By means of the mechanism of bridging courses (schakelprogramma) holders of a Professional Bachelor degree may have access to a Master programme.

Professional Bachelor programmes are only organised at university colleges (hogescholen). Academic Bachelor and Master programme are provided by Universities. University colleges participating in an association are also allowed to organize academic education. An association is an inter-institutional co-operation between one university and one or more university colleges.

The Higher education institutions (HEIs) also offer further training programmes. Students who have completed a professional Bachelor programme can start a Bachelor after Bachelor programme or start a bridging course. A Master programme can be followed by a 'Master after Master programme' (second or subsequent Master). These programmes have a load of at least 60 ECTS credits and a Bachelor or Master diploma is awarded upon completion. Furthermore the HEIs organise postgraduate courses of at least 20 credits. These training pathways focus on the strengthening and/or deepening of competencies acquired after a Bachelor or Master programme.

2. Structure of institutions and funding arrangements

Most HEIs in Flanders (universities and university colleges) are private government-dependent or public institutions. Besides the universities and university colleges, there are also four postgraduate training institutions, offering Master after Master programmes, and five non-statutory institutions (private independent institutions). There are only minor differences

between public, private dependent and postgraduate institutions. Any further explanations and regulation discussed in this report are not applicable to the private independent institutions. It is worth noticing that these institutions cover less than one percent of the higher-education student population in Flanders.

Since January 1 2008, a new model of funding in higher education is operational. The new model encompasses most of the higher education sector: university colleges and universities, the professional degree programmes, the academic degree programmes and research. This way the following funding-mechanism is in place for all public- and private-government-dependent institutions.

2.1. Public Funding arrangements:

All public funds to Higher education institutions are allocated through one of the following funding- mechanisms.

2.1.1. Lump sum on basis of funding formula

We focus on the lump sum for teaching and research. There are five overall budgets that compose the lump sum.

- an overall budget to be distributed as a fixed amount to the institutions, taking into account scale effects;
- a budget for professional bachelor programmes which the university colleges offer;
- a budget for the academic bachelor and master programmes which the university colleges offer;
- a budget for the academic bachelor and master programmes which the universities offer;
- a budget for research at the universities.

The awarded lump sums are allocated on basis of a series of criteria and factors that compose the financing mechanism. The specific components of the funding formula are:

- a fixed amount of funding, about 8-to-15%, depending on the size and profile of the institutions, taking into account economies of scale;
- a variable amount for teaching, depending on the output of teaching activity.

Factors are:

- the number of study points (ECTS) which the newly enrolled students take up.;
- the number of credits awarded; (ECTS)
- diploma's: the number of bachelor and master degrees awarded which are converted to a number of credits (one degree is equivalent of 30 credits)
- there are different weights for the different disciplines;

- Weights are applied to the study points and the credits related to the type of curriculum. The range of weights applied from 1 to 4,2.. (This means that all credits awarded in a study program with factor 3, will be multiplied by 3 to calculate the financial block grant for the institution organizing this study programme)
- a variable amount for research (only for the universities) depending on the volume (output) of the research activity;

Factors are:

 - the number of Master degrees awarded;
 - the number of PhD degrees awarded;
 - the number of publications and citations;
 - The diversity of the institution's research population.
- not all study programmes receive funds. The general precondition is an accreditation of the study programme. If this is the case, the following rules apply:
 - all initial bachelors and master courses are funded
 - post initial bachelors are partially funded
 - post initial master courses are not funded.
- students taken into account:
 - Full time and part time students are funded equally. All study programmes are organized in a fully flexible way. Both degree students and single course students (lifelong learners, re-schooling and updating of skills) are funded. For the latter ones, only the number of credits awarded (ECTS) is taken into account in the funding rule.
 - Note: for up to 2% of the volume of teaching activity, students from abroad are taken into account for the allocation of public funding. With the exception of 1 or 2 HEI; the number of foreign students in the funded study programmes remains under that limit.
- the funding method applies premiums (i.e. higher weights) for;
 - Students from underrepresented socio- economic groups. (i.e. low cultural capital groups);
 - disabled students;
 - Working students provided that the institution has specific provisions in place.
- the funding model applies temporary premiums for closing down study programmes and for merging study programmes between different institutions;

The lump sums are adjusted for the increase of the volume of teaching activity. There is an increase of 2% if the volume of the resource units increase with at least 2% compared to a set reference volume.

