

**Achieving the Lisbon Goal:**  
The Contribution of Vocational Education and Training Systems

# Country Report: Belgium

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This report is one of a series of European country reports. It has been written to support a larger report: **Achieving the Lisbon Goal: the contribution of VET**, prepared by the **Lisbon-to-Copenhagen-to-Maastricht Consortium for the European Commission**. This report is not intended as an official view. But rather independent insight into specific aspects of National VET systems in Europe.



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## **Theme 1 - Progress of national VET systems towards meeting the challenges of Lisbon**

# **Strategies and barriers for improving the status, flexibility and attractiveness of Initial VET (IVET).**

What strategies are being used to by government, social partners and providers etc. to achieve these objectives.

### ***1.1.1 Raise the status of IVET?***

### ***1.1.2 Improve the attractiveness of IVET?***

- Time-out projects: The collaboration between education and welfare concerning time-out projects is being continued. By supporting these projects, the government wants to
- obtain a better idea about the effectiveness of the various operating procedures school replacement programmes The idea is that young people, for whom it has become
- Impossible to co-exist at school, will be able to pick up their studies again through a temporary school replacement programme.
- Prevention of anti social behaviour in secondary education: schools for young people for schools (Yoyo): The Yoyo project is aimed at young people who have left school early, or have stopped studying after secondary education, but are still interested in working in schools. Young people from immigrant backgrounds and young people from underprivileged families in particular are encouraged to take part in this starting block project. The objective is two-fold:
  - To introduce the young people in the target-group to jobs in education, in order to motivate them for possible further study, or employment;
  - To support schools with problem students in working towards a positive climate in the schools and to improve relations between immigrant and underprivileged families.

### ***1.1.3 Increase the flexibility of IVET?***

Modularisation is an important tool to diminish the number of unqualified from compulsory education. Credits, it is true, give entry to the labour market or follow-up courses. By using the same educational structure for compulsory and adult education, lifelong learning is promoted. By gearing educational structure and its various components to the qualifications that are needed, a transparency between the supply of education and the demand of the labour market is realised.

In secondary education, the modularisation experiment is focused first of all on vocational training with a clear focus (practical qualification) and attainment targets\* and basic skills which take this focus into account. With this modular vocational training, the divisions between the different types of education disappear. This means that they are identical for all forms of education, and even for all providers of education. It is clear that there will be a difference in terms of educational approach, and duration. In order to oppose the 'cascade effect' the strategy adopted is not a top-down, but a bottom-up approach. On the one hand, this involves the incorporation of a system of stages of success, or step-by-step learning, in which students can gradually proceed to the highest level. On the other hand, it involves an attempt to provide better guidance at the beginning (= after the first stage) by providing a more appropriate range of education. This in turn leads to the necessary degree of transparency and a flexible response to the labour market. One of the essential tasks of education is to devote attention to the social component, as well as the vocational component. In the modularisation experiment, elements of general education will be integrated as far as possible in the vocational context. All the students are given an opportunity to gain a certificate of secondary education, in addition to the vocational qualification.

Source: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/english/educationinFlanders.pdf>

Restructuring the qualifications structure – reducing the number of vocational courses from 66 qualifications to 31. This process will start in 2002 and finished in 2006.

Source:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/vereenvoudiging/pdf/Onderwijsplan2004.pdf>

The DIVA-project group "Interface work experience data banks" is conducting a thorough investigation into the possibilities of collaboration concerning work experience data banks in which supply and demand will be connected. It will be left to the schools and institutions to decide exactly what the work experience will entail.

#### **1.1.4 What are the main barriers to achieving these objectives?**

Le développement d'une stratégie cohérente et transparente de l'éducation et de la formation est complexe en Belgique, du fait de la répartition institutionnelle des compétences en ces matières. La formation initiale est en effet une compétence communautaire, tandis que la formation professionnelle et la formation en entreprise relèvent des régions. Il importe que les processus de concertation et de collaboration soient maintenus et renforcés entre les différents niveaux de pouvoir.

See also DGTV-report : due to the federal system in Belgium, there are sometimes delays and barriers because of different political agenda's.

Cedefop Info:

Technical vocational training: mismatch - Engineers threatened with extinction in Flanders

Education must stimulate an attitude of eagerness to learn: to encourage more keenness to learn, creativity and own thinking. At the start of the 80's the inflow for training as an industrial engineer was twice as great: in the 70's many pupils were in technical education because it put them in a strong position. It is advised to have better pupils move into the technical fields, and the level will also increase. Technical Secondary School Education (TSO) must again become the equivalent of General Secondary School Education (ASO). Industry also has to play its part: such disciplines have a less cool image because they are associated with care for the environment, for example. Chemistry on the other hand has connotations of pollution. Co-operation could be much better. We do not have the consultation platforms that exist in our neighbouring countries for concrete solutions such as training with equipment at a company. Matching training to the demand is another aspect: with one year continuation courses we could respond to the demand for textile engineers. This is a problem because the textile sector has to unjustly cope with the reputation that there is no future in it. But nothing comes of the actual adaptation of the training.

## Reducing the number of early school leavers

(How does your country relate to other countries in terms of the contribution to increasing or reducing the number of young people: )

### ***1.1.5 Who leave education or training at the earliest opportunity and with few or no recognised qualifications?***

### ***1.1.6 Who leave formal education with low levels of basic skills at age of 15?***

L'objectif est de réduire à 10% le risque de sortie prématurée de l'école et de faire en sorte qu'à 22 ans, 85% des jeunes aient atteint le niveau secondaire supérieur" (...)

Within the European context, and thus according to European methods of analysis, the Flemish Region had 11.6% early school leavers among 18-24-year-olds in 2000. The estimated EU average was 19.7% in the same year. With this percentage the Flemish Region scores better than the European country mean, although Austria (10.2% in 2000), Finland (8.9% in 2001) and Sweden (7.7% in 2001) have even better figures. This European comparison therefore puts the rather negative signals given by the Flemish method of analysis into perspective.

Table 35 -Guideline 7 - "% de la population de 18 à 24 ans qui n'a pas terminé l'enseignement secondaire et qui n'est plus dans l'éducation "(page 91: reference years 1998 until 2002).  
Source: NAP 2003

Tableau 35: Ligne Directrice 7		Pourcentage de la population de 18 à 24 ans qui n'a pas terminé l'enseignement secondaire et qui n'est plus dans l'éducation				
		1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
REGION FLAMANDE	H	15,0	17,7	14,1	13,4	14,9
	F	10,1	12,3	9,5	9,4	8,8
	T	12,8	15,1	11,9	11,4	11,9
REGION WALLONNE	H	18,3	20,7	19,7	19,7	19,1
	F	13,4	15,6	12,7	12,3	12,9
	T	15,9	18,2	16,3	16,1	16,1
REGION DE BRUXELLES-CAPITALE	H	20,7	21,9	25,3	22,5	26,1
	F	18,4	22,3	17,1	19,0	19,4
	T	19,5	22,1	21,2	20,7	22,6
PAYS	H	16,8	19,1	17,0	16,3	17,3
	F	12,0	14,4	11,3	11,3	11,2
	T	14,3	16,8	14,2	13,9	14,3
UE	H	27,1	23,1	22,2	21,8	21,4
	F	20,3	18,4	17,1	16,8	16,2
	T	23,8	19,3	19,3	19,3	18,8
Ecart B/UE	H	-10,5	-4,0	-5,2	-5,5	-4,1
	F	-8,3	-4,0	-5,8	-5,5	-5,0
	T	-9,3	-2,5	-5,1	-5,4	-4,5

Source : INS, Eurostat

More statistics: <http://www.statistiques.cfwb.be/pub.asp?pubId=93#opened>

According to the diploma criteria:

The percentage of students who leave without a certificate of full-time secondary education, compared to the overall group of school leavers, is falling, although after 1992 it has stabilised at around 20%. In 1998 the figure was 17%.

