



Belgium (Flemish Community)

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Principles and general objectives of education

The most important aim of education is to guarantee to everyone, regardless of social or ethnic background, a socially equal and thoroughly personal education and a broad vocational training with a view to guaranteeing the integration into the world of work. For this purpose, education must: foster the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes; be accessible to everyone through a policy of equal opportunities; be differentiated; be adapted to the different target groups; contribute to human development (cultural enrichment, emancipation) and social development (educate individuals to be active citizens, optimizing their role in society); prepare individuals for the world of work; be adapted to the changing needs of the people and society.

Current educational priorities and concerns

Flanders is the northern Dutch-language region of the Kingdom of Belgium. Belgium was established in 1830 as a unitary centralized state, with its own Constitution enacted in 1831. Since 1970, the Constitution has been revised several times: following four successive revisions (e.g. in 1970, 1980, 1988 and 1993), the political, legislative and administrative structures of the Belgian state evolved towards a federal system.

From 1989, the federal state structure comprises three policy levels, each one with its own legislative and executive organs: the federal state, the regions and the communities. There is no hierarchy between these three levels and they have their own, clearly defined areas of competence. The federal state comprises the whole territory of Belgium and encompasses the entire population. There is a federal parliament (the Chamber and the Senate) and a federal government. Federal areas of competence include, among others, social security, justice, defence, public safety and public order. There are three regions: the Flemish, the Walloon, and the capital region of Brussels. Their responsibilities encompass the environment, the economy, infrastructure, employment and agriculture. The Region of Flanders comprises the provinces West and East Flanders, Antwerp, Limburg and Flemish-Brabant.

There are three communities (i.e. the Flemish, French and German-language communities) and four language areas: the Dutch-, French-, and the German-language areas and the bilingual area (the Capital Region of Brussels). The areas under the authority of the Flemish Community cover the Flemish Region and the Dutch-speaking institutions and inhabitants of the Capital Region of Brussels. For community areas of competence in Brussels there is a Flemish, French, and a Joint Community Commission. The communities and the regions have their own government and their own parliament. However, the Flemish people have opted to join the government and the parliament of the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region. Therefore, there is only one Parliament and one Government of Flanders.



Federal Belgium is divided into provinces. Like the municipalities, they are known as lower governments; they have a certain degree of independence, but are also subject to decisions taken by both the federal and the regional authorities. Flanders comprises five provinces and 308 municipalities and accounts for 44.3% of the Belgian territory. According to recent institutional reforms, the powers relating to education lie with each community's own government and minister (executive power) and its own parliament (legislative power). This means that since 1989, each community has had its own education system. From 2001, the federal units have fiscal autonomy and almost total control over different types of taxes, agriculture, foreign trade and development, as well as over the provinces, municipalities and social service departments.

The *Strategic Plan for Learning in Flanders*, the Government Agreement of 14 June 1995 and the Policy Paper submitted by the Minister of Education to the competent commission of the Parliament of Flanders have been the reference for the main directions of educational policy during the second half of the 1990s. As regards legislation, the Government aimed at simplification and modernization. The main objectives for the education system have been: (i) autonomy and accountability; (ii) extending care; (iii) a suitable provision of adult and continuing education; and (iv) ensuring an affordable range of high quality educational services.

The priorities of educational policy in recent years can be found in *A Forward-looking Education Policy*, in the Coalition Agreement of 13 July 1999, and in the *Policy documents: Education and Formation* submitted by the Minister of Education and Training on 11 January 2000. The most important initiatives include: scaling-up partnership between schools; a more participatory approach in the school organization by setting up local councils and participation councils; a renewal of the structure and especially the content of teacher education; strengthening equal educational opportunities (including the right of the pupils and the parents to choose the school where to enrol, as stipulated in the Decree of June 2002, under the coordination of local consultative platforms); supporting the introduction of ICT in education; strengthening the Centres for Educational Guidance and the links between education and the job market.

The Higher Education Act of 4 April 2003 has introduced a new degree structure in accordance with the two-cycle pattern of the Bologna process. Through the Decree of 30 April 2004 a credit system has been adopted replacing the organization of study by year, and the universities started to implement it from 2005/06. The process is expected to be completed in 2008/09. The independent Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Body, responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes, has been established in September 2003 after the adoption of the new Higher Education Act.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

Article 24 of the Belgian **Constitution** guarantees freedom of education. Schools can be established and managed without any government connection. However, schools which wish to present officially recognized diplomas or certificates and receive subsidies from the Government of Flanders must comply with the legal provisions and regulations relating to the application of legislation on language and the organization



of studies. Apart from granting freedom for the organization of education, the constitution also guarantees parental freedom of choice. Parents can choose what type of education and what type of school they want for their children.

The **1959 School Pact** regulates the constitutional principle of the freedom of education. The **Act relating to the regulation of language in education** of 30 July 1963 provides that the language of education in the Dutch-language area is Dutch. For pre-primary and primary education, the developmental objectives and attainment targets are determined in the **Act of the Government of Flanders** of 22 June 1994 effective from 1 September 1997. **Decree on Primary Education** of 25 February 1997 introduced the concept of 'governing board' (of a school) as a synonym for 'the organizing authority'. This Decree also integrated all legislation regarding pre-primary and primary education into one coherent framework.

Decree of 17 July 1991, amended by **Decree of 13 April 1999**, regulated the organization and functioning of the inspectorate for all education levels, excepting universities and two-cycle higher education institutions.

Decree on Non-university Higher Education Institute of 13 July 1994 redefined the tasks and determined the respective responsibilities of the government and of colleges of higher education. This applies to the provision of education, the organization of studies, financing and quality control. The increased autonomy of institutions is a central element of this Decree.

Through **Decrees of 12 June 1991** and of **26 June 1991**, part of the responsibility for the further development of the university system was transferred to the institutions themselves. **Decree of 22 September 1995** established the University of Antwerp as an institution of public law with legal personality. As regards the management of universities, mention should be made of the **Decree of 22 February 1995** concerning the scientific and social services provided by colleges of higher education and universities, and the relations of higher education institutions with other legal entities. **Decree of 30 June 2000** modified article 34 of the Decree of 12 June 1991 regarding the universities in the Flemish Community. The **Higher Education Act** of 4 April 2003 regulates aspects related to the degree structure within the framework of the implementation of the Bologna process.

Decree of July 1990 established the Centres for Adult Basic Education aimed at providing adult learners with a broad and varied range of basic education services through different programmes delivered in a balanced and interrelated way.

The status of teaching staff in Community education is determined in **Decree of 21 March 1991**. The status of staff in subsidized education was regulated in another Decree relating to the legal position of some members of staff in subsidized education and in the subsidized Psychological, Medical and Social Guidance Centres. These two Decrees regulate the recruitment, promotion, permanent appointment, rights and obligations of teaching staff. They must be observed by the organizing powers.

Decree on Teacher Training and In-service Training of 16 April 1996 provides for the integration of all types of teacher training into one coherent



framework. An important change introduced is that, in addition to the importance of initial training, the importance of in-service training is also emphasized. Furthermore, the objective of university teacher training is explicitly defined.

In the **Regulations** of 7 September 1994 relating to the Education Policy and Practice-Oriented Scientific Research (OBPWO), the reciprocal interaction of research and policy is a central feature.

In order to prepare Community schools to adapt to the innovative concept of school clusters at secondary level, a **Special Decree** was passed on 14 July 1998, stipulating the transition from a two-level to a three-level structure.