2.1.2. Research funds

The budget for the Flemish science, technology and innovation policy is allocated through different ministries. Applying the Frascati Manual classification, there are three main destinations for the funding: R&D, Education & training and scientific and technological services. Five major Flemish funding agencies and mechanisms especially geared towards science and innovation policy are to be mentioned here: (1) BOF&IOF (2) FWO, (3) Hercules foundation and (4) IWT, (5)PWO.

2.1.2.1 BOF

Funding stream for curiosity-driven research (**BOF**).

- The interuniversity allocation rule includes the following factors:
- the number of researchers
- the number of masters and PhD degrees awarded;
- the number of publications and citations
- the number of newly appointed external professors;
- the number of newly appointed female professors.

2.1.2.2. IOF

The minister responsible for research and Innovation further allocates a block grant (**IOF**) to the universities aimed at encouraging universities to collaborate with business and industry to foster innovation. The allocation rule includes the following factors:

- the number of patents
- the number of spin-offs
- the revenue from research contracts with industry
- the income from participation in EU framework programs;
- the number of researchers
- the number of publications and citations.

2.1.2.3. FWO

As mentioned above, public research funds are also provided by the fund for scientific research (**FWO**). These funds are allocated through research projects, PhD grants, and postdoctoral grants.

Once the total amount of funding has been determined (teaching and research), it is mainly provided as a block grant which institutions are free to spend according to their priorities within broad guidelines. This free internal distribution of resources is only limited by the fact that the HEIs may not spend more than 80% of their public funds on personnel. How they

allocate their externally obtained funds is completely up to them. This is the same for public and private institutions.

2.1.2.4. IWT

IWT is the government agency for Innovation by Science and Technology. It helps Flemish companies and research centers in realizing their research and development projects. It offers them financial funding, advice and a network of potential partners in Flanders and abroad.

2.1.3. Targeted allocations

Apart from the lump sum there are various targeted allocations:

- A targeted allocation to widen access and increase participation activities.
- Apart from the lump sum there are multi-annual agreements between the minister and each higher education institution, stipulating agreed upon objectives and targets as well as the commitment of the institution to deliver on them, and the amount of funding involved. The performance agreements cover an increase in participation of specific student target groups and an incentive for the institutions to support student success (in terms of completing credits and gaining a qualification) especially the achievement and success of students from more vulnerable backgrounds (i.e. low cultural capital group).
- A targeted budget supporting research in the humanities
- A targeted allocation covering the additional costs associated with the concentration and rationalisation of the study programme supply and the teaching and research provisions: closing down small study programmes, collaborations between institutions, join programmes ...
- A targeted allocation supporting the appointment of top researchers from outside Flanders (Odysseus programme)
- A targeted allocation supporting the highly performing professors for a longer period up to seven years (Methusalem programme)
- An allocation for food, sports, cultural, housing and other social- facilities.
- A targeted allocation for research activities especially for university colleges.
- A targeted allocation for the promotion of research driven- programs in university-colleges. This allocations aims to promote academic and scientific methods in certain university-college-programs.
- The Flemish government further provides funding for real estate and equipment investments:
 - A yearly earmarked capital grant supporting investments in real estate;
 - Earmarked capital funding as an additional funding supporting investment in big science infrastructure. (This funding is delivered by the Hercules Agency)

2.1.4. Intended outcomes and reflections on the funding-mechanism.

The basic principle is that if they require public funding they need to produce outcomes in accordance with the funding model rules. Apart from that they are also free to receive funding from other external sources. Institutions are not expected to model their internal allocations on the public funding model.

This entire funding method should help:

- To enable the HEIs to enhance their innovative capacity;
- To enable the HEIs to increase the participation of students from ethnic minorities and underrepresented socio- economic groups;
- To enable the HEIs to develop more flexible learning paths and to develop opportunities which are more suitable to mature and employed students while maintaining academic standards
- To enable the HEIs to improve the efficiency and the overall quality of the higher education system by pooling capacity and expertise (critical mass) and by developing joint study programmes.

One of the crucial issues was to find the right balance between input-based and output-based funding. Funding enrolments (input) imply to a certain extent providing funding for teaching activities which are not undertaken and giving an incentive to recruit students who have little prospect of completing the study programme. On the other hand, the students and some professors have expressed their concerns that linking funding to academic achievement could compromise academic standards and could lower the quality of education by encouraging the institutions to pass students to ensure the funding will be received.