The percentage of students who leave without a certificate of full-time secondary education, compared to the overall population of students is falling, although after 1992 it appears to have stabilised at around 3%.

The percentage of students who leave without a certificate of the second stage of secondary education (all types), compared to the overall population of school leavers is falling, although after 1995 it appears to have stabilised at around 3.5 to 4%.

The percentage of students who leave without a certificate of the second stage of secondary education (all types), compared to the overall student population is falling, although after 1995 it appears to have stabilised at around 0.9%.

According to type of education that was abandoned:

In general secondary education, vocational secondary education and technical secondary education, approximately 1/18th, 1/12th and 1/13th of the students appear to abandon their type of education prematurely.

In artistic secondary education the proportion of students leaving artistic secondary education is 1 in 8. Based on the available figures, research has concluded that the introduction of an extended period of compulsory

education resulted in a significant reduction in the number of unqualified early school leavers. Simultaneously, these calculations show that it is possible to monitor and quantify the unqualified outflow from Flemish secondary education. However, a consensus must be reached on the term 'unqualified school leaver'. The steering committee has established a concept that is based on current official certification and on existing data in the central databases. However, the procedure appears to be relatively arduous. Nevertheless, this research project has created a monitoring instrument that can be used by the Department of Education.

Source:

[http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/onderwijsstatistieken/351098\\_EN001\\_084.pdf](http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/onderwijsstatistieken/351098_EN001_084.pdf)

## Increasing VET at tertiary level

What steps are being taken to establish or improve technological and vocational qualifications at the tertiary (higher) educational level? Please refer in particular to any attempts to make pathways more flexible, and to introduce shorter post-secondary VET courses.

The implementation of the BAMA-structure in higher education demands a stronger bond between two-cycle higher education and scientific research. This calls for the association between universities and colleges of higher education. These associations will also create a new dynamism in the further development of the scope of higher education. The decree of 4 April 2003, concerning the restructuring of higher education in Flanders provides additional means to stimulate academicism and the restructuring of higher education.

Source: LLL strategies in Belgium

## Incentives for updating knowledge & skills

(What initiatives and measures are the following taking to motivate employees to update knowledge and skills?)

### **1.1.7 Government**

- General: Treaty of Vilvoorde on LLL:  
“In 2010, Flanders will have evolved into a learning society. Lifelong and life-wide learning will be embedded in the community. At least ten percent of Flemish people between the ages of 25 and 65 will be taking part in permanent training. A learning community also means that competencies will be accredited on an equal basis no matter where and how they were obtained.”
- In 2010, the number of functional, literate people and the number of people with ICT competencies will have risen to more than three

quarters of the population. The number of young people, who leave school without sufficient basic qualification for the labour market, will be halved at least, by this time. By 2010, education will be more democratic. Dualism in the society will be combated by guaranteeing that everyone will have access to learning initiatives and by promoting equal opportunity throughout the entire learning process.

- The new Lever Loans were launched together with the ESF in the first quarter of 2002. Two schemes supporting training programmes in companies proved eligible for subsidy. The first scheme involves demand-directed training in enterprises and is preferably focused on high risk groups, the development of ICT- skills and the promotion of diversity, while the second concerns projects facilitating a strategic training policy within the company (training requirements detection etc.).
- IBO (INDIVIDUAL ON-THE-JOB TRAINING)- The employer is not expected to pay wages or social security contributions for the duration of the training programme, with the exception of an allowance or a production bonus. This bonus is the difference between the normal wage for the occupation that is being learned and the average unemployment pay or supplementary benefit (17.65 Euros per/day).
- On the 4th December 2001 the Flemish government approved the plan to implement Training Cheques for companies. The system of cheques is aimed at stimulating business companies in their learning efforts, by creating a demand-directed instrument. A company is permitted to purchase 200 training cheques per annum, by way of the Internet. (LLL-strategies p. 21)
- In 2001 a fund was set up for the studying of foreign languages (€ 620,000) preferably aimed at secondary schools, with 5,000 'reading cheques' also given to job-seekers for the purchase of books and CD-ROMs for language education (€ 39,700); In the Brussels Region there was the development of a system of language cheques (€ 620,000 in 2001) where employers received a premium if they employed low-skilled job-seekers).
- Paid educational leave. The aim of this system is the social advancement of those working full-time in the private sector.
- ICT basic competencies Programme (Plan basisvaardigheden ICT) launched in 2001. The target groups are Flemish job-seekers.
- The ECDL (European Computer Driving License) is also an important programme developed in Flanders and Wallonia.
- In Wallonia, a wide action plan called Plan Mobilisateur TIC has been developed in order to train job-seekers by the end of 2004.
- Flanders: Validation of skills acquired through experience  
The Flemish Government has approved the draft decree on the validation of skills acquired through experience. Through this validation of skills acquired through experience, the Flemish Government aims at enabling thousands of Flemish people to obtain a vocational qualification because of the experience they have gained. The skills will be assessed on the basis of occupational profiles

developed by the Economic and Social Council of Flanders (SERV). The Flemish authorities have to designate the bodies which will be responsible for assessment and recognition. If everything proceeds as planned, the system will be launched at the beginning of 2004 for some fifteen occupations.

For more detailed information: <http://www.vdab.be>

- Following an analysis by a working party and the establishment of a series of pilot projects, the Flemish authorities will soon be ready to develop a right to individual career mentorship. In the autumn 2003, individual training vouchers for employees are to be introduced by the government.