The **Compulsory Education Act** of 28 June 1983 determines that every child, Belgian and foreign-born, is subject to compulsory education for twelve years, from the month of September of the year of the child's sixth birthday until the end of June of the year in which he/she reaches the age of 18 years. Compulsory education is full-time up to the age of 15, if the pupil has completed primary education, and at least the first two years of secondary education. In other cases, it is full-time up to the age of 16. From the age of 15 or 16, part-time compulsory education can be met through continuing full-time education (the large majority of pupils opt for this possibility), a part-time programme in one of the centres for part-time education, or by enrolling in a recognized course, mainly in centres for entrepreneurship training. Part-time education is a combination of learning and working.

In Flanders, compulsory education does not mean compulsory school attendance. In theory, it is also possible to comply with compulsory education at home, on condition that the education provided complies with the legally imposed requirements. In practice, it is only in exceptional cases that home education can actually be provided for children. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their children regularly attend classes until they reach the age of 18. In addition to compulsory education, there is also the right to education. This means that education is free of charge during the period of compulsory schooling. Parents may not be required to pay any financial contribution, and the Community is responsible for providing part of the traditional school equipment. A subsidy may be provided for removal costs of pupils who cannot find an educational establishment of their choice within a reasonable distance from their place of residence. All pupils also have a right to religious or moral education at the government's expense.

Administration and management of the education system

As a result of the institutional reforms, the responsibility for education has been transferred from the federal state to the Communities. Therefore, since 1989 the Flemish-, French- and German-speaking Communities have their own education system. The federal government has only the power to determine the beginning and end of the age of compulsory education, the minimum conditions for obtaining a diploma, and teachers' pensions. These tasks are carried out by the federal services for scientific, technical and cultural matters which fall under the Services of the Prime Minister of Belgium. All the other educational matters in Flanders fall under the powers of the Parliament of Flanders (the legislative authority), the Government of



Flanders, and the Flemish Minister of Education and Training (executive authority). As head of the **Department of Education and Training**, the Minister is responsible for the overall educational policy, within a framework of deregulation and decentralization. Fewer externally imposed rules should result in even more local autonomy, but also in a greater degree of accountability for every school.

The concept of the **organizing power** is central in the education system. The organizing power of an educational establishment is the government, or the natural or legal person who takes responsibility for it. The organizing powers have a broad degree of autonomy and pedagogic freedom. They are free to choose educational methods (including the evaluation of pupils), curricula and timetables, provided they take into account a minimum curriculum and timetable. In Flanders, approximately 1,500 organizing powers provide education in three traditionally distinct educational networks: community education; subsidized official education; and subsidized private education. Through the Decree on Primary Education of 25 February 1997 the concept 'governing board' (of a school) was introduced as a synonym for 'the organizing authority'.

From 1989, the organizing power in Flemish community education has been the Autonomous Council for Community Education (ARGO), replaced in 1998 by the **Community Education Council**. It consists of a Central Board and 374 local boards (LORGOs). The Central Board of Community Education receives and administers the financial means to provide education, determines the pedagogic plan and curricula, manages the school buildings fund, and is responsible for the appointment of staff in this educational network. The **local boards** (local school boards in elementary and secondary education, boards of directors in colleges of higher education) decide on matters of local relevance, the educational and staffing policies, and material and financial management. The local board comprises representatives of parents, the local social, economic and cultural associations, and teaching staff. In every school for community education, a **Pedagogic Board** is established, consisting of the members of the teaching staff.

In subsidized education (private and official), there are compulsory **participation boards**; they are composed of representatives of the organizing power, the parents, staff and local community and have a certain degree of participation in school policy. Their powers are less far-reaching than those of local school boards in community education (community education allows for co-management, while subsidized education allows for co-participation). The board has a right to information about all matters relating to school life, and advises on the general organization and operation of the school, school-level planning, and the general criteria for the evaluation of pupils. It has powers of consultation regarding the criteria for the use of the lesson timetable and the hours per teacher, the definition and amendment of school regulations, the transportation of pupils, and the health and safety of pupils.

After the passing of the Institutions of Non-University Higher Education Decree in 1994, all the former institutes combined into Flemish colleges of higher education. Colleges within another network could adopt the same management form, or retain a different form, e.g. private or provincial law. For Flemish autonomous higher education institutes, the management structure is stipulated in a decree; for the other non-university higher education institutes, co-participation has been spelled out



in detail. The management structure is adapted to the requirements of far-reaching autonomy and envelope financing, while the participation structure is based on participation at different levels.

In the Ministry of the Flemish Community there are departments other than education, with powers regarding specific aspects of education—mainly continuing education. For example, agricultural training and commercial courses of the Flemish Institute for Entrepreneurship Training (VIZO) and the vocational courses of the Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency (VDAB) fall under the competence of the **Departments of Economic Affairs, Employment, Internal Affairs and Agriculture**. Likewise, social and cultural training is under the responsibility of the **Department of Welfare, Public Health and Culture**.

The **Flemish Education Council** (VLOR) was established in 1990. It is an advisory body and a discussion forum for all educational matters in Flanders. All the draft decrees related to education must be submitted to the Council. The VLOR can also advise the Government of Flanders on its own initiative. It comprises a general council and a number of individual councils. The general council consists of representatives of the organizing powers, the teaching staff, the parent associations, the social and economic organizations, and education experts. The individual councils are: the council for elementary education, with a department for special education; the council for secondary education, with departments for general secondary education, artistic secondary education, technical and vocational secondary education, and special secondary education; the council for higher education, with departments for one-cycle and two-cycle higher education, and university education; and the council for adult education, with a department for social advancement education. In the VLOR, there are also “participation boards”, one for subsidized official education and one for subsidized private education. Their composition is analogous to that of the participation boards of the schools. The participation boards have a mediating role in the participation councils’ conflicts and must establish infringements of the Decree governing these councils. In addition to an advisory and consultation function, the VLOR also has a study function. The council can take its own initiative to conduct research or contract third parties.

The **Social-Economic Council of Flanders** (SERV), which comprises representatives of employers and employees, should advise on all draft decrees including those relating to education. The **Flemish Council for the Hogescholen** (VLHORA) was established in 1996/97. This Council gives advice and makes proposals to the government with regard to education in *hogescholen* (colleges of higher education). The **Flemish Inter-university Council** (VLIR) advises and makes proposals to the Minister with regard to university education. The independent **Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Body** (NVAO), responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes, has been established in September 2003 after the adoption of the new Higher Education Act.

