



Belgium - Flemish Community

Education for All 2015 National Review

This report was prepared by the relevant national authorities in view of the World Education Forum (Incheon, Republic of Korea, 19-22 May 2015). It was submitted in response to UNESCO's invitation to its Member States to assess progress made since 2000 towards achieving Education for All (EFA).

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not commit UNESCO. The designations employed and the presentation of material do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

The paper can be cited with the following reference: "Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Belgium - Flemish Community". For further information, please contact: efa2015reviews@unesco.org

EDUCATION FOR ALL EVALUATION REPORT

BELGIUM – FLEMISH COMMUNITY

Contact person: Marie-Anne Persoons, Policy Advisor, Flemish Department of Education and Training, e-mail: marie-anne.persoons@ond.vlaanderen.be

1 – INTRODUCTION

In the Federal State of Belgium, there are three autonomous national education systems due to the devolution of most competences for education from the central governmental level to the three linguistic Communities of Belgium:

- (1) the Flemish Community for education provided in the Flemish Region and Brussels Capital Region with Dutch as main instruction language;
- (2) the French Community for education provided in the Walloon Region and Brussels Capital Region with French as main instruction language; and
- (3) the German-speaking Community for education provided in part of the Walloon Region with German as main instruction language.

The current reporting addresses the development and outlook for the education system of the Flemish Community of Belgium only.

2 – CHALLENGES IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF 2015: INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION, FINANCIAL CRISIS, AGEING POPULATION AND GROWING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

1.1 The economic and social context

(A) General trends

In view of informing the incoming Flemish Government after the Parliamentary elections of 25 May 2014 the Flemish administration prepared its own contribution¹ in which the main challenges for the coming 5 year administration period (2014-2019) were identified. For the field of education the following socio-economic trends are of particular relevance:

(1) Globalisation and new upcoming economies

According to estimations by the European Commission the volume of world trade will double in 2025 in comparison with 2005. In this process Asia and other upcoming economies will reinforce their position. This implies that the Flemish export needs a gradual redirection from EU-15 countries towards the new economies.

However, in comparison with the EU15 countries the Flemish Region is specialised in “easy to copy” and “research-intensive goods” (chemical and pharmaceutical products). Moreover it has assets in labour-intensive goods such as diamond, synthetic fibre products) and in “capital intensive products” (vehicles).

Flanders has logistic advantages due to its central location which also opens perspectives for its sea-harbours.

In competition with the upcoming economies Flanders risks to loose field as possible export partner or as provider of products and services. It should therefore concentrate on products and services which are more difficult to imitate and on services with high added value.

Finally it should be noted that the dependence of Flanders of the import of energy and raw materials remains an important challenge.

(2) Moderate economic growth

Predictions for economic growth are moderate: 1.5 % for the period 2011-2020. The tertiary sector remains the largest sector in gross added value and will continue to gain in importance. In the context of the labour market the tertiary and the social profit sector show an increasing trend.

Flanders has an economy which is mainly based on the tertiary sector but still offers opportunities to industry to grow, especially with SMEs focussing on low-scale and tailor-made production. Logistics assets can be called on in attracting businesses specialised in value added logistics.

¹ *Bijdrage van de Vlaamse administratie aan het regeerprogramma van de Vlaamse Regering 2014-2019*, Brussel: Vlaamse overheid, 2014.

<http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/overheid/verkiezingen/bijdrage-van-de-vlaamse-administratie-aan-het-regeerakkoord-van-de-vlaamse-regering>

The real growth of the gross domestic product of the Flemish Region is less sustainable due to the financial-economic crisis. This implies that Flanders faces the difficulty to maintain its competitive advantage in productivity in comparison with other Belgian Regions and neighbouring countries.

Compared to European standards the efforts in the field of R&D in Flanders are relatively strong but they tend to be concentrated in larger companies and in a limited sectors which are subject to rapid changes. The valorisation into market products of research activity and capacity is still insufficient, as is testified by the low rates of applications for patents and for export of high tech products. Flanders often shows lack of entrepreneurship to integrate innovative research outcomes in processes and products which create added value and employment.

(3) Overall wealthy region but fight against poverty remains a challenge

Flanders is a wealthy region but faces huge challenges for the preservation of the social welfare system in terms of R&D, ageing population, environment and general economic prospects. Poverty rates are relatively low but nevertheless affects 10 to 15 % of the population. Despite of the relative overall increase of wealth in the last decades the risk of poverty did not decrease accordingly. This is less the case for elderly people than for the part of the population with low educational attainment levels, disabilities and/or of foreign origin.