Source: Cedefop Info 2/2003

### **1.1.8 Employers**

- Action plan Een leven lang leren in goede banen (Lifelong Learning on the Right Track), the expectations towards the social partners are continuing unabated. It was decided interprofessionally that investment in training would be raised to 1.9% of the total payroll
- Intense collaboration with the social partners, including making them more responsible, improves the implementation of the Flemish policy concerning employment and professional training. The sector is the driving force. In the VESOC (-Vlaams economisch sociaal overleg comite)- agreement of 12 February 2001, it was agreed that from a common point of view the Flemish government would support the efforts of the sectors with a number of flanking measures. For their implementation, a number of sector consultants and diversity managers will be appointed to sectors that are going to create plans of action to combat the bottlenecks in the Flemish Labour market. Eighty full-time sector consultants have been earmarked for this purpose. The plans of action will be converted into an agreement on collaboration with the Flemish government (= sector covenant). The sector will take up qualitative and quantitative engagements in a number of work domains. Actions concerning an improved connection between education and the sector, propagation of the culture of lifelong learning and competency management are minimum requirements in the agreement package.
- In the French Community, an interesting action programme is the development of Technological Innovation Centers (Pôles d'innovation technologique – PITech). They are special centers for training, information and documentation for pupils, students and teachers. Their purpose is to intensify cooperation between the different levels of education (as regards the education and training of students and teachers, but also the use of highly effective teaching tools and equipment), to strengthen the various stages of partnership between the worlds of education and business, and to adapt educational provision to the course of economic development. There are also skill centers (cf. supra). Following an original teaching approach, focused

on the constant inter-activity of each participant, the skills centers offer a wide choice of courses adapted to the job market.

- The Flemish Employers' Association (VEV) has devised a plan to improve the functioning of the adult training market in Flanders. The position of the employers' association is that the government should not finance training organisations, but rather, the persons undergoing training or the firms sending their employees on training courses. VEV moreover wants responsibility for the paid educational leave system be devolved to the regions.

A study was commissioned by the VEV on the strengths and weaknesses of the Flemish training market, the origins of which go back to the Pact of Vilvoorde which set the target of 10% of Flemings aged 25 to 65 engaging in lifelong learning by 2010. Whereas barely 2% of Flemish adults received continuing training a decade ago, this rate had risen to 6.9% by 2000 and stands at approx. 8% today. So although still below the European average of 8.3%, lifelong learning has the wind in its sails in Flanders.

The study commissioned by VEV confirms that there is no lack of training opportunities in Flanders. Training quality is high and moreover the region looks back on a long tradition of adult training. These strengths are nevertheless counterbalanced by a number of shortcomings: apart from a lack of transparency, the Flemish government spends less on education and training than most other European countries; the key tasks of the government in the training market are not clearly defined; provision is not sufficiently geared towards clients' needs and the role of the sectoral training funds remains obscure.

However in the opinion of VEV, the heart of the problem lies in the excessive flows of subsidies to the training organisations. The employers' association wants the government to grant subsidies to jobseekers rather than to the training organisations. VEV agrees that certain types of training programmes, e.g. integration courses for migrants and programmes for the unemployed can only be delivered by the state. VEV also urges that responsibility for the system of paid educational leave, still at federal level, to be devolved to the regions. In fact, with this single exception, all other necessary competences to launch initiatives designed to ensure the smooth functioning of the training market have been devolved to the Flemish government.

Source: Gestion Média et bibliothèque VDAB . Cedefop Info 2/2003

### **1.1.9 Other stakeholders**

- Flemish Knowledge Centre PPP (public private partnerships. Specific projects as Digikids, ECDL, regional technological centres (RTC): Through the regional technological centres (RTC's), schools are encouraged to pay attention to lifelong learning. An RTC is collaboration between education and the business community, a centre for the exchange of information between education and the business community. In 2004 they are evaluated.

- **DIVA: Training and Alignment Information Service**  
The Flemish Government considers Lifelong and Lifewide Learning as a paramount priority. Flanders can already boast on an excellent and diversified provision of training and adult education opportunities. The Flemish Employment and Vocational Training Agency, Continuing Education, Syntra and social and cultural work profile themselves separately towards the citizen but also work together in a wide range of fields. The Flemish authorities aim at optimising the co-operation between these training providers with a view to help them face the challenge of turning Flanders into a learning society. As a result of the intention to formalise this co-operation, DIVA (Training and Alignment Information Service) was created. The objective was to institutionalise the co-operation between the policy fields Education and Training, Employment, Culture and Economy. This newly established body is led by the Ministerial Committee on Training composed of the different responsible ministers. DIVA's actions are twofold: firstly, projects were launched in 2003 that enhance the participation of the citizen in training and education (e.g. Adult Learners' Week (De Grote Leerweek), Dutch language houses (Huizen van het Nederlands)) and reinforce the collaboration between the partners (e.g. aligning of databases on practical training positions, aligning of Regional Technological Centres, SYNTRA and skills centres, ICT training and e-learning). Secondly, DIVA also started actions at the level of the provinces that, in the initial phase, are directed towards the alignment of the various training partners and sensitising campaigns.
- The 22 VIZO training centres for independent trades administered by 15 non-profit making organisations and subsidised by the Flemish government are now merged into five regional Syntra centres. The merger and the introduction of performance-driven funding are designed to boost their effectiveness. The principal task of the public-sector agency VIZO (the Flemish Institute for Independent Entrepreneurship is, as its name suggests, to deliver training programmes for the self-employed and SMEs and to organise linked work and training apprenticeship programmes for young people aged 16+.

Source : Cedefop Info 1/2003

### ***1.1.10 Please provide examples (if any) of the contribution of VET to successfully promoting inclusion***

The Flemish government wants to promote and support a broadening of the current duty of care in schools in both primary and secondary education. Welfare needs to be an integral part of daily education and training. Welfare policies need to take care of a continual interface of pedagogical-didactical supply and the needs of students.

To create cohesion in the conflict areas and in implementing equal opportunities in education, a decree pertaining to equal opportunities was

drafted. The Flemish Parliament passed part I of the decree on 28 June 2002.

In addition to this, from 1 January 2003 (or from 1 September 2002, on a voluntary basis), local consultation platforms will be operational. Schools will conduct local consultation – based on an area-analysis – to realise adequate equal opportunity in education.

## Meeting the challenges of an aging population

Please identify any innovations and initiatives in VET that are being introduced to encourage older people (55+) to remain at work longer and to participate in training and other forms of lifelong learning.

### **General:**

Belgium's employment rate for people aged 50-64 was 41% in 2001, one of the lowest in the OECD area after Turkey, Hungary and Italy, and 14 percentage points below the OECD average. Yet the employment rate for the 25-49 age group is almost 80%, which is the OECD average.

In Belgian enterprises, participation in vocational training is generally low. There is a need to motivate firms and workers by offering high-quality training courses that are recognised and valued on the labour market.

Kok-report, recommendation:

Develop comprehensive active ageing strategies: remove early retirement schemes; increase participation in continuing training and promote a flexible working environment; ensure effective job search for older unemployed workers.

The Belgian government has decided to pursue an essentially preventive policy to encourage older workers to remain in work. One step in the right direction is to focus on training and employability throughout a person's working life, and definitely well before the age of 50. Some of the measures introduced in Belgium since early 2000 are particularly worthwhile, such as sponsorship and mentoring, a new fund to improve working conditions for older workers, lower social contributions, the "activation" of unemployment benefits for older workers (e.g. as wage subsidies for newly-hired older job seekers) and time-credit arrangements, although the last two would be more effective if confined to older workers with financial difficulties.

Source: Ageing and Employment Policies Belgium- OECD, 2003. See also recommendations in this report.