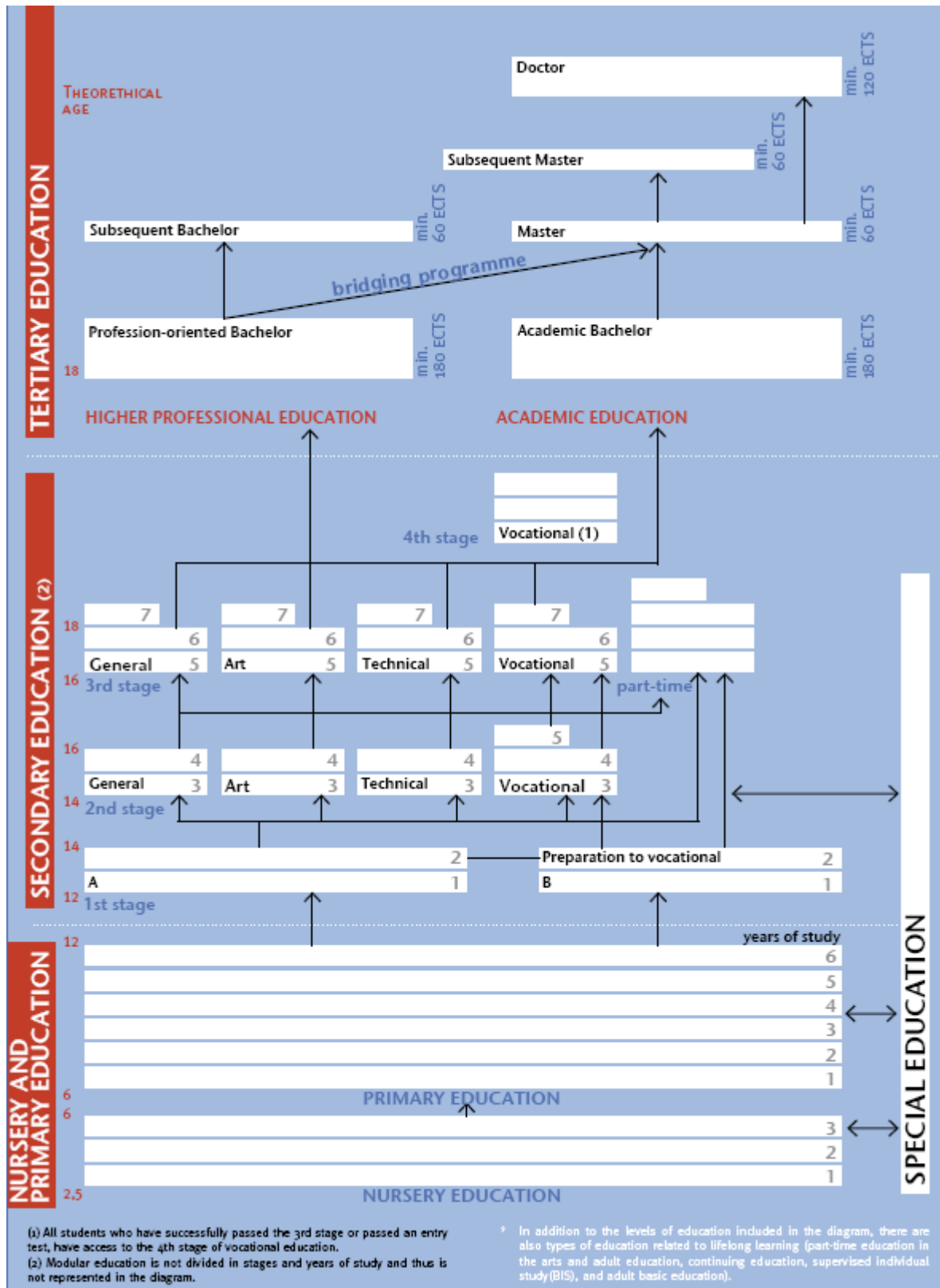
In Flanders there are many non-governmental organizations providing education and/or producing educational materials. Subsidized official education has two umbrella organizations: the **Flemish Provincial-authority Education Group** (CVPO), on the one hand, and the **Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities** (OVSG) on the other hand. There are also



umbrella organizations in subsidized private education. For Catholic education, this is the **Flemish Secretariat for Catholic Education** (VSKO), at the level of the Flemish Community. This has a strong coordinating influence on the different organizing powers. Approximately 99% of the schools in private education are affiliated to the VSKO. At the diocese level, Catholic education has the Diocesan Planning and Co-ordination Committee (DPPC); at the regional level, it has the Regional Coordination and Planning Committee (RCC). The CVPO, OVSG and VSKO are discussion organs. They do not have the right to act in place of the organizing powers, but have a supportive role. The three umbrella organizations draw up central curricula for the schools in the network, but ultimately these schools choose their own curriculum. Other umbrella organizations include: the Association for Protestant Christian Education in Belgium, the Flemish Education Discussion Platform, and the Federation of Alternative Schools.

Structure and organization of the education system

Belgium (Flemish Community): structure of the education system



Source: Ministry of the Flemish Community, 2005.



Pre-school education

Traditionally, elementary education comprises both nursery education (pre-school education) and primary education. Nursery education caters to children from 2½ to 6 years of age (in exceptional cases, 7 years). Nursery schools are often attached to primary schools. Classes are usually organized in three groups according to age: children 2½-4, 4-5, and 5-6 years old. When there are not enough children to form three groups (mainly in rural areas), children of different ages can be combined in one group. Pre-school education is not compulsory, but almost all children attend.

Primary education

Compulsory primary education is for children aged 6-12 and consists of six years of study, divided into three two-year cycles. Elementary schools usually adopt the year system, and every group has its own class teacher who teaches most subjects. A special teacher may be appointed for religious instruction or ethics, or for physical education. As in nursery education, two years are sometimes combined in a single group in sparsely populated areas.

Secondary education

The unified system of secondary education, introduced in 1989/90, comprises six years of study divided into three two-year stages. At Stage I, the first year B is for pupils who have fallen behind in their education, or are less suited to an education that is predominantly academic. At the end of the first year B, pupils can either continue in the second (pre-vocational) year or proceed to the first year A. At Stage II, students can choose between four options: general, technical, artistic, and vocational. The structure of the three two-year stages can be optionally supplemented with a third year in Stage III. This is a preparatory year for higher education (in general or artistic secondary), or a specialization year (in technical or vocational secondary). It is also possible to organize a third year at Stage II of vocational secondary (completion year). In addition to full-time secondary education (unified system), there is also part-time vocational secondary education, i.e. a combination of learning and practical training.

Higher education is offered at professionally-oriented colleges of higher education and universities. The Higher Education Act of 2003 has introduced a new degree structure in accordance with the two-cycle pattern of the Bologna process. As a result of the reorganization, both professional and academic degree programmes at the undergraduate level are now organized into two cycles: bachelor's degree (normally lasting three years) and master's degree (requiring two additional years of study) programmes. The new system is fully implemented from 2007/08. As regards doctoral degree programmes, the normal duration is four years in the case of full-time study and six to seven years in the case of part-time study.

The school year at the elementary and secondary levels extends from 1 September to 31 August and consists of 182 working days, five days per week. The main holiday periods are: autumn (one week); Christmas (two weeks); spring (one week); Easter (two weeks); and summer (July and August). At colleges of higher education, the academic year starts at the earliest on 1 September and at the latest on 1 October; it ends on the day before the start of the next academic year. At universities,



the academic year extends from the beginning of October to the end of September. The courses are taught from the beginning of October to the end of May or June, depending on the university. This period is divided into two terms.

The financing of education

According to the Special Law on the funding of the Communities and Regions of 16 January 1989 and the Belgian Law of 23 May 2000, the appropriations for education allocated by the State to the Communities are distributed according to the number of pupils on the basis of objective criteria, e.g. the number of pupils aged 6-17 years who are regularly enrolled in primary and secondary education in an educational establishment organized or supported by each Community.

The Council of the Community Education is competent for the definition of criteria for the allocation of the funds to the school groups (an intermediate level between the schools and the Council). The Board of Accountants has a supervisory responsibility with respect to financial policy and accounts of the school groups. The Board is also responsible for the financial supervision of the Council of the Community Education.

The municipalities and the provincial governments are responsible for the financial management of the schools in the subsidized official education sector. The budget has to be approved at the higher level (the provincial government for the municipal budget and the Flemish government for the provincial budget). The school governing bodies of the subsidized privately-run education sector have a large degree of autonomy; their budgets need not be approved by a higher body and they only have to comply with a number of basic rules concerning the use of the funds obtained.