3. Governance and regulatory framework

As mentioned in the introduction, the structure of the higher education in the Flemish community has been reformed in 2003 following the implementation of the Bologna process. Alongside the introduction of the Bachelor-Master degree system and the accreditation imperatives in higher education, a new form of collaboration in higher education has been introduced: the association as a new and relevant legal entity. Partners in the association are one university and one or more university colleges. They are established as non- for profit organizations. They are legally qualified to act: they are entitled to close contracts, to acquire goods and properties ... There is a general assembly (the organizing body), a governing board, a president and a director and a limited staff. The roles and tasks of the Flemish higher education associations are:

- to develop a strategic plan in order to streamline and tune the overall supply of degree courses; it is the aim to abolish overlap of courses: the association is striving for

concentration (critical mass) and a good division of labour, based on the strengths of each member institution;

- To tune the structure of the curricula in order to improve the transfer opportunities for continuing one's studies, from bachelor degree courses to master degree courses, or from vocational degree courses into academic degree courses;
- To improve the guidance, the counselling and support of students by pooling the experience and capacity of each partner;
- To develop a strategic plan for the improvement and innovation of teaching and learning, as an element of a common framework for internal quality assurance;
- To improve and enhance the research capacity of the university colleges; this is needed to interweave teaching and research in the Master degree courses.
- To develop a strategic plan for research and community services and to develop a common framework for the internal quality assurance of research;
- To make the investments in buildings, laboratories, auditoriums, libraries and real estate facilities more efficient;
- To advise the plans of each partner for developing new degree courses;
- To advise teaching development plans of each partner;
- To make agreements on how to deal with IPRs, to tune the partners' R&D policies and their relations with the industry.

Effects and impact of those reforms until now are:

- Students can and do switch from one study programme to another study programme early in their first year, contributing to better match of students' capabilities and interests with the demands and requirements of the study programmes. The funding program stimulates institutions to develop a screening system in the first semester in order to give students the possibility to switch to fields of study without losing much time.
- The teaching-research nexus at the universities has been strengthened
- Knowledge transfer and commercialization of the knowledge produced at the university colleges has been improved with the support of the university technology transfer offices
- Quality of applied research of the university colleges has been improved through the collaboration with the universities. A better involvement of university college staff in research projects has been the result, with a positive impact on teaching.
- An overall increase of the efficiency and cost effectiveness through a better use of resources and infrastructure for teaching and research.
- Networks for the exchange of ideas and practices regarding innovation in teaching, learning and evaluation.

Apart from the financial incentives (public funding) towards the Flemish higher education institutions, there are a number of specific rules in order to streamline the education process. These rules guarantee quality, transparency and accountability such as the uniformity of diploma's and diploma supplement (according to the recommendations of the council of Europe, UNESCO and the European Commission), the accreditation of study programmes (by an independent commission), and a mandatory annual report formulated in accordance with uniformity rules.

There is also a small difference in the amount of indirect taxes that public institutions have to pay. The public institutions have a lower rate on their tax bill but there is a compensation for the private institutions.

With regard to evaluation and curriculum content, we can refer to the already mentioned independent commission for accreditation and visitation.

Visitation is a repeated external evaluation of study programs that stimulates institutions to improve their quality. The visitation-report is the starting point for an accreditation request.

Accreditation of a study program is a precondition for funding and recognition of quality (beware, recognition of quality does not automatically mean that the institution will be funded by the public purse but it does give the institution the right to award official degrees). An institution can only be recognised by the government as qualitative if it has met a number of preconditions. These preconditions are:

- At least one accreditation for a study program.
- A sufficient organizational structure.
- Sufficient financial stability.
- A contract with at least one other institution to take over students in case of a closing scenario.

Explanatory factors for efficiency

1. Staff Policy

The level of autonomy to hire and dismiss academic staff is more or less the same for public and private dependent institutions. A few differences can be found between universities and university colleges. The basic rules are:

All institutions are free to hire the staff they prefer. There are no specific rules apart from the fact that only 80% off the public funding may be used for remunerating personnel. The only difference worth mentioning is the fact that university colleges can only compensate wages

for up to ten years of job-related experience in the private sector when entering in higher education. This rule does not apply for universities. The dismissal of academic staff is also an institutional decision, although there are some social- protection barriers. For instance: there would have to be at least two negative evaluations before a statutory member of personnel can be dismissed.

Wages paid with the block grant from the government are fixed in scales. Most institutions use the same scales for the remuneration of their externally funded personnel.