### ***Favoriser le vieillissement actif***

La Belgique poursuit ses efforts en vue d'atteindre les objectifs européens dans le cadre d'une stratégie reposant sur 4 axes qui doivent se renforcer mutuellement.<sup>50</sup>

1. Le premier axe, déjà annoncé dans le PAN 2002, est opérationnel depuis le 1er juillet 2002 et concerne l'inscription des chômeurs âgés comme demandeurs d'emploi. Cette inscription oblige les nouveaux chômeurs à accepter toute offre d'emploi convenable jusqu'à l'âge de 57 ans (58 ans à partir de juillet 2004). Cette mesure vise à freiner le licenciement de travailleurs âgés via le système appelé Canada dry. Cette pratique consiste à licencier un travailleur et à lui octroyer un complément financier à l'allocation de chômage en évitant les contraintes et obligations des prépensions. Le succès de cette formule a été tel qu'elle a annihilé les efforts accomplis pour ralentir les retraits du marché du travail pour la catégorie d'âge en dessous de 57 ans<sup>51</sup>. Il était donc urgent de prendre des mesures afin de contrer ce phénomène.

2. La Belgique poursuit ici une stratégie essentiellement préventive. Le fait que l'âge légal de la retraite des femmes a été porté à 63 ans à partir de janvier 2003 devrait contribuer à relever leur taux d'activité. En Flandre, l'employeur est invité à prévoir, dans sa politique du personnel, une politique de fin de carrière. Il peut compter pour ce faire sur un encadrement et une assistance financière (via les plans de diversité du VESOC<sup>52</sup>, voir LD7).

A partir de 50 ans, le travailleur a accès à des mesures spéciales de réduction individuelle du temps de travail dans le cadre du crédit-temps. La Région wallonne octroie en plus des avantages financiers complémentaires pour l'aménagement des fins de carrière dans les secteurs à forte pénibilité. En outre, le Plan tandem permet au travailleur âgé, en priorité dans les secteurs à forte pénibilité, de réduire ses prestations à un mi-temps tout en conservant environ 85% de sa rémunération.

Des formules de tutorat qui viennent compléter ces aménagements de fin de carrière ont été développées dans toutes les Régions et permettent une transition progressive du travail à l'inactivité. En Région wallonne, le tutorat a été intégré dans le dispositif Crédit-Adaptation qui octroie une aide financière à l'entreprise dès lors qu'elle permet à un travailleur âgé de consacrer une partie de son temps de production à la formation des jeunes recrutés. Il impose également au FOREM de proposer une formation au tuteur qui ne démontrerait pas les compétences nécessaires à sa mission. Le projet «Tutorat - Mode d'emploi » quant à lui se propose de sensibiliser les entreprises à cette méthode de capitalisation des compétences et de gestion de fin de carrière. En Région flamande, le travailleur âgé peut accéder à plus de flexibilité en fin de carrière via les «emplois d'atterrissage » dans le secteur non marchand et servir de tuteur pour l'encadrement de jeunes travailleurs en formation professionnelle (formule de tutorat avec prime double pour les travailleurs de plus de 45 ans).

La formation des travailleurs âgés reste un problème difficile à résoudre. Le Fédéral a relevé le plafond de rémunération pris en compte en cas de congé-éducation-payé afin de stimuler la participation des travailleurs âgés à la formation. La Flandre a elle décidé de prendre des mesures spécifiques pour

les demandeurs d'emploi âgés sous forme de modules adaptés aux 50+ et d'accompagnement par des jobcoachs spécialisés.

La Région wallonne (en collaboration avec la COCOF et la Communauté française) entend valoriser l'expérience et les compétences des travailleurs âgés au moyen du dispositif de validation des compétences. La Région wallonne privilégie également l'orientation des dispositifs existants vers les plus de 45 ans. C'est ainsi que le Jobcoaching, qui vise l'accès et le maintien au travail des personnes les plus fragilisées, est accessible aux + 45 ans après 1 an de chômage. Les mesures de discrimination positive (par exemple, la gratuité de l'offre de formation du FOREM) adoptées à l'égard de travailleurs fragilisés, dont font partie les + 45 ans, commencent à porter leurs fruits<sup>53</sup>. Enfin, les conventions sectorielles (voir LD4) prévoient, spécifiquement, des mesures à l'intention particulière des travailleurs âgés. En Communauté germanophone, une vaste initiative «45+ », coordonnée par le SPE<sup>54</sup>, a été mise sur pied avec les partenaires sociaux et des organismes de formation. Dès septembre 2003, des actions spécifiques de sensibilisation et de formation seront organisées afin de promouvoir l'emploi des travailleurs et des demandeurs d'emploi plus âgés. Les instruments utilisés dans ce projet se basent sur une étude de l'image du travailleur plus âgé dans les entreprises de la Région et sur un échange d'expériences dans le cadre de l'initiative européenne EQUAL.

3. Le troisième axe vise à favoriser le retour ou le maintien sur le marché du travail des travailleurs âgés par un système d'incitants financiers à la fois pour l'employeur et pour le travailleur. Depuis le 1er juillet 2002<sup>55</sup>, un chômeur âgé reprenant le travail bénéficie d'un complément de reprise de travail de 159 € par mois. Pour l'année 2004, une augmentation de ce montant est prévue, afin d'arriver à une vraie «prime-pont » vers le travail. Le prépensionné qui reprend une activité conserve également son complément prépension à charge de l'employeur. Ces mesures devraient réduire le piège au chômage en rendant l'emploi plus attractif. La loi du 5 septembre 2001 instaure un droit pour les travailleurs licenciés de 45 ans et plus de bénéficier d'une procédure de reclassement professionnel (outplacement) à charge de leur employeur. Ces dispositifs ont été concrétisés par une convention collective de travail conclue au sein du CNT<sup>56</sup> (CCT 82 du 10 juillet 2002) et complétés par des conventions spécifiques dans un certain nombre de secteurs.

Les employeurs, pour leur part, sont incités à garder leurs travailleurs âgés de 58 ans et plus par une réduction supplémentaire des cotisations sociales patronales de 1.600 € par an. Une augmentation de cette réduction à 4.000 € par an, ainsi qu'un élargissement aux travailleurs de 55 à 58 ans, sont prévus pour l'année 2004. Les employeurs qui engagent des chômeurs âgés se voient accorder une réduction importante des coûts salariaux, allant jusqu'à 10.000 € par an.

La reprise d'un travail indépendant pour les plus de 50 ans a également été encouragée<sup>57</sup> sous la forme d'une aide au lancement d'une activité indépendante ou de la création d'une société.

4. Enfin, le quatrième axe vise à modifier les mentalités par une large sensibilisation de tous les acteurs afin de sortir d'une culture de retrait précoce de l'activité professionnelle.