Colleges of higher education receive an 'envelope' of funds. Before distributing the funds to individual colleges, a number of deductions are made to cover certain costs that the government will meet directly, such as the salaries for certain members of staff. After these deductions, an overall amount is left for the operational expenses of the colleges. The amount per college is determined on the basis of: the costs of the college in the past; the number of students (taking into account a five-year average); and a combination of student numbers (three-year average) and the weightings allocated to the programmes according to the fields of study. The government also contributes to the funding of the colleges' social facilities and colleges are also entitled to collect enrolment fees.

From 1991, universities have been funded for a 50% in function of the number of students in the previous academic year and for the other 50% in a fixed sum varying in function of the index of consumer prices and wage costs. Since then, the financing system has been regularly revised by different decrees. From 1998, universities have also received an additional contribution supplementing the fixed amount of funds. A new financing system, based not only on inputs but also on outputs, should be put in place by 2008.

According to Eurostat, the total public expenditure on education in Belgium (all Communities) represented 5.99% of GDP in 2004.

The educational process

In the past the definition of the general curriculum and decisions on the actual content for primary and secondary education were strongly centralized, whereby the government gave formal approval of all initiatives that emanated from the organizing authorities. This ‘centralization’ was institutionalized when in 1958 and 1959 the School Pact and the School Pact Law were in force. In contrast to this there was of course the pedagogical freedom that was defined and regulated by article 6 of the Law of 29 May 1959 on the School Pact. Decree of 24 July 1996 amended the text of this article, however safeguarding and confirming the same basic principles. A new text was introduced to meet all the technical requirements regarding a clear and explicit definition of the attainment targets and the developmental objectives.

The Decree of 17 July 1991 determined that each organizing authority has the freedom to establish the timetables and curricula as long as these incorporate the developmental objectives and goals. After the first experiences with the formulation of goals and developmental objectives, the Decree of 24 July 1996 improved the definition of the minimum objectives for different levels and types of schools. It also determined which developmental objectives and goals must be attained. The decree also defined the role and functions of the educational inspectors.

The Decree of July 1991 charged the Department for Educational Development (DVO) with the duty to formulate proposals regarding attainment targets and goals applicable to all schools and for pre- primary, primary and secondary education (mainstream and special). The decree defines the goals as “minimum targets that the government regards as necessary and achievable for a specified population of pupils”. They concern “a minimum of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes intended for that population of pupils”. Furthermore, developmental objectives are defined as “the minimum targets in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that the government considers desirable and that the school must aspire to in their pupils”.

Another important evolution concerns the division of goals and developmental objectives into what are known as course-related and cross-curricular goals and developmental objectives. Cross-curricular minimum targets add valuable substance and goals that otherwise threaten to slip away through the net of the subjects. Moreover they offer the possibility of achieving more cohesion and balance in the range of courses offered. It is the intention that as many pupils as possible achieve these minimum targets. Nevertheless the legislation makes a distinction between ‘aspiring to’ and ‘achieving’ the targets. In secondary education a number of important themes regarded as cross-curricular are translated into separate goals and developmental objectives. The cross-curricular goals are “minimum targets that each school must aspire to for its pupils.” They do not belong to a specific learning area, but can be achieved through many subjects or educational projects. These goals include, for example, learning to learn, social skills, nurturing a sense of public responsibility, health education, environmental education, musical and creative training, technical and technological training.

The organization of secondary education is based on the distinction between basic secondary education and the specific part of the training. Basic secondary



education comprises the contents that every pupil, regardless of the network or the school, should learn. With the formulation of goals for the specific sections of training in the second and third grade of secondary education the legislation however introduced a new concept, i.e. specific attainment targets. These are “goals with regard to the skills, the specific knowledge, understanding, and attitudes that a pupil of the secondary school should attain in order to enter continuing education and/or to function as a beginner in a vocational work environment.” The specific sections, categorized by these specific goals, are consequently strongly differentiated and focused on the individual nature of the training.

No developmental objectives or goals are established for instruction in a recognized religion, a morality course based on that religion or in the non-denominational ethics, the study of one’s own culture and religion or another culture. The government has also provided a procedure for divergence, whereby a board of governors can rule that the established minimum standards either leave insufficient space for their own pedagogical and educational ideas and/or are irreconcilable with them. In that case, the board of governors submits to the Government a request to diverge. This application is only acceptable if it indicates exactly why the developmental objectives, attainment targets and specific goals leave insufficient space for its own pedagogical and educational ideas and/or why they are irreconcilable with them.

The legislation assumes that the minimum objectives must be broadly in line with society. To achieve this, an evenly balanced procedure has been developed including different phases that create a subtle balance between the various participants in the interplay of forces within society. At the same time realism and feasibility are sought in this procedure. The procedure revolves around four important moments. First the Department of Educational formulates the design and construction. Then there is an advisory phase, which consists of a debate within society and a formal recommendation by the Flemish Education Council and the Socio-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV). Thirdly, there is the decision by the political administration, after which—in the fourth phase—follows ratification by Parliament.

The developmental objectives and goals for pre-primary and primary schools were implemented on 1 September 1998. Those for the first grade of secondary education were given statutory status from 1 September 1997. The goals of the basic section of the courses in the second and third grade of secondary education are being implemented from 1 September 2002. Regarding the specific goals for the specific sections of the job-oriented and non-job-oriented courses, they are being introduced gradually, taking into consideration the formulation and introduction of the vocational profiles being developed by the vocational sectors involved.

In view of this important innovation the Government has launched a number of initiatives targeting the teachers, heads and organizing authorities so that the implementation of these minimum targets will progress as smoothly as possible. There has to be sufficient clarity regarding the interplay between goals and developmental objectives on one hand, and the curricula on the other hand, which can be considered as a contract between the government and the organizing authority with regard to the provision of education.



In defining the specific goals of the specific section of the training in the second and third grade of the secondary education, the socio-economic sector plays a prominent role. This is especially true for the job-oriented courses. Not all courses are vocationally oriented, but taken overall, the minimum expectations for the specific section of job-oriented courses are established by the SERV or given legitimacy in the form of vocational profiles. When creating the profiles, the SERV has the opportunity of consulting other organizations set up on an equal footing. In the first phase a vocational profile is formulated, and subsequently it is transformed into a training profile (with the related attainment targets). In the third phase a training programme is formulated by the organizing authority based on the training profile. The process of developing a vocational profile into a training programme takes place according to a consultation scheme whereby three partners with a varying degree of responsibility are involved. Those who are consulted are the socio-economic actors (employers, employees and self-employed professionals working in the field), the educational authority (administration, Inspectorate and Department of Education) and other stakeholders (including representatives of the organizing authority, teachers, and parents). Article 2 of the Decree of 14 July 1998 defines a training profile as “the sum of the skills, knowledge and attitudes, formulated as attainment targets that have to be acquired within a course.”

Until recent years the Government used to recommend standard timetables for secondary education comprising three sections (general, specific, and free choice). The reform of secondary education of 14 July 1998 increased the autonomy of schools by giving them more freedom, such as drawing up the timetables. The centrally imposed timetables were abolished, so that the schools could react in a more flexible manner to the needs of their pupils. This was made possible also by the introduction of attainment targets, and it is one of the responsibilities of the school to define how these targets are to be achieved. In practice this means that only a ‘minimum’ timetable, that is limited to a summary list of subjects, is established for primary education, while for the specific part no minimum timetable is recommended. Consequently no preliminary approval is required for the actual weekly timetable that the school applies. (Ministry of the Flemish Community, 2001).