(B) Impact on educational policies²

(1) Crucial importance of continuous investment in education in order to face the challenges of the economic crisis

The challenge for Flanders is smart, strategic and effective investment keeping in mind that effective investment yield high return on other domains such as social welfare spendings, unemployment, criminality, health sector. Moreover, maintaining a focus on educational outcomes, rather than just attainment can yield long-run positive economic effect, as was demonstrated by education economists such as Hanushek & Woessmann³, who estimated the effect of educational achievement – as measured by international student achievement tests – on economic growth to simulate the impact of improved educational achievement for individual EU countries and the EU as a whole.

(2) Persistent lack of workforce for certain professions

On the basis of the prognosis of the Flemish Public Employment Office 21.7 % of the vacancies remained open for more than 90 days. Engineering jobs represent more than 50 % of jobs that traditionally remain open for a longer time but in view of the demographic evolution and in particular an ageing population, the pressure on jobs related to care and healthcare increases rapidly.

²The following challenges were identified in the (unpublished) contribution of the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training to the new Flemish Administration 2014-2019 : *Bijdrage Regeerakkoord. Beleidsdomein Onderwijs en Vorming. Ambtelijke bijdrage voor de legislatuur 2014-201, May 2014.*

³Eric A. HANUSHEK & Ludger WOESSMANN, *The Cost of Low Educational Achievement in the European Union. Analytical Report no. 7 for the European Commission prepared by the European Expert Network on Economics of Education*, Brussels/Luxembourg: European Commission DG EAC, November 2010.

Moreover, as stated under paragraph A2, entrepreneurship in Flanders is relatively weak. According to the 2012 survey of the Eurobarometer⁴ only 30 % of the Belgians would opt for self-employment while the average percentage for EU-27 is 37 %.

- (3) Growing polarisation of job structure and suppression of work force with shorter schooling on the job market.

According to estimations of CEDEFOP Belgium will be one of the 8 EU countries where more than 50 % of the working population will be employed in the tertiary sector. CEDEFOP expects a growing polarisation in the job structure since the professional groups where the highest growth is expected are situated at both extremes of the spectrum, i.e. jobs for which high educational levels are required and jobs for low-educated work force.

For Flanders by 2020 the offer of work force with high educational skills will have evolved faster than the demand, which entails the risk of over-schooling and suppression of people with lower education attainment levels on the labour market.

In order to address this problem, several measures are necessary, also in the field of education and training, such as establishing learning trajectories for low-skilled people to obtain professional qualifications as well as integrated policies to reduce early school leaving.

- (4) Lifelong employability requires broad skills for everyone

In comparison with other EU countries (48.9 % for EU27 and 50.9 % for EU15), with 40.5 % the Flemish Region shows low employment rates for work force aged 55-64.

In the perspective of growing lack of work force it is important for Flemish educational policies to focus on lifelong employability in a broad range of functions. This implies that those VET programmes that typically prepare for a specific job on the labour market should reorient their curricula in order to integrate broader, generic skills which make graduates less vulnerable on a changing labour market.

- (5) Teaching profession under pressure in a society with high educational attainment levels of the population.

The teaching profession in Flanders faces qualitative as well as a quantitative challenges.

On the one hand the gap in education level between the average teacher and the rest of the population is closing rapidly. Moreover it can be observed that most teachers have a bachelor qualification⁵, while the share of population with master degrees is increasing.

From the quantitative side, the ageing of the teaching staff in Flanders combined with a fairly high early drop-out⁶ of young teachers from the profession is problematic.

⁴ *Flash Eurobarometer 354*, June 2012.

⁵ This situation is connected with the organisation of teacher training and the requirements for access to the teaching profession. A bachelor degree in initial teacher training is the typical qualification for teachers in pre-primary, primary; lower secondary and part of upper secondary education. Master degrees combined with specific teacher training certificates are only required for teaching in part of the programmes in upper secondary education.

⁶ About 20% of those who start teaching leave the teaching profession within their first five years of service: 12% in pre-primary education, 14% in primary education and 22% in secondary education.

According to prognosis of the Flemish administration in the period 2012-2022⁷, 27.036 vacancies will have to be met for primary schools, 32.600 for secondary education. According to the most recent trends, a shortage of 9.000 teachers in primary and 8.000 teachers in secondary is to be expected.

Research on performance of students in Flemish schools demonstrated that educational achievement is highly influenced by the teachers⁸. Therefore it is of utmost importance to guarantee continuous attraction of sufficient and well-qualified teachers in the profession.

1.2 Demographic developments

(A) General trends

According to the analysis in the contribution of the Flemish administration to the incoming Flemish Government, the Flemish Region faces particular challenges in terms of demography⁹.