Source: NAP 2003

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/employment\\_strategy](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/employment_strategy) (only in French)

- In the Adult Learners Week the target group of senior citizens is regarded as a special opportunity group.
- Technological developments in the field of industry and the provision of services, as well the globalisation of the economy have made it necessary for the worker of the 21st century to permanently maintain the level of his knowledge and skills. Several projects which are subsidised within the context of the abovementioned measures, are focused on the older workforce, such as the Career Coaching for citizens older than 45 course.

Source: LLL strategies Belgium

## Effectiveness and efficiency of VET

### ***1.1.11 In the current national debate, how effective is the system of VET perceived to be?***

(Is the VET route effective in fostering individual careers, self-confidence and personal identity? Benefits of training for employers? Is the VET route effective in combating youth unemployment?)

### ***1.1.12 In the current national debate, is the VET system seen as offering efficiency/ good value for money?***

(These questions are given as examples and need not all be answered: Who is investing in VET - the state, the employers, and individuals – and what are their benefits? How can we make the best use of existing resources: Better balance between practical and theoretical training, accreditation of prior learning, raising completion rates, etc.? Improving management and organisation of VET?)

### ***1.1.13 What are the main trends in terms of investment in VET(Public investment?)***

Incentives to employers as well as to individuals to invest more? Public-private partnerships?)

See DGTV.

## **Theme 2 - Innovation in Teaching and Learning Processes**

# **Improvements in learning processes and contents**

Please identify innovation in teaching and learning methods and contents for VET.

(For example, developments towards student-centred learning styles; a possible shift from content/subject based learning to competences/outcomes; more problem- and project-based pedagogy, and contextualised work-based learning processes and contents.)

The main reforms carried out in the French Community are set out in Decrees ("Missions" Decree). For instance, introduction of the competence thresholds, final competencies and required know-what and know-how has led to a review of the curricula. These no longer focus on teaching content but on levels of competence to be attained at specific points in a pupil's career. This new approach is mentioned explicitly in Article 8 of the "Missions" Decree.

Other strategies are as follows : to strengthen basic learning and improve the transition between education and working life (e.g. : basic skills, cyber-schools scheme, etc), to ensure that systems of education and initial or continuing training match demand of the labour market , and to encourage adult education and training through the provision of linked work and education or training.

Finally, the most recent development in relation to key competencies has been the establishment of a steering commission whose tasks include the development of a consistent system of indicators, the promotion of consistency between the curricula, the competence thresholds and the final competencies, and the definition of priority topics to support teachers who are preparing pupils to achieve the competence thresholds and acquire the final competencies.

In the German-speaking Community, pilot projects are developed in order to strengthen core skills (learning to learn), competencies in the area of new information and communication technology (teacher training, school equipment and material and future projects), to promote new methods of organization and learning (new skills) in full-time compulsory education (in-service teacher training).

The Flemish Community encourages the inclusion of "core skills" in educational curricula at all levels, the development of differentiated and flexible learning pathways, the division into modules, the skills recognition,

the development of basic, social and civic skills, through study of multidisciplinary topics, the spread of new ICTs in schools (new basic competencies), the development of flexibility and distance education through new skills.

The Begeleid Individueel Studeren service is also going to offer its courses on the Internet. This was announced by the Flemish Minister of Education.(2004) The cost of such a course amounts to an average of 15.25 euros a month. Registration takes place every three months.

The didactic advantage is that the student has complete control of a modular course. He can himself decide on his subject matter and put together a personal course. He also obtains a personal mentor to answer all his questions. With a language course, for example, a student can choose level four for reading proficiency and level two for writing skills. He can also choose the subjects that interest him. Supervised distance learning is proving successful. Between 2001 and 2003 the number of people registering rose from 23 345 to 28 183.

## **Improving the integration of different learning sites; integration of formal and informal learning.**

Please identify the institutional and organisational links (or lack of them) between learning sites at schools and companies

(How are the traditional barriers between learning at schools/colleges and learning in the workplace being overcome? How far can “simple experiencing” at work be transformed into a “reflective experiencing” by linking company-based learning with school/college based learning?)

Through the regional technological centres (RTC's), schools are encouraged to pay attention to lifelong learning. An RTC is collaboration between education and the business community, a centre for the exchange of information between education and the business community. An RTC wants to be a platform for building a network of training- and teaching institutions and companies where for example agreements may be reached about the accessibility of superior infrastructure and equipment. Colouring the centres will be done according to regional needs, facilities and priorities. The government co-finances the operations of the RTC. Within a DIVA-project, agreements are made to realise a better interface between the RTC's, the

competency centres of the VDAB, the CVO and the VIZO-centres (now called Syntra-centres). Based on concrete information on the various initiatives, research is done on the best way to create constructive collaboration between the RTC's, the CVO, competency- en VIZO-centres.

Preceding this harmonisation project, proposals were put forward: who does what, for whom, and what are the future plans..?

DGTV-report: An evaluation showed that the RTC's play an important role in the tuning of the needs of technical and vocational education and business life. At the same time it was noted that too many rtc's were only working virtually.

Problem: a declining number of young apprentices. Possible causes:

- Restructuring of the training network (merging of 22 training centres into 5 entities, creating – amongst others - mobility problems for some youngsters because of a more centralized offer of training) has been a priority during the last 2 years
- Legal problem: no equal value of certification compared with other regular educational and vocational systems
- Fragmented policy making because of the co-existence of different training systems with rather similar objectives and target groups
- Apprenticeship counsellors have been working as subcontractors, which rendered the implementation of a common policy difficult. New regulation will soon change the status of these counsellors: they will become VIZO-employees.

The DIVA-project group "Interface work experience data banks" is conducting a thorough investigation into the possibilities of collaboration concerning work experience data banks in which supply and demand will be connected. It will be left to the schools and institutions to decide exactly what the work experience will entail.

Source: LLL in Belgium

## **Evaluation and quality assurance of VET provision**

(What systems are in place to evaluate the processes and outcomes of VET – for learners, systems and the system?)

- a) For the individual (assessment of competences and knowledge)
- b) For the institution (internal/external quality management)
- c) For the system (monitoring and evaluation)

Quality control and promoting quality in Flemish education is based on three pillars:

- the attainment targets: a frame of reference for quality with a clear social basis;
- the inspectorate: a professional system of external supervision;
- educational supervision: professional internal support.

With the attainment targets the Flemish Community clearly indicates its minimum expectations with regard to nursery, primary and secondary education. In this way it can guarantee its inhabitants a good quality education.

Attainment targets are minimum objectives that the majority of pupils should aim for and achieve at a particular educational level and in a particular discipline. In concrete terms, this concerns qualities with regard to knowledge, insight, attitudes and skills. There are both subject-related attainment targets and crosscurricular attainment targets.

The key tasks of the inspectorate are:

- to inspect the quality of education;
- the recognition of educational establishments or clbs.

In order to achieve these key tasks, it examines whether the attainment targets or developmental objectives are being achieved, and whether the other organic obligations are being properly observed (e.g., applying a timetable based on the core curriculum). It does this on the basis of a 'school audit' or 'centre audit' (for clbs and adult education).