Elementary education (pre-primary and primary education)

The organizing powers have a large autonomy and educational freedom. They are also free with regard to the choice of curriculum and timetable, provided that minimum requirements are taken into account. Nursery (pre-primary) education has a social function and serves as a preparation for primary education. The aim is to promote the child’s overall development (motor, cognitive and affective), mainly through play. Nursery schools are often attached to primary schools.

Primary education aims at: promoting the children’s personal development; stimulating their social initiation; helping the children acquire basic knowledge and skills and actively participate in their education; and countering the inequality with regard to school and upbringing. Elementary schools are usually organized by grades, and every group has its own class teacher who teaches most subjects. A subject teacher may be appointed for religious instruction or ethics, or for physical education. As in the case of pre-primary education, two grades/years are sometimes combined in a single group in sparsely populated areas.



For regular pre-primary and primary education, the developmental objectives and attainment targets were determined in an Act of the Government of Flanders of 22 June 1994 entered into effect on 1 September 1997. The attainment targets are the minimum objectives which the school must pursue and which must be achieved by the majority of pupils. These targets concern a specific standard of knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills. The developmental objectives should be pursued, and therefore do not necessarily have to be achieved by all pupils. These attainment targets should not replace the curriculum, but allow for creativity and for decisions with regard to content by the organizing powers, schools and teams of teachers. The curriculum must be approved by the Minister, who asks for the advice of the inspectorate.

The developmental objectives and attainment targets for regular nursery and primary education—ratified by the Parliament of Flanders in 1995—are organized into five learning areas: physical education; art education and musical training; language (Dutch in nursery education, Dutch and French in primary education); discovering the world (nature, people, society, technology, time and space); mathematics (introduction of mathematics in nursery education). Attainment targets are also considered for two cross-curricular themes that go beyond these areas of learning: learning to learn and social skills (compulsory since 1 September 1998).

Typically, both in pre-primary and in primary education there are twenty-eight weekly lesson periods, each lasting fifty minutes. The government does not determine how many periods must be allocated to each subject. However, a weekly half period of road safety education is compulsory. A timetable is not prescribed, but there should be a balanced and coherent educational provision. The governing board freely determines how the educational process is organized, and defines a school work plan outlining the content and organization of teaching.

The school year consists of 182 days, and the school week comprises five days (from Monday to Friday in the morning and afternoon, except Wednesday afternoon). Lessons start at 8:00 at the earliest; they finish at 15:00 at the earliest, and at 17:00 at the latest. Most schools start at about 8:30. There is a lunch break of at least one hour. A typical weekly lesson timetable (at the end of the 1990s) is presented below:

Primary education: typical weekly lesson timetable by cycle

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each cycle		
	Grades I–II	Grades III–IV	Grades V–VI
Religion or ethics	2	2	2
Observation of the environment	6	6	–
Dutch language	7	7	7
Mathematics	6	6	5
French as second language	–	–	3
Drawing	1	1	1
Manual activities	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2
Geography	–	–	1.5
History	–	–	1.5
Science	–	–	2
Music	1	1	1
Writing	1	1	–
Total weekly periods in each grade	28	28	28

Source: Eurydice Eurybase, 1999. Each teaching period lasts 50 minutes.

The language of education in the Dutch-language area is Dutch. In the Capital Region of Brussels, the language of education is Dutch or French, depending on the choice of the parents living in this region. With a view to protecting minorities, a number of municipalities (including the municipalities in the language border area) fall under a special arrangement. Nursery and primary education may be provided in another language, if this is the child's mother tongue or usual language, and if the parents live in one of these municipalities. The teaching of the second language (French) may be organized in primary school from the fifth year (usually three weekly periods). In the primary schools of the Capital Region of Brussels, and in the municipalities which fall under the above-mentioned special arrangement, the teaching of the second language is compulsory. Normally, three weekly periods in the third and fourth years, and five weekly periods in the fifth and sixth years are envisaged, excepting the municipalities on the language border area, where the number of periods are four and eight, respectively. The teaching of French has become compulsory from 2004/05.

The organizing powers are free to choose their method of evaluation, provided that they respect the regulations concerned. In nursery education, the assessment of children is mainly based on observation, using a system for monitoring progress in relation with the developmental objectives. The educational guidance centres and the team of teachers evaluate the child's degree of development and maturity. If they do not consider a child to be ready for primary school at the age of 6, the child can remain in nursery education for another year at the parents' request. On 1 September 2000 the Psychological, Medical and Social Guidance Centres (PMS) have been transformed into Centres for Educational Guidance (CLB). The re-profiling of the purpose and structure of the centres has been discussed for a long time. The Decree regarding the Centres for Educational Guidance of 1 December 1998 established the integration of the PMS and MST centres (Centres for Preventive Health Care). This decree implies radical changes in structure and content.



In primary education, the pupils' progress regarding the attainment targets for the prescribed subjects/areas of learning are evaluated by means of observation and tests. During the school year, pupils are continuously assessed on the basis of their daily work in the classroom and their homework. The teacher organizes regular tests under the responsibility of the organizing power. Every school individually designs the tests, observation lists and systems that are used for monitoring pupils, or uses those of the umbrella organizations of the network concerned. The school report informs the pupil and his/her parents about the results that have been achieved, the progress that has been made, the learning behaviour and personal development. On the basis of all the information gathered during the school year, the teacher decides at the end of the year (usually in consultation with the head of the school) whether or not a child will move on to the next school year.

Children with learning difficulties receive individualized care and support from a special needs education teacher. Schools which prepare and justify a plan of action can receive additional periods to help children with learning difficulties to move from nursery to primary education. In the context of the educational priority policy, immigrant children also have access to additional provisions in order to support their integration into society.

Pupils whose files show that they have successfully completed the sixth year receive an elementary education certificate. This certificate is issued by the management of the (recognized) primary school for mainstream or special education. The elementary education certificate can also be obtained at the end of the first year of secondary education. At the age of 12, a pupil without this certificate normally enrolls in the first year B of secondary education. In view of the fact that education is compulsory from the age of 6 to 18 years, it may be said that 100% of the age group concerned move from primary to secondary education.

In 2004/05, there were 2,218 pre-schools and the number of children in pre-primary education was 234,963 (of whom 1,791 children in special education). In the same year, a total of 2,050 elementary schools offered both nursery and primary education. The total number of pupils enrolled in primary schools was 420,678 (of whom 26,768 in special education).

Secondary education

In the unified system which is followed in the different networks, a great deal of importance is attached to a broad, general basic education which comprises the subjects to be taught to all students. This is determined per two-year stage and per type of education. Therefore, part of the curriculum is identical for all the students at the same level. In addition to this common part, students can choose additional subjects under the optional part.

A basic option is a group of subjects which enable the student to gain a broader orientation and perspective in the first stage. An option is a subject or a group of subjects which determine the characteristic feature of the programme in the second and third stages, and comprises the fundamental part and possibly a complementary part. The fundamental part differs according to the direction chosen. This means that the different directions are distinct from each other, and that typical characteristics of



the desired specialization can be taken into account. The complementary part gives individual schools the opportunity to place their own emphases, on the basis of their respective educational plans.