(1) Ageing and longer and better life expectancy

Ageing of the population is a constant trend. By 2030 a quarter of the population in the Flemish Region will be over 65 years old (currently 18 %) and 6 % older than 80 (currently 5 %).

The positive side of the story is that life expectation is increasing, alongside with the number of years of living in good health and without physical problems. Elderly people will be able to remain active in many domains and will be able to live independently of care by other people. This category adds to the increasing group of people living on their own and in smaller families. Elderly people become an increasingly important group of consumers of goods and services. They have stronger financial assets than the previous generations due to the fact that they had higher education attainment levels, longer professional careers and often acquired the property of their own home. This group of the population is eager to participate actively in society. Solidarity between generations remains high, especially from the older group to the younger.

The ageing of the population also presents important challenges, such as an increasing demand for care also in view of the rapid growth of the number of people above the age of 80. This presents the education system with the particular challenge to provide sufficient education and training opportunities in care and healthcare programmes.

Since the proportion of elderly people increases rapidly in comparison to the younger, economically active, population which stagnates in numbers, the ageing of population becomes the most important budgetary threat to the preservation of the Flemish welfare system after the financial crisis (see § 3 below).

For the same demographic reason Flanders risks to be affected by 2020 by a lack of labour force in order to realise its economic growth. Even in the current situation it can already be noticed

⁷ Patrick POELMANS. *De vraag naar leerkrachten nu en in 2020. Kwantitatieve verkenning van de toekomstige personeelsbehoeften in het basisonderwijs en het secundair onderwijs*, in: *Hoogste tijd voor capaciteit! Een strategische verkenning voor onderwijscapaciteit*, Brussel: Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, 2010.

⁸ K. BELLENS, G. VAN LANDEGHEM & B. DE FRAINE, *Review naar indicatoren voor het maximaliseren van leerprestaties, welbevinden en leerwinst*, Leuven: Centrum voor Onderwijseffectiviteit, 2012.

⁹ *Bijdrage van de Vlaamse administratie aan het regeerprogramma van de Vlaamse Regering 2014-201: Algemene omgevingsanalyse voor Vlaanderen*, Brussel: Vlaamse overheid, 2014, pp. 6-39.

that retirements from the labour market are not fully compensated by the influx of younger work force.

Finally it can be observed that the ageing of the population and the workforce in particular calls for an increase of up- and re-skilling provision in a lifelong learning perspective.

(2) Diversity

In a context of globalisation and international migration the Flemish population becomes increasingly ethnically and culturally diverse. The Flemish Region currently counts 7.1% residents with non-Belgian nationality and in 2012 17.5% of the population could be categorized as of foreign origin (one of the parents born with a foreign nationality).

Immigration waves remain steady but – according to prognosis by the Belgian Federal Planning Bureau - will evolve at a slower pace by 2030.

Foreign residents and citizens with foreign origin tend to concentrate in the larger cities and their immediate surroundings. In the particular case of Brussels, the presence of international institutions further enhances the attractiveness of the city to foreign residents. In contrast, there is a tendency with citizens of Belgian origin to move outside the urban agglomerations towards the greener outskirts. Therefore, in comparison with the rest of the country, larger cities show a more diverse population, which is characterized by a more rapid growth and a higher proportion of young people. This situation explains the current increase of demand of available places in school education in larger cities and the pressure on the school infrastructure capacity in those urban areas. It will also have a direct impact on the operational budget for schools due to a necessary increase of ear-marked funding based on socio-economic characteristics of students enrolled in compulsory education. Also a larger demand for support provision for recently arrived immigrants in Flemish schools and Dutch language courses for adult non-native speakers is to be expected in short and mid-term perspective.

(3) Demography and macro-economic variables

Increasing the wealth of the population is an important policy goal for the Flemish Government. In the future the age structure of the population will change dramatically. This will inevitably have an impact on the total GDP, the GDP per inhabitant of the Flemish Region and the whole range of macro-economic variables of Flanders.

The Study Service of the Flemish Government published a survey on the evolution of the GDP and GDP per inhabitant of the Flemish Region with a time horizon until 2060¹⁰.

Until the reference year 2014 the survey builds on mid-term estimations calculated by the Belgian Regions in collaboration with the Federal Planning Bureau. From 2014 onwards the prognosis is based on the survey's own simulations, which in essence confront labour demand variables (employment opportunities) and labour supply variables (demography).

For the evolution of the employment rate (total employment of the population between age 15-64) the survey presents estimations on the basis of three different scenarios:

1. Constant level based on the last calculated reference year 2014

¹⁰ Thierry VERGEYNST, *Impact van veranderingen in de bevolkingsstructuur op de welvaart in de Belgische Gewesten (SVR 2010/2)*, Brussel: Studiedienst van de Vlaamse Regering, 2010.