The results are published in a report that is available to the public. Every year the inspectorate records its findings in a detailed report (Onderwijsspiegel), which is presented to the Parliament of Flanders so that the quality evaluations can be followed up in the policy.

Source : <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/english/educationinFlanders.pdf>

See also: <http://www.onderwijsinspectie.be/SO/Draaiboek/04-03-25-Draaiboek%20van%20een%20doorlichting%20ISO-DRB.doc>

## **Professional development and status of teachers and trainers.**

Teachers' and trainers' professional development is now recognised as a decisive factor in improving learning processes and outcomes. Please indicate the key initiatives and innovations that are taking place in the training of teachers and trainers.

(These questions are given as examples and need not all be answered: Is initial training being introduced or reformed? If so, how? What provision is made for the continuous professional development of VET teachers and trainers? How do innovative education and training practices benefit students, companies and society? What is the position of trainers within organisations? How much autonomy do they have? What is the professional status - social status and self-esteem - of VET teachers and trainers in the society?

There still is a shortage of teachers in Belgium- Education Labour market report 2004 shows that these shortages are diminishing and there will be a surplus in 2007. There's an immense need for more flexible and restructuring of teacher training in Belgium. This issue is high on the priority list of the government.

(<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/nieuws/2004pers/files/arbeidsmarktrapport2004.pdf> )

In order to remedy the teacher shortages in the short term, a number of new measures have been introduced since September 2000:

- in future, it will be more rewarding for teachers to work overtime; there will also be a more flexible arrangement for returning to a job temporarily from leave or retirement;
- the teacher replacement pool creates a better status for supply teachers: the pool provides job security and a secure income, in exchange for their regional deployment to replace absent colleagues. Because of the enormous shortages on the labour market, a few additional measures were recently taken, entering into effect from 2001:
- to provide additional support for teachers and school management teams from sectors where there are still sufficient reserves of labour. For example, child care assistants will be recruited in nursery education, and the administrative framework for nursery and primary education will be strengthened;
- to encourage students to opt for teacher training, by means of a recruitment campaign in the media;
- to provide a premium for teachers who work in Brussels. 11, and who pass the language examination;
- the introduction of longer uninterrupted periods of teaching practice (two months) for students in their last year of teacher training. However, the educational aim of teacher training continues to have priority;
- to draw up formulae to train (unemployed and employed) nursery teachers and physical education teachers to become primary teachers.

In order to make the teaching profession an attractive and valued job once again in the medium term, a coherent and coordinated action plan was introduced with various policy projects:

- in 2000, teacher training visitations started. Both the users of teacher training, the clients and providers, as well as other experts, are stakeholders. The results of this evaluation will be available in mid-2001 and will indicate the line to be taken for the revision of the initial training and the in-service training;
- in 2000, the government concluded one Collective Employment Agreement (V). It negotiated on another collective employment agreement. The Collective Employment Agreement V places an emphasis on improving the working conditions of teaching staff, and mainly contains investments to improve the working conditions with additional support and a reduction of the planning load;
- the discussions in 2001 resulted in a Collective Employment Agreement VI, which applies to 2001 and 2002. In addition to a general salary increase, the Collective Employment Agreement VI comprises a significant reduction in the workload. A number of important measures have also been taken to reduce the shortage of teachers. With regard to the salary conditions, the government has commissioned a study to compare teaching salaries in Flanders with salaries in other sectors and in other countries, and to determine the direction of the new salary policy for Flemish teachers;
- a professional school management: the Government of Flanders Acts on the legal position will be amended so that schools have the scope, instruments and capacities to fulfil their role as employer as well as possible, and can implement a personnel policy which develops and monitors, coaches and values the teachers;
- with regard to the plan of action for rewarding teachers, the minister has initiated a broad social debate. In 2000, the teaching profession was on the agenda during the hearings of the Education Commission of the Parliament of Flanders. It is the minister's intention to involve society in this debate in a broad sense. In addition, it has commissioned a number of scientific studies to support this debate.
- The social debate and the evaluation of teacher training will result in an overall idea of the teaching profession and the related policy proposals.

Source : <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/english/educationinFlanders.pdf>

## **Theme 3 - Building European Competences for a European Labour Market**

# **Challenges & policies in relation to the Lisbon employment strategy**

### ***1.1.14 What are the main challenges to achieving the Lisbon employment objectives for your country, according to the European Commission 'Kok Report'?***

- Employment rates in Belgium are below 60%.
- Belgium has employment rates for older workers of less than 33%.
- The employment rate of low-skilled people stands at about 49%, compared to 83% for the high-skilled. The gap exceeds 35 percentage points in Belgium.
- An entrepreneurial activity varies greatly within in the EU, ranging from around 3% in Belgium and France to 9.1% in Ireland. This compares with 10.5% in the US.. Whereas in 2001 the typical number of days required to set up a private limited company was only seven in the UK and eight in Ireland, it took more than 30 days in Italy and Belgium.
- Efforts to limit the cost of labour have started to pay off in a number of countries and should be pursued with priority given to low-paid jobs. Looking at the overall levels of taxation (tax wedge) on low wages, combined with the share of these taxes paid by employers, it appears that Belgium, Sweden, Italy, Greece, Germany, Austria and Finland should give priority to reducing non-wage labour costs further.
- Moreover, in Germany, Italy and Spain, social partners should be encouraged to develop wage differentiation further to reflect local, regional and sectoral differences in productivity and labour market conditions. The same applies for sectoral differentiation in Belgium.
- In some Member States such as Denmark, the risk of unemployment traps - which exists if financial factors alone are taken into consideration - is mitigated by the existence of strong incentives to take up a job. In Belgium and Germany, as well as Finland, such compensating factors are not strong enough and steps should be taken to eliminate the trap.
- Another cause for concern in many existing and new Member States is the integration of young people in the labour market. The unemployment rate for young people is typically double that of adults. In Greece, Italy, Spain, Finland, France and Belgium, this rate is close to, or above, 20%.

- Older workers: The need for action is particularly urgent in France, Belgium, Italy, Austria and Luxembourg, which all have very low levels of participation of older workers. Action is as urgent and necessary in the new Member States, where a vast number of older workers have left the workforce as a result of economic restructuring.
- Achieving better integration of minorities and immigrants in the labour market is a challenge for all existing and new Member States. Within the EU15, more attention to this issue is especially needed in Belgium, France, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, where the gap between nationals and non-nationals is striking.
- Increasing participation in training for the entire workforce is a priority in all Member States. It is particularly pressing for Greece, France, Portugal, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Belgium and Germany.
- Source: Cedefop Info: Shortage technical professions/training  
The number of first-year students training to become engineers, mainly at high school level, has fallen steeply over the past 15 years: in the 1987-88 academic year there were 5 000 students, now the number is less than half that. Figures from the Flemish Service for Employment and Vocational Training (VDAB) show where this stagnation has taken us: a third of all vacancies for engineers do not become filled. Year after year these vacancies appear among those that cannot be filled, especially engineering jobs in civil engineering, electricity, mechanics and electromechanics. Even stranger is the fact that engineers are often confronted with unemployment. The paradox can be partly explained by the criteria for applicants often being more demanding than just having obtained the qualifications on paper. Engineers are also expected to be leaders, be able to communicate well with less technically able people, have language skills, etc.