2. Output flexibility

2.1. Course content and exams

Course content is the autonomy of the HEIs. It is one of the subjects of the evaluations by the independent accreditation and visitation commissions. Because the accreditation commission can decide upon accreditation, they can indirectly decide upon subsidising certain study programmes. The visitation commission will advise on the content and pedagogical methods of study programs and forward their advice to the accreditation commission. Their decisions in the field of course content are therefore very important for the institutions. Notice that both of these commissions work independently from the government.

2.2. Offer of short studies and other diversifies studies

A new policy ready to be implemented is the introduction of a new level of vocational education, namely the ‘associate degree programmes’. These are study programmes of at least 90 and maximum 120 ECTS credits. This puts the new level between secondary education and the Bachelor degree. The institutions qualified to organize these study programmes are ‘Centres for adults education’ (sic.) and university colleges. The implementation of this new level going together with the introduction of new study programmes is foreseen in the academic year 2009-2010.

The study programs in Flanders are flexible. This means that every study programme is an aggregate of certain courses which one has to pass. (ECTS- credits) Students can put together a flexible program within the framework offered by the institution. If a student should choose to subscribe for only a limited set of courses it is his right to do so. He then closes a ‘credit contract’ which allows him to combine any number of courses in any field. Note that these kinds of contracts do not lead automatically lead to degrees. Their result is a ‘credit’ for the courses passed successfully. This is an alternative for a diploma-contract which allows the student to take up any number of courses within a defined study program. It is mentionable that only the completion of the whole study program (a certain number of credits within a defined study program) can result in the deliverance of a degree and diploma. (Bachelor 180 and Master 60 in most cases) A third possibility is an exam-contract which allows the student to subscribe for the exams only. This type of contract can be awarded with a diploma as well.

It is too soon to forward conclusions about this new method of flexible programs. All parties involved are still adapting to the new model.

2.3. Student choice

Students are free to subscribe in the study programme and institution of their choice. As mentioned before study programmes are flexible. Students can put together their own yearly curriculum within the framework of a study programme or outside of it. The framework is created by the institution. This way there can be a lot of differences between the curricula of the study programmes. For instance: the number of optional courses, the number of courses that need to be followed subsequently, the possibility to graduate in different fields of study etc.

This method makes it also easier to switch between study programmes. Since students have already completed certain courses which are also in the program of their new programme, they do not have to start all over when they want to change programmes. If a student completes a course with success he receives a qualification for this course. (EVK = earlier awarded qualification (sic.))

All institutions admit part-time learners because of the flexible model. Distance-learning is another matter since distance learning can be implemented in very different ways. All institutions are obligated to offer what we call 'exam-contracts'. These contracts are meant for students who do not actively want to participate in the tuition. In essence they only participate in the exams after studying the documents of a course. On the other hand there are also institutions who offer distance-learning programmes with more support such as e-learning, discussion-platforms, a weekly question-time,...

Lifelong learning can be viewed from different angles. First of all there are different procedures to enter higher education. There is the traditional route with a sufficient diploma. Secondly there are two different possible types of dispensation when entering in a study programme. The first is what we have discussed already, namely the 'Earlier awarded qualification' or EVK (sic.). The second possibility is an 'earlier learned skill' (EVC) which has to be assessed by a commission in the institute itself. These skills may have been learned in previous working experience, informal training or even hobbies. Based upon the decisions of such a commission, the institution can put together a program for the 'lifelong learner' which may exempt certain courses because of the 'early learned skill' an/or 'earlier awarded qualification'.

2.4. Numerus clausus

In Flanders there is no such thing as a numerus clausus. Institutions can not exclude students for this reason. However, there are a couple of study programmes which can only be entered after succeeding an admission test, namely medicine, dentistry and arts.

2.5. Regional/ European/ global mobility

Regional study mobility is rather limited in Flanders. More than 50% of students do not leave their home when entering higher education. State supported student dorms and private housing are available though. We also have a regional mobility programme to support inter-regional mobility, namely Erasmus Belgica.

European and global mobility is mostly organized within the framework of existing programmes (Erasmus, Erasmus mundus, Leonardo, etc...) There is only one condition to the transfer of students between programmes and between different higher education institutions. Students who wish to attend a number of courses in a foreign country must do this in an institution for higher education and in a study programme with a length of at least 3 years. Those conditions are built into the existing programmes for student mobility or in the bilateral agreements between institutions. The Flemish government co-finances some of these programmes with other partners. Of course the existing programs themselves have rules in place to insure quality.