2. Continuation of the increasing tendency between 2010-2014 at half the pace of increase
3. Complete continuation of the increasing tendency between 2010-2014 at the same pace of increase

From the supply side, the most important observation is that the share of population at the age of professional activity will continuously decrease in future. This has an impact on the amount of available work force. In the scenarios 2 and 3, which foresee an increase of employment opportunities, this situation will be a hampering factor eventually causing overall decrease in employment rate. Under the constant employment rate scenario 1 this negative side effect will not occur but another problem is to come up: the unemployment figures will remain relatively high (up to 10-11 % by 2020). It should be observed that the latter scenario is a rather pessimistic one, since the last 25 year employment rates in Flanders showed a continuous increase.

However, in all 3 scenarios the GDP will continue to grow, although at a slower pace than in the period 2000-2007. The financial-economic crisis has indeed an negative impact on the Flemish macro-economic variables but in the long run, it will be the unfavourable demographic evolution and the shortages in available work force that will be the main challenge for Flanders' employment rate and economic growth.

In all scenarios the Brussels Region will remain to be confronted with permanent high unemployment rates but the GDP per inhabitant will remain the highest of all Belgian Regions.

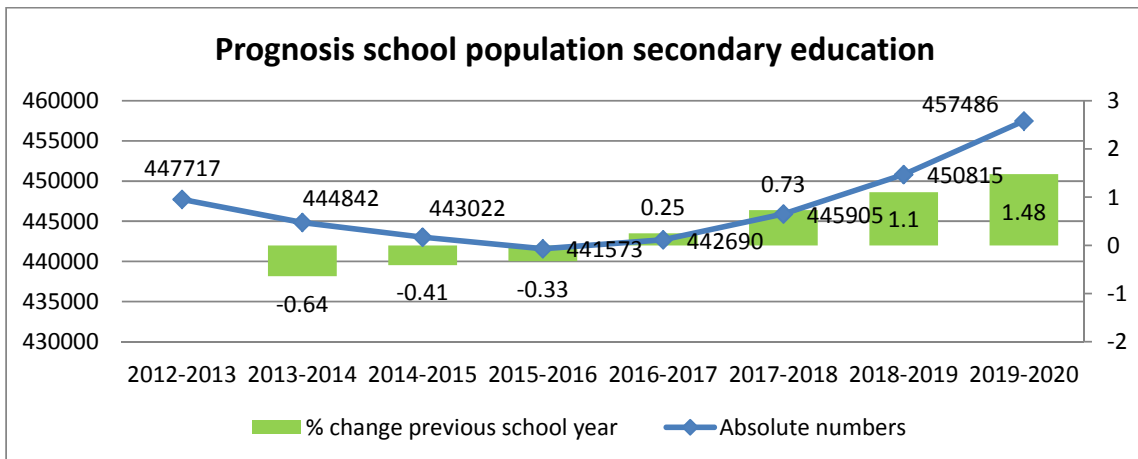
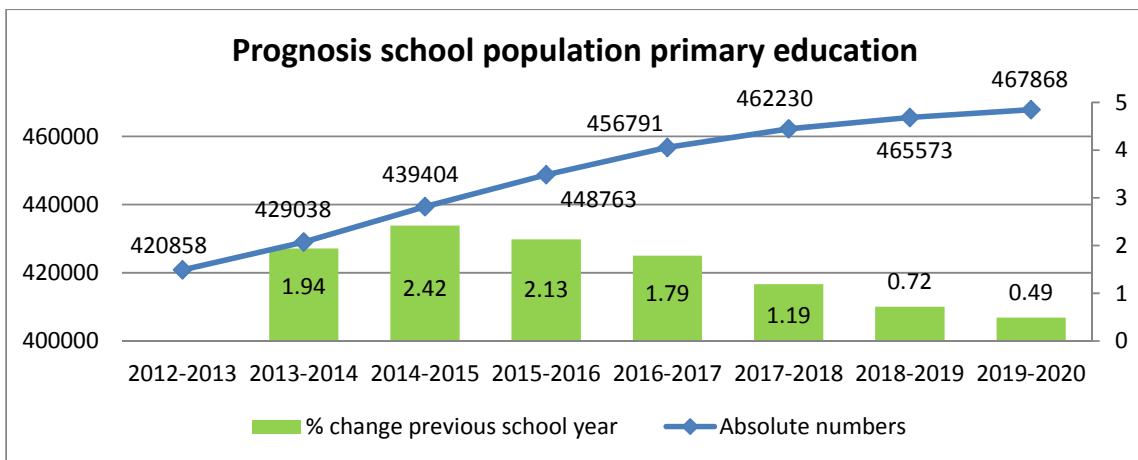
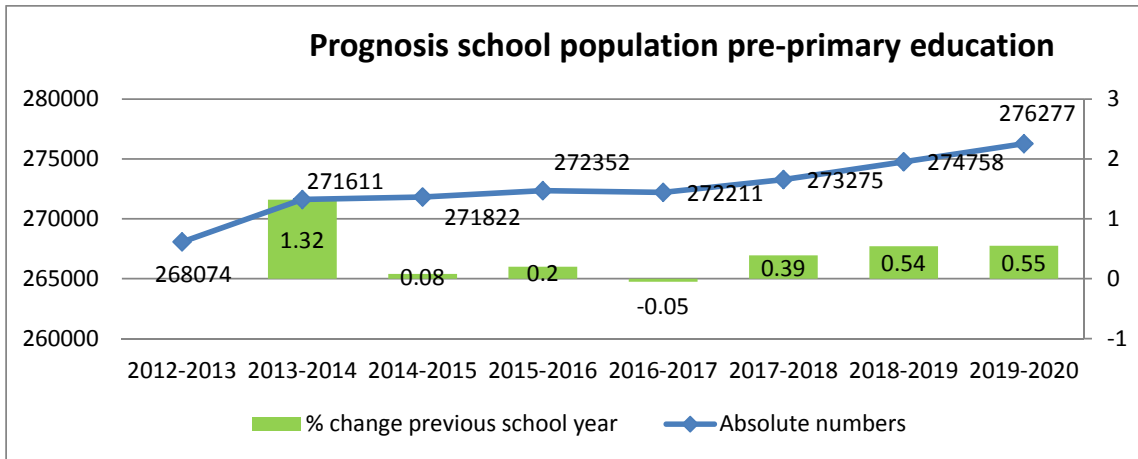
In conclusion it can be reiterated that economic growth is coupled with the evolution of the employment rate. According to the lowest estimations with a stagnation of the employment rate between 2012 and 2020, the unemployment rate in Flanders would evolve at 10-11 % of the potentially active population. Increase of the employment rates is necessary in order to realise a substantial decrease of the unemployment rate toward 3 % by 2030.