Source: Info 2004

#### **1.1.15 Please identify any policies and strategies being developed to tackle these challenges**

- A recent national collective agreement in Belgium establishes a right to a time credit that allows employees, for a maximum total of one year over their entire career, to interrupt their work or reduce it to a part-time job without interrupting the employment contract or losing social security rights.
- In Belgium, service vouchers can be purchased by consumers of certain services, for which there is a large share of presumed undeclared work (e.g. household services). The vouchers are a means of payment (with which the provider constitutes social security rights) largely subsidised by national and regional authorities. The service providers (which include job seekers) are recruited under a legal work contract by authorised companies (non-profit organisations and public

bodies such as municipalities). At the Employment Conference of September 2003, it was agreed that the system will be simplified and extended in order to create 25,000 additional jobs by 2005.

- The positive action plans supported by the Flemish Government in Belgium aim to increase the employment of migrants and people from an ethnic minority and are implemented by enterprises and public institutions. The action plans comprise training of human resources staff and others on cultural diversity as well as measures focussing on the recruitment of ethnic minorities.
- Skills centres (Centres de compétences) in Belgium by VDAB focus on a specific industries and pool resources of local partners to finance and deliver training relevant to the sector concerned. These sectoral funds are constituted by employers' contributions partly on a compulsory and partly on a voluntary basis. Creation of competence (skills) centers comprising 4 main services: training (including blended learning), career guidance (for employed), certification (incl. validation of prior learning- APL) and provision of information on labour and training and education.
- Individual learning accounts: have been tried in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and the UK. An investment from the individual is matched by the public sector or enterprise and put in a savings account.
- In Belgium social partners agreed at interprofessional level that investment in training should represent 1.9% of total wages by the end of 2004, with 0.1% reserved for groups at risk.
- 16/6/04 – The social partners (SERV) stress the importance of the education-labourmarket relationship and to strengthen alternance training, and APL. The SERV asks to make haste with the competence based qualification structure and modular system of education and training.

Source:

<http://www.serv.be/webteksten/aanbevelingsnota%20nieuwe%20VI%20regering.pdf>

- The Vilvoorde Pact or Flanders as a top European region in 2010 : The sealing of the "Vilvoorde pact", on 22 November 2001, signalled the Flemish government and social partners' express commitment to the Lisbon process' aim of making Europe the world's most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based society by 2010, with particular emphasis on better jobs and stronger social cohesion. Like the Lisbon process, the Flemish Pact involves a carefully balanced focus on economic, social and environmental targets and a number of specific objectives and targets to be achieved by 2010.
- Entrepreneurship: Belgium has adapted its insolvency legislation with a view to allowing entrepreneurs to rescue businesses when facing temporary problems and to liquidate non-viable activities as quickly as

possible. Courts can declare honest bankrupt entrepreneurs to be 'excused', allowing them to make a fresh start.

- (VIZO) System: training of future and established entrepreneurs (VIZO/Syntra) The implementation of the basic principle of alternating learning (a combination of theoretical training and apprenticeship schemes) in all training trajectories to enable persons to learn a profession and the necessary (entrepreneurial) competencies. [www.vizo.be](http://www.vizo.be)
- Conclusions of the 2003 conference on employment  
In the context of the conference on employment held in the course of the last quarter of 2003, the social partners at federal level formulated a series of proposals designed to mobilise all stakeholders (authorities, employers and trade unions), within their own specific fields of responsibility, with a view to increasing the level of training provision to the benefit of both sides of industry.  
The social partners confirmed the terms of the inter-occupational agreement - to reach a global training effort corresponding to 1.9 % of the total wage bill by 2004.  
They also expressed their willingness to consider increasing that figure even further to reinforce and achieve a more even distribution of the overall training effort.  
They also intend to increase the rate of participation in training in accordance with the new European guidelines, aiming at 50 % of workers engaging in training every year by 2010. As a result, between 2004 and 2010, all stakeholders will have to make a concerted effort to provide a training opportunity for 60 000 workers every year. In the context of these efforts, the social partners recommended that a particular effort be made in order to diversify the categories of workers receiving training. To this end, they call upon industries and firms to earmark 0.10 % of their total training effort for groups at risk, in particular older workers, the low-skilled, the disabled and migrants. By means of these increased efforts, they also wish to facilitate access to sensitive occupations. They call upon the various industries, in collaboration with placement agencies and with due account taken of the situation in each labour market, to regularly monitor and forecast occupational and skill trends and to increase financial incentives to engage in relevant training programmes. Moreover, without prejudice to the different areas of responsibility, the federal social partners advocate a more methodical and structured organisation of training, in particular by means of sectoral training plans and individual company training plans, designed to implement these broader sectoral plans. On the basis of the technical work done by the Central Council for Economic Affairs and the National Labour Council, the social partners are to develop a simple measuring instrument which will provide an accurate overview of the overall training effort. As far as existing training instruments are concerned, the social partners are to examine the possibility of optimising the operation of the sectoral funds and

easing administrative formalities and reimbursement of employers within the framework of the paid educational leave system.

Moreover, the social partners support the initiatives of the Regions in the field of the recognition of prior learning by, among other things, opening up paid educational leave to skills acquisition, according to modalities and conditions to be set within the context of the social dialogue. They call upon the federal authorities to take account of these qualifications in assessing vocational aptitude for access to occupations. Among their proposals relating to jobseekers and labour-market entrants, the social partners stress the importance of education as a mechanism of labour market entry. They call upon the competent players to harness the enormous potential of know-how in the world of education to the benefit of employment, among others by decompartmentalising the different forms of education, by breaking down education into modules, by according a central role to the 'learning to learn' approach, by stimulating collaboration between education and the enterprises at the level of teachers and trainers (exchanges, re-training, etc) and by enhancing the value and appeal of technical and vocational education.

Each of the social partners is to examine the actions which could be undertaken within their own particular area of responsibility to ease the transition between education and labour market, among other things by better provision of information for young people on labour-market opportunities to support a reasoned educational choice (possibly through sectoral funds); by determining an increase in the number of young people in statuses facilitating labour-market entry; by simplifying and rendering more attractive all statuses of apprenticeship and breaking down existing barriers; by promoting structural collaboration between schools and industry; by offering students industrial placement opportunities, infrastructures, etc; and by developing a clear status for tutoring and mentorship (titulariat) schemes.

The social partners emphasise the importance of developing a coherent approach between now and 2006 to guarantee the provision of guidance and training for all jobseekers. The social partners at federal level will also make a contribution to this effort in the framework of the 'vocational integration plan'. The social partners call upon both the regional authorities and the regional partners to examine the possibility of improving the guidance of jobseekers throughout the transition phase and rendering this provision more effective. In this context, the social partners will also examine the extent to which collaboration between the sectoral training funds and regional and community initiatives can be optimised.