3. Evaluation

3.1. Institutional evaluation

Accreditation

The starting point for accreditation is the accreditation framework. The required procedure, the quality standards and the assessment rules are laid down in this framework.

Accreditation concerns programmes that already award (nationally) recognised degrees. These programmes are included in the official register of the relevant country (i.e. the [CROHO](#) in the Netherlands or the Higher Education Register in Flanders). Accreditation relates to the assessment of the quality of the programme and [focuses on learning outcomes](#).

The accreditation procedure consists of three consecutive steps: the self evaluation, the external assessment and the accreditation.

Self evaluation

The first step in the accreditation procedure is the self evaluation. The institution and/or the programme is responsible for carrying out a self-evaluation of the programme(s) concerned.

This process is concluded with a self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report contains a description and evaluation of the programme. This is done according to at least the themes, the standards and the criteria of the relevant accreditation framework. The programme's different specialisations and/or locations, if present, are described and evaluated separately. In addition, the self-evaluation report indicates and substantiates the level and orientation of the programme. The institution sends the self-evaluation report to a quality assessment agency.

External assessment

The second step in the accreditation procedure is the external assessment. The quality assessment agency convenes an assessment panel that will be responsible for the external assessment of the programme. The composition of the assessment panel should be in line with NVAO requirements.

The assessment panel assesses the quality of the self-evaluation (including the methodology used to realise it) and whether the programme fulfils the criteria of the assessment framework. The panel follows the assessment framework, which contains all the standards and the assessment rules as laid down in the accreditation framework. The external assessment [focuses on learning outcomes](#).

The panel writes down their (objective) findings, (subjective) considerations and conclusions in their assessment report. The report is sent to the institution and published by the quality assessment agency.

Accreditation

The third step in the accreditation framework is accreditation itself. The institution submits an application for accreditation of a programme to NVAO by sending in the assessment report. NVAO uses the evaluation criteria in the accreditation framework to evaluate the assessment report, the overall conclusions expressed in it, the panel composition and the methodology used. This means that NVAO verifies whether the programme offers generic quality. Subsequently, NVAO takes an accreditation decision and lays down its findings in an accreditation report. Finally, the panel's assessment report and NVAO's accreditation report (including the accreditation decision) are published by NVAO.

The accreditation decision

If the assessment report provides insufficient information regarding the programme, NVAO can decide to reject the report. This means that the report doesn't provide sufficient information regarding the fulfilment of the accreditation criteria, i.e. the report is unclear. Since NVAO cannot decide whether the programme offers generic quality, it has no other choice than to reject the report.

If the assessment report provides sufficient information regarding the programme but offers insufficient basis for NVAO to decide whether or not the programme fulfils the accreditation

criteria and/or offers generic quality, NVAO can take additional measures. NVAO can first interview (selected) members of the assessment panel. If this doesn't provide sufficient additional information, the institution can be requested to provide an additional assessment within a period set by NVAO or NVAO can decide to undertake a verification procedure. The verification procedure consists of an extra external assessment by an assessment panel convened by NVAO.

If the accreditation decision is positive, the programme is accredited. This means that the programme is included in the relevant official register (i.e. the [CROHO](#) in the Netherlands or the Higher Education Register in Flanders). This registration means that the degree awarded by the programme is recognised by the national authorities. Additionally, accredited programmes can receive public funding and the students enrolled in these programmes can receive student support (e.g. grants). However, public funding and student support are normally not available for programmes offered by private institutions.

If the accreditation decision is negative, the programme loses accreditation. This means the programme is deleted from the relevant official register and can no longer be offered. There is however a possibility of temporary recognition during a recovery period.

Consequences of accreditation

The accreditation decision is either positive or negative. There is no conditional accreditation and NVAO doesn't rank programmes. A positive accreditation decision has a fixed period of validity. For the Netherlands this is six years while for Flanders this is eight years. In case of a negative decision, there is a possibility to get a temporary recognition during a recovery period. Only accredited programmes can award recognised degrees (diplomas) and receive public funding. Only students enrolled in accredited programmes can receive student support (e.g. grants). However, public funding and student support are normally not available for programmes offered by private institutions.

Temporary recognition

In Flanders, after a negative accreditation decision, the institution can submit an application to the Flemish government for a temporary recognition. This has to be done within one month after the notification of the negative decision. A detailed plan for improvement shall be put forward together with the application. Following advice from the Recognition Commission, the Flemish government takes a decision within three months of the application. Temporary recognition may have a validity of one to three years.