In the first stage, the basic education almost covers the entire timetable. It is progressively reduced in time, allowing for increased specialization. The first year of the first stage does not include any options, basic options or vocational areas. This year is divided into the first year A and the first year B. In the first year A, at least twenty-seven out of the thirty-two weekly periods are devoted to basic education (a period lasting fifty minutes). This is the same for all the pupils of the same school, and comprises the following subjects: Dutch; French and possibly English; mathematics; history; geography; artistic education or crafts education and/or musical education; natural sciences or physics and/or biology; technology; physical education; religion or non-denominational ethics or (only for private education) cultural history or students' culture and religion. The remaining five periods can be determined by the school itself within a prescribed framework. This means that the school can emphasize its own profile, based on its tradition, the socio-economic environment, etc. The first year B is meant for students who have fallen behind in their education or are less suited to predominantly academic education. This year is a sort of bridge between primary and secondary education. The students also have twenty-seven periods of basic education. Afterwards, they can either move to the second vocational year (where they still have sixteen periods of common basic education) or to the first year A. In the second vocational year, sixteen periods are devoted to the theoretical and practical introduction to the main vocational sectors.

In the second year, at least twenty-four periods are devoted to basic education. These comprise the same subjects as in the first year, with the addition of English. At least fourteen periods are common for all pupils. The other periods can again be determined by the school itself (e.g., Latin, Greek, modern languages, mathematics and technology).

From the second stage, students can choose four options: (i) general secondary education (ASO) where the emphasis is placed on a broad academic education, providing a firm foundation for higher education; (ii) technical secondary education (TSO) in which attention is devoted, above all, to general and technical/theoretical subjects; (iii) artistic secondary education (KSO) which is a broad general education linked to active practical art work; and (iv) vocational secondary education (BSO) a practical type of education in which young people learn a specific occupation, while simultaneously receiving a general education. In the second and third stages, there is again a common and an optional part. In ASO, TSO and KSO, the following subjects fall under basic education: Dutch; a second modern language; mathematics; history; geography; (applied) natural sciences or physics and/or chemistry and/or biology, whether or not in an integrated form; physical education; religion or ethics; a third modern language (only for ASO). Vocational secondary education comprises basic teaching in: Dutch; history and/or geography (these two subjects may be integrated in social studies); mathematics and/or applied sciences and/or applied physics and/or applied chemistry and/or applied biology, whether or not in an integrated form; physical education; religion or ethics. In the optional part, the basic teaching is supplemented with a broad range of possible subjects. In the third stage, the



specialization can be further narrowed with a view to the eventual choice of profession or study plans in higher education.

At the secondary level, the assessment of students and their achievements at the end of the school year (and/or their grades), are decided by the school exclusively. In this context, the educational staff meeting is the most important assessment organ. During the staff meeting, which occurs at the end of the school year, the decision is made as to whether or not a student pass on to the next year and, if so, whether any restrictions will be imposed. The following are the parameters for decision-making: the student's previous school career; interim tests and examinations; information from the PMS Centre; and, possibly, discussions with parents and students. Students who do not succeed repeat the year. The exams are organized by the individual teacher under the responsibility of the organizing powers. There is no centrally administered examination at the level of the Flemish Community.

Students who complete the second year of the first stage of secondary education receive a certificate. The same applies to the second stage. At the end of the second year of the third stage of general, artistic and technical secondary education successful students are awarded a secondary education diploma which gives access to higher education. Students in vocational secondary education who pass the second year of the third stage receive a certificate. They can obtain a secondary education diploma by completing the third year of the third stage.

In 2004/05 there were 1,037 secondary schools and the total enrolment (general and vocational education) was 452,441 students, of whom 17,393 students in special education.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

Quality control is based upon a comprehensive analysis of the school setting. Quality is no longer translated in terms of individual teachers, but rather in the overall functioning of the school. The Inspectorate takes into account context, input, process and output indicators. The school, in all its aspects, is considered to be responsible for the quality of the education provided. Supervising the attainment of the general and developmental objectives is an important part of the school analysis carried out by the Inspectorate.

To this end, inspectorate members can focus on certain learning areas and organize a test in those fields. Tests cannot be used to compare schools' quality levels. Actually, the organization of nationwide central testing is legally forbidden in Flanders. The Inspectorate does not have the right to organize or publish its findings on a comparative basis. That is why test results are not disclosed, but rather used only within the framework of the overall education analysis of the inspectorate or of a survey research project, in which the anonymity of the school is guaranteed. When carrying out these inspectorate tests, feedback could be given to schools as to the overall sufficient or insufficient categories. Each year the Inspectorate presents an overview of the main conclusions of inspections to the Parliament. The work of the Inspectorate, at all education levels, is based upon the general objectives and developmental objectives.



Inter-school tests are organized each year for certain groups of schools, e.g., the municipal examinations and/or inter-diocesan examinations for the mother language and arithmetic in the final year of primary school in the grant-aided sector. However, the results of these tests are neither published nor systematically used for defining educational policies. These tests are a voluntary initiative of the schools involved. The Flemish education authorities are not allowed by law or decree to organize such comparative testing or to publish such data. (See also: Eurydice Eurybase, 1999).

One of the pillars of the quality assurance system is the Department for Educational Development (DVO), initially established as a study centre of the Inspectorate by the Decree of 17 July 1991. The DVO is an advisory body to the government and to the minister responsible for education. The Department formulates proposals with regard to the attainment targets, specific attainment targets and developmental objectives for all schools (pre-primary, primary and secondary education), and these targets and objectives are taken into account for assessing educational quality. The tasks of the Department include: the development of instruments of analysis and assessment; the development of criteria for the approval of curricula and educational plans; the development of proposals regarding the development of the programmes' structure (Decree of 13 April 1999 changing the decrees regarding the inspection and supervisory services); and the development of proposals for occupational profiles and specific attainment targets for the teachers (decree regarding teacher training and in-service training).

Within the framework of the *Better Governing Policy* the ministries of the Flemish Community will be thoroughly reorganized. The Department of Education, the Inspectorate and the Department for Educational Development will also be involved. The DVO will probably be included in the administration of the Department of Education and will focus on curriculum development.

Higher education

Higher education in Flanders is provided at non-university higher education institutes (colleges of higher education, *hogescholen*), and universities. In 2004/05 the higher education network comprised twenty-two colleges and seven universities. There are public and private, but state-funded, higher education institutions. University and colleges can establish an official cooperation (association).

At the beginning of the 1990s a considerable degree of autonomy was granted to universities and colleges of higher education, involving both management and financial aspects. With the Decrees of June 1991, part of the responsibility for the further development of the university system was transferred to the institutions themselves. However, the government maintained coordinating supervisory functions. The Decree of 13 July 1994 redefined the tasks of the government and of the colleges of higher education, and determined their respective responsibilities. This applies both for the provision of education and the organization of studies, and for financing and quality control.



Colleges of higher education offer a broad range of professionally-oriented programmes in the following areas: architecture; health care; industrial sciences and technology; audio-visual and visual arts; music and dramatic arts; biotechnology; teacher training; product development; social work; applied linguistics; commerce and business studies. Traditionally, colleges offered programmes at basic, advanced and post-degree level (full-time, part-time and distance education). Two-cycle programmes at the basic level used to lead to the award of a bachelor's degree at the end of the first three-year cycle, and to a master's degree at the end of the second cycle. A diploma was awarded at the end of advanced programmes, and post-degree programmes culminated with the award of a certificate.