Source: Website - [www.vandenbroucke.com](http://www.vandenbroucke.com)

Information from: FOREM - Department for International Relations,  
[Sigrid.dieu@forem.be](mailto:Sigrid.dieu@forem.be)

- Training and job creation: two retraining schemes for the unemployed in Flanders  
On the request of the province of Limburg, the Flemish employment

and vocational training service (VDAB) and the sub-regional joint committee for employment and training (CSEF) introduced a scheme to help 300 employees at risk of unemployment and a further 474 job-seekers find a job. Another scheme implemented by the Limburg institute for the training of employees in the metalworking industry (LIMOB) applies the same principle in the case of 192 employees in its own sector. The two initiatives involve an overall budget of EUR 2.3 m, half of which is covered by European and Flemish government funding.

Source : Cedefop Info 2003

**1.1.16 Please identify any obstacles standing in the way of reform of VET in relation to achieving the Lisbon objectives.**

See DGTV-report: due to the federal system in Belgium, there are sometimes delays and barriers because of different political agenda's.

The annual analysis of the Higher Employment Council (CSE) reveals that Belgium is still falling short of European employment objectives. The country's great weakness remains its low labour market participation rate, especially in the 55+ age group. Moreover, the country's regional imbalances, lifelong learning figures, assistance for the unemployed and equal opportunities policy place Belgium far from the top of the European class.

## **Involving stakeholders**

**1.1.17 Please describe the role of stakeholders or social partners in the planning of VET at national, sector and company level**

Generally speaking, the co-operation between the social partners and the government is an essential element of the employment policy of the regions, particularly concerning the evaluation of the training needs of companies and drawing up training programmes in order to meet these needs better. Apart from the funding of sectoral training, companies are taking an increasingly active part in the vocational training policy: Making sure the courses are in keeping with the specific needs of companies is an essential modern-day challenge and formulas that need to make the training offer more flexible are encouraged.; Collective bargaining agreements reached on company level may result in the implementation of a sectoral agreement and in case of no collective bargaining agreement on sector level, they may result in the direct implementation of provisions laid down centrally (particularly concerning the undertaking regarding risk groups). Many sectors let support depend on the realisation of a training plan by the companies with a view to optimising the training contribution. The cooperation between the federal government and the social partners takes place in different ways. The government can ask for advice directly from the social partners; they can also set up advisory bodies in which the social partners are represented. The initiative can also be given to the social partners themselves when they, for example, are entrusted with the implementation of a training system. Finally the social partners can also

be involved in the preparation of Bills which deal with technical and vocational training. The social partners are involved in the following way in education (in training institutions, sectoral training funds,...) :- via the vocational structures and profiles on which the training and the content are based;- via giving advice on the package -via recognition of training (for example by sectoral training funds) - by giving tailor-made training (through sectoral training funds). There is tripartite consultation between the social partners, the community authorities and the educational field/educational institutions. The Educational Authority is the competent body to set up training and educational programmes. The social partners are involved in the following way in training and education via their representation in the management of training institutions (VDAB / FOREM and VIZO / IFPME) via sectoral training funds. The social partners are involved in the preparation of new qualifications through advising on the training package. Besides national action plans, intersectoral agreements have been concluded in which the social partners play a leading role in employing and training risk groups: the social partners put the emphasis with regard to financing, and with regard to the educational package, etc... Until now 6 interprofessional agreements have been concluded. The regional government's wished the transference of paid educational leave

**1.1.18 Which actions to anticipate and recognise skills and qualifications needs (at national, sector or regional level) for your country do the European social partners identify as important in their recent report?**

- the situation of older workers, low-skilled workers and women;
- development of interesting or new experiments or initiatives;
- skills shortages;
- Organisational problems of SMEs in order to enable them to take advantage of training measures.
- Particular emphasis was placed to improve the monitoring of training efforts:
  - By entrusting the National Labour Council and the Central Economic Council with the task of perfecting a simple but accurate measurement instrument, i.e. one which takes into account all the training efforts developed by companies;
  - By asking the bipartite committees to prepare by end-March 2004 a report on compliance with their sectoral agreements and measures for achieving the agreed objectives, together with a breakdown of training efforts by category, age and workers' level of study.

# Transparency, recognition & mobility

A key objective of the Copenhagen Agreement is to establish mechanisms that can lead to a European labour market. Credit transfer, qualification frameworks and Europass are specified in this respect. What measures, if any, are being developed at national and/ or sector level

## **1.1.19 To establish credit frameworks**

- support the policy of evc;
- follow-up and co-ordination of evc- pilot projects;
- communication and implementation of EVC-range of ideas (tuning with initiatives such as vocational certificate and flexibilisation)
- to fit evc in Flanders in an international context;
- Publication of research results (f.i. common portfolio - methodology and learning certificate).

## **1.1.20 To establish or reform a qualifications framework**

Restructuring the qualifications structure – reducing the number of vocational courses from 66 qualifications to 31. This process will start in 2002 and finished in 2006.

Source:

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/vereenvoudiging/pdf/Onderwijsplan2004.pdf>

## **1.1.21 To implement Europass?**

(Transparency and recognition for professional purposes. The Commission and the Member States have developed a number of tools supporting transfer and transparency of qualifications and competences. A network of National Reference Points for vocational qualifications is currently being set up in the Member States and will be the first point of contact for questions relating to vocational qualifications. The Certificate Supplement for vocational qualifications, has been developed in parallel to the Diploma supplement in higher education, and is currently (2002) being tested in the Member States. Furthermore, a common European format for Curriculum Vitae (CV) has been recommended by the Commission, aiming at a simple and efficient presentation of individual qualifications and competences. A further instrument, the Europass assists and promotes mobility within work-linked training by providing a voluntary Europe-wide means of recording periods of training outside the 'home' Member State. As part of the 'Bruges process' of increased cooperation in vocational education and training, the intention is to develop an integrated strategy, bringing together into a single, user friendly tool, the above mentioned instruments for transparency of certificates and diplomas. Professional recognition in the regulated professions is covered by a set of directives specifying the rights of individual citizens in the field of

qualifications. This set of directives will in the near future be replaced by one single directive covering all regulated professions.)

The programmes Europass is in use in Belgium thanks to the participation of all Regions and Communities. In the field of technical and vocational education, the Regions and the Communities also take part in the programmes Leonardo, Comenius and Lingua, which have the purpose of increasing the mobility of students.

In spring 2004, VLOR published an advice on how to implement Europass successfully. Some critical comments:

- the distinction between the results of the learning trajectories and self-assessments;
- Europass should be clear and simple to use;
- Privacy should be guaranteed

According to the VLOR, Europass should be implemented in Flanders. The certificate supplement should be part of a standard procedure, just like the diploma-supplement in higher education. The VLOR asks the government to design a coherent certification system which constitutes Europass.

Some remarks on the implementation remain: Who will be involved in the determination of the content of the certificate supplement and how will this be determined.

Source : <http://www.vlor.be/bestanden/documenten/ar-adv013-0304.pdf>