In the Netherlands, there is also a possibility for an improvement period. This is seen as a recovery period. This period lasts two years. However, since the programme is no longer accredited, the programme cannot enrol new students and the institution does not receive funding for the programme.

4. Funding rules

4.1. Public funding

See Part I - 2.2. Public funding arrangements

4.2. Impact of quality assessments on funding

The official accreditation of a study programme is a precondition for public funding and scholarships. See Part II - 3. Evaluation.

4.3. Private funding

4.3.1. Tuition fees and/or households

General rules for subsidised study programmes dictate the size of the tuition fees within clear perimeters. All these programmes will therefore cost about the same in any institution. (between 445 and 505 euro's for an average study programme. (Master, Bachelor,... of at least 54 and maximum 66 credits for one year.) Please note that the tuition fee of a student is dependent on the number of ECTS-credits he takes up in the institution.

However, as far as non subsidised study programmes go, there are different rules. A normal Master after Master for instance can have a tuition fee up to a maximum of 5400 euro (60 ECTS). If the institution can invoke special circumstances the fee can even go up to a maximum of 24.790 euro. There are four criteria for these 'special circumstances'. Only those four criteria, recognised by the government, can justify the cost of the study programme. Note that these fees are demanded for speciality training, management schools etc...

4.3.2. Business, other

The income from private sources is difficult to detect. Roughly estimated we can categorise the institutions into three categories: universities, university colleges and postgraduate institutes. Postgraduate institutions have the highest relative private income, more than 50% of their income (including tuition fees). Again we must accentuate that these institutions only provide postgraduate education and represent a relatively small amount of students. Secondly there are universities that have up to 25% of their total income from 'private sources'. However, these private sources may also be independent government contracts for scientific research and thus paid for by the public purse. University colleges at last are estimated to have below 10% of their income from 'private sources'.¹

¹ These are no official figures.

4.3.3. Grants/loans

There is a system of grants from the public purse to support students coming from lower socio- economic backgrounds. There are of course a number of criteria to be considered, mainly the number of ECTS-credits of the students programme and the income of the parents/student.

There is no public system of student-loans in the Flemish higher education system.

5. Impact on Employability

The link of tertiary education with the labour market is a responsibility of the institutions. Some institutions or study programmes have a strong commitment towards stages or traineeships in private and public enterprises. Other facilities may be in place as well. They can organize (online) forums on vacancies, job fairs, etc...

There are also a number of study programmes where either the Flemish government (for example teaching) or the European Commission (for instance certain jobs in medicine, architects and pharmacists) dictate directives with regard to practical 'on the job' training or stages. The institutions are of course required to comply with these directives.

With respect to employability the graduate master students have the best chances in finding a job. They are closely followed by the professional bachelors. The academic bachelor graduates do not often go to the labour market. They are better placed to continue their studies and obtain a master degree. If they do go to the labour market they will find that their degree is not (yet?) considered conclusive. Therefore it is less likely for them to find a job quickly.

6. Recent and planned reforms of the tertiary education system

6.1. Description of recent reforms

Between 2003 and 2009 the entire structure of higher education was reformed. First there was a new structure for higher education (following the Bologna process) introducing the BaMa structure and the associations. In the aftermath of that we have seen the introduction of the new model for financing, the introduction of a flexible curriculum model, a new legal framework for students and a new accreditation system for quality control. Together, all of these reforms have changed the higher education landscape in Flanders tremendously. The next step is to evaluate these changes and correct the unintentional side effects.

6.2. Planned reforms (or reference to ongoing policy debate)

A new policy ready to be implemented is the introduction of a new level of vocational education, namely the 'associate degree programmes'. These are study programmes of at least 90 and maximum 120 ECTS credits. This puts the new level between secondary education and the Bachelor degree. The institutions qualified to organize these study programmes are 'Centres for adults education' (sic.) and university colleges. The implementation of this new level going together with the introduction of new study programmes is foreseen in the academic year 2009-2010.

Secondly there are plans to reform the accreditation mechanism. This will introduce an institution-accreditation (as complementary to a study-program-accreditation). The study-program-accreditation will be less thorough if the institution already received such an institution-accreditation but will remain as before if the institution does not have one. The new system is based on the Dutch system.

Furthermore there are plans to evaluate and consolidate all legislation for higher education. The intended result of this process is a single decree for higher education. The evaluation is planned for 2010.