Admission to university education is not subject to entrance examinations, and all students with a secondary education diploma are admitted. Excepting some professional fields of study (engineering, medicine), there is no form of selection, nor any form of binding guidance for the students. Approximately one third of graduates from secondary education opt for university studies. Universities offer some eighty programmes (full- and part-time) in at least eighteen fields of study traditionally lasting four, five or seven years depending on the field of study. Universities offered: basic programmes organized into two cycles, leading to a bachelor's degree at the end of the first cycle and a master's degree at the end of the second cycle; advanced programmes (aimed at supplementing or broadening a basic programme); specialization programmes; doctoral programmes; and post-doctoral courses.

The Higher Education Act of 4 April 2003 has introduced a new degree structure in accordance with the two-cycle pattern of the Bologna process. Through the Decree of 30 April 2004 a credit system has been adopted and the universities started to implement it from 2005/06. As a result of the reorganization, higher education programmes (both professional and academic) at the undergraduate level are now organized into two cycles (bachelor's and master's degrees). The new degree system is fully implemented from 2007/08 and all new entrants are now in the new two-cycle structure. The process is expected to be completed in 2008/09, excepting the cases of medicine, dentistry, and veterinary (where the master's degree cycle lasts three to four years). As regards doctoral degree programmes, the normal duration is four years in the case of full-time study and six to seven years in the case of part-time study.

For the practical implementation of the Bologna process, working groups have been established by the two Rectors' Conferences (the Flemish Inter-university Council, VLIR, and the Flemish Council of University Colleges, VLHORA). These working groups usually comprise representatives of higher education institutions, staff, students and public authorities. According to the Decree on Participation in Higher Education of 19 March 2004 all higher education institutions are now required to establish a students' council which is democratically elected on a regular basis by all students.

The independent Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Body (NVAO), responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes, has been established in September 2003 after the adoption of the new Higher Education Act. The agency is financed by the Netherlands (60%) and the Flemish Community (40%), and has four major tasks: accreditation of existing bachelor's-master's programmes; ex-ante evaluation of new



programmes to ascertain whether they meet the basic quality standards; assessment, on demand of the institution, of specific quality aspects of the programme; and promotion of the European and international dimension in Dutch-Flemish accreditation processes in order to foster coordination and collaboration. The VLIR and the VLHORA are legally responsible for organizing and monitoring the quality assurance system in universities and *hogescholen*. They design the system, develop and update the protocols and guidelines, appoint the expert panels, receives the reports of the panels, etc.

In 2004/05 the total enrolment in colleges of higher education was 101,185 students, and in universities it was 57,005 students.

Special education

Special education is aimed at children and young people whose physical, sensorial, psychological, social or intellectual development is impeded by a disability and/or learning or educational difficulties. By means of an individualized educational and teaching provision, an attempt is made to integrate every child into mainstream education as well as possible.

In special education, a distinction is made between special nursery education (for children aged 2 ½-6); special primary education (for children aged 6-13); and special secondary education (for 13-21-year-olds). The structure of special education consists, at both the primary and the secondary education levels, of eight types adapted to the pupils' needs: type 1, for pupils with a slight mental handicap; type 2, for pupils with a moderate or serious mental handicap; type 3, for pupils with serious emotional and/or behavioural problems; type 4, for pupils with a physical handicap; type 5, for pupils with a (long-term) illness; type 6, for pupils with a visual handicap; type 7, for pupils with a hearing handicap; type 8, for pupils with serious learning difficulties. There is no special pre-school education for children of types 1 and 8, and no special secondary education for adolescents of type 8. It is envisaged to replace the eight types by four clusters (grouping a number of specific problems, such as learning, functional and social disabilities) and four levels.

At the level of special secondary education, four types of training are organized in addition to the above-mentioned subdivision into eight types of education. In this instance, students from the different types of education can be brought together. Each type of training complies with pre-determined objectives based on the nature and seriousness of their disability: (i) training type 1: social training with a view to integration in a protected living environment; (ii) training type 2: general and social training with a view to integration in a protected living and working environment (comprising two stages, each consisting of at least two years of study); (iii) training type 3: social and vocational training, with a view to integration into a normal living and working environment (comprising an observation period of one year, and a training period of four years of study); (iv) training type 4: preparation for studies in higher education and integration in active life. The diplomas or certificates which are issued are the same as those for mainstream education.



The enrolment of pupils in special education depends on a multi-disciplinary examination carried out by an organ empowered to do so or, in certain cases, by a medical organization. A report (protocol) and a statement are drawn up on the basis of this examination, the results of which must be submitted by the person responsible for the child (parents or guardian) to the school of their choice, provided that this school offers the appropriate type of special education. In addition to the management personnel, the teaching staff and the auxiliary educational staff (who have the same training as the teachers in mainstream education), special education services are also ensured by medical and paramedical staff (a supervising doctor, physiotherapist, speech therapist, nurse and childcare assistant) and other assistants.

Children with special education needs are also currently integrated into mainstream education. Integrated education consists of co-operative ventures between mainstream schools special education schools. At the beginning of 2006 approximately 6,000 pupils were under this scheme, while about 46,000 pupils were in special education.

Private education

There is virtually no private education in Flanders, in the sense of education that is completely independent from the government. Practically all students are enrolled in an educational establishment financed or subsidized by the Flemish Community.

Nevertheless, there are a few rare private institutions which are neither financed nor subsidized by the government. Some of these are recognized by the inspectorate. This means that these institutions provide education of a sufficient quality and level that they may issue certificates and diplomas recognized by the Flemish Community.

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

In elementary education, most schools have adequate teaching materials in terms of quantity. Taking into account the fact that the purchase of educational resources requires significant investments, schools opt for a long-run use, which may mean that after a certain period of time the contents are no longer up to date. In addition to the printed resources, experiments related to the use of visual materials have been carried out for about ten years. In this respect, computers play a central role, particularly as an interactive medium (computer-assisted instruction). In the teaching process, attention has been paid to a multimedia approach, bearing in mind that the different media are interrelated and all play a role in this process.

In secondary education, almost all schools have laboratories, computer rooms and audio-visual resources, as well as other educational and teaching materials. Nevertheless, the extent to which this equipment is available differs from school to school. The production and publication of textbooks is mainly in the hands of the learning resources industry (commercial companies), in cooperation with educational experts. In general, textbooks are of a high or very high quality. Competition among textbooks by different publishers is frequent. As part of their educational freedom, the



organizing powers (schools) themselves are completely free to choose the textbooks that are used. It is prohibited for any external party to impose a textbook.

The presence of a minimum infrastructure, which provides sufficient safety for the pupils and complies with the requirements of modern hygiene, is a precondition for the Flemish Community to finance or subsidize and recognize a school. Hot meals are provided at a reasonable cost for pupils who do not bring their own lunch with them. Some institutions organize the transportation of their pupils. In the context of free choice, the government organizes (or subsidizes) the transportation of pupils in some areas.

Adult and non-formal education

Continuing education, which is mainly aimed at adults, consists of many types of courses which differ considerably in terms of their nature, duration, level and structure. This is the result of the diversity of the target groups and objectives, and also reflects the distribution of responsibilities among three departments of the Ministry of the Flemish Community. Continuing education includes part-time adult education, part-time artistic education, the vocational training courses of the Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency (VDAB), the commercial training courses of the Flemish Institute for Entrepreneurship Training (VIZO) and social/cultural training work.

Part-time adult education comprises: social advancement education; second chance education; distance education; and adult basic education. Social advancement education (OSP or evening classes) includes a variety of programmes. A distinction can be made between three large groups of participants: (i) pupils and students who wish to obtain an additional basic qualification; (ii) pupils and students who want in-service training or wish to specialize; (iii) pupils and students who are interested in their personal development or social emancipation. The OSP is organized at the secondary (vocational and technical), and at the higher education level. The Decree of 2 March 1999 changed the structure of OSP. From 1 September 1999 the institutions for social advancement education became known as Centres for Adult Education (CVO). The structure of social advancement secondary education was developed in order to ensure further coordination with the regular secondary education as regards areas of study, programmes, modules and goals. Programmes organized into modules are also offered in addition to the traditional programmes. In 2004/05 there were 119 CVO, 108 OSP at secondary level and 61 OSP at the higher education level. The number of participants was 228,871 at the secondary level and 20,699 at the higher education level.

Through distance education in-service training and additional training take place on the basis of self-study. There are programmes on a wide range of subjects. Distance education has developed to become a multimedia type of education. In addition to the traditional “written” courses, there are also language cassettes and practice disks for use on the computer. Through the Decree of 2 March 1999 distance education became partly integrated into part-time adult education.



Part-time artistic education (DKO) offers the four traditional forms of expression: the visual arts, dance, music, and the spoken word (drama, public speaking and fluency). In 2004/05 there were 166 DKO institutes. The total number of participants was 157,712.

In Flanders, the number of illiterate persons is estimated to be 90,000, while in Belgium there are more than 308,000. This is a relative figure, because people who have officially learned to read and write, but still find it very difficult to apply these skills in daily life, are not included in the statistics. The true number of illiterates varies, depending on the definition of functional illiteracy used by researchers. In 1990, a Decree established the Centres for Adult Basic Education (CBE).

The CBEs aim at providing a broad and varied range of educational and training programmes for adults with a low educational level, in a balanced and interrelated way. Attention is paid to the following areas: (i) language and arithmetic skills: this is the acquisition or improvement of reading and writing skills, speaking and listening skills in Dutch as a first language and as a second language, and in this way the centres play an important role in teaching Dutch to immigrants; (ii) social awareness and skills and an orientation towards society: these include acquisition of basic skills and competences which are useful for the different roles in social life; (iii) orientation and preparation for further learning, vocational training or work; (iv) activities and programmes to motivate potential participants to make use of basic education. In 2004/05 there were twenty-nine CBEs and the number of participants was 26,188.

Teaching staff

There are four different types of teachers: nursery teacher; primary school teacher; secondary school teacher group 1 (until September 1997, still known as a qualified teacher for lower secondary education) trained to teach in the first and second stages of secondary education, in the third stage of technical education and in the third and fourth stages of vocational secondary education; and secondary school teacher group 2 (until September 1997, still known as a qualified teacher for upper secondary education) trained to teach in the second, third and fourth stages of secondary education.

Pre-service teacher training programmes offered at colleges of higher education train the first three types of teachers, while secondary school teacher group 2 are normally trained at universities. Programmes for elementary education teachers and secondary school teacher group 1 have been already transformed into three-year professional bachelor's degree programmes in accordance with the Bologna process. Programmes offered at universities for secondary school teachers group 2 are also being restructured. In two-year master's programmes, teacher training becomes a specialization in the second year (30 credits or half a year); in one-year master's programmes the theoretical part (also 30 credits) has to be followed (for a specific subject or area of study or basic discipline) after the master's year. The practical part (teaching practice) follows the master's programme. Teaching practice can be done before recruitment (pre-service, 30 credits) or after recruitment (in-service) at a school during one year with an assignment of a minimum of 70% of a full-time position and under the guidance of a teacher-mentor.



In the past, the government determined the content of teacher training programmes and specified a compulsory range of subjects. Nowadays, teacher trainers can draw up their programmes autonomously. However, they are obliged to guarantee the quality of their training by means of a system of internal and external quality control. This implies that they must take into account the social requirements and professional profiles. Teachers of vocational subjects and some teachers of technical subjects for which there is no full-time course available, can be admitted to the teaching profession after following social advancement programmes (part-time adult education), which also comprise a theoretical and a practical part. Programmes are offered in the evenings and during weekends, and lead to the teacher certification.

In-service training is essentially based on demand. The schools have their own means to develop an in-service training policy which is in accordance with the local requirements and the needs of educational staff. The umbrella organizations can organize in-service training of education advisors, members of staff of PMS Centres and boarding schools, as well as in-service training initiatives related to their own educational projects. The government organizes in-service training which meets the policy priorities and those demands which are not met by the free market. In recent year, a considerable amount of funds has been invested in further education programmes for the optimal use of ICT.

The teaching time is the total number of hours (sixty minutes long) which a teacher on a full-time appointment is obliged to spend teaching during the school year, according to official education policy, although it does not include the time devoted to other activities, such as lesson preparation, in-service training, staff meetings, etc. Minimum and maximum teaching times are prescribed. In elementary education, nursery teachers and teachers have to teach a minimum of twenty-four and a maximum of twenty-eight lessons (fifty minutes long) per week in a full-time position. Including all the additional educational tasks (including supervision), the weekly number of hours may comprise a maximum of twenty-six hours (sixty minutes long). These hours must coincide with the period of the normal presence of pupils. In secondary education the official working week comprises 38.5 hours; the teaching time depends on the stage and type of subject, and ranges from a minimum of twenty to a maximum of twenty-nine lessons (fifty minutes long) per week in a full-time position.

The status of staff in Community education is determined in the Decree of 21 March 1991, relating to the legal position of particular staff members in Community education. The status of staff in subsidized education was laid down in the Decree of 21 March 1991 relating to the legal position of some staff members in subsidized education and in the subsidized Psychological, Medical, and Social Guidance Centres. These two Decrees deal with the recruitment, promotion, permanent appointment, rights and obligations, sanctions, etc., of teaching staff.

Since 1974, relations between the organizing powers and staff in Community education and subsidized official education have been regulated by the union agreement for government personnel. This agreement provides unions with broad powers of participation regarding the measures which concern both the status and the working conditions in general of the personnel. It also recognizes the different possibilities of specific action for the union. The Decree of 5 April 1995 introduced a



specific arrangement in subsidized private education. It provides for the establishment of participation structures at a local level, and at an umbrella level for the whole sector. In principle, there is one local negotiating committee (LOC) per school. The LOC is composed of an equal number of representatives of the school's management and staff, and negotiates on most matters of concern to the staff.

The different educational networks have their own educational advice departments. These education advisors are responsible for the supervision of schools and members of staff. Their task is to provide teachers (and the school in general) with educational and methodological support. The number of education advisors is calculated on the basis of the number of staff members for every level of education and for every network (organic posts). The government pays their salaries and covers operational costs.

Educational research and information

The priority research themes are determined every year by the Minister of Education and Training of the Government of Flanders and following the advice of the Flemish Education Council. The universities are then informed of these themes with a request for proposals. Colleges and community schools can also submit proposals, but must cooperate with a university research institute.

The research proposals which have been submitted are assessed on the basis of two sorts of criteria: their relevance to policy and their scientific value. The projects which score highest on these two criteria are submitted to the government for approval. A monitoring group (consisting of scientific experts, those who are responsible for policy, educators, as well as the researchers who are working on the project concerned) closely monitors every project and ensures that the project is adjusted, if necessary. The draft final report is also discussed in the monitoring group and is assessed before being submitted to the Minister.

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EURYBASE, the information database on education systems in Europe: <http://www.eurydice.org/> [In several languages.]

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>