(B) Implications for educational planning

For a clear picture of the impact of the changes in composition of the population in the coming years on i.a. the necessary capacity in the different schools and educational levels and strands the Ministry of Education and Training made prognoses on the future school population. These prognoses build on the prognoses on the population as a whole but also integrates characteristics of educational careers such as transition through education levels by students.

(1) School education

If we compare the school year 2020-2021 with the observations on 2012-2013, an increase of students in pre-primary, primary and secondary education is to be expected. For pre-primary and primary a continuous growth is expected during the whole decade. In secondary education a decrease is expected until the school year 2017-2018 after which student numbers will increase again.



Although there is an overall growth in student numbers in Flanders, it should be observed that not all municipalities and regions will be confronted with demographic pressure on school infrastructure on their territory. The increase is concentrated mainly in specific municipalities and in the larger cities. Therefore, monitoring of school capacity should take due account of the local

context and also involve the local level. The challenge for educational policies is to provide sufficient capacity while safeguarding the constitutionally defined freedom of school choice for students and their parents.

(2) Higher and adult education

On the basis of prognoses of the population as a whole in the Flemish Region there will be a light decrease in absolute numbers of 18-24-year-olds, the typical age of participation in higher education. In the Brussels Capital Region there will be, on the contrary, a light increase.

Nevertheless there is no indication that student numbers in universities and university colleges will show a decreasing trend. There is still room for growth in the participation rate of 18-24-year-olds and for mature students over 25. We should also take into account international mobility with inbound mobility leading to an increase of foreign students and outbound mobility increasing the number of Flemish students opting to study abroad. In the academic year 2011-2012, 5 % of the student population that took a degree enrolment completed their previous studies outside Belgium. In 2012-2013 this number increased to 6.3 %. Provisional figures for 2013-2014 show a further moderate increase.

Flemish higher education can therefore not only expect a larger student population but also a growing diversity in student profiles (foreign students, students combining studies with professional activities...). This poses challenges to the higher education institutions in terms of capacity, flexibility and adaptation to new demands.

Also the demand for educational provision for adults will increase. The training needs of this group are moreover very diverse. Part of the learners wishes to raise their functional literacy levels, others will search for specialised professional training. It is the key mission of the Flemish education and training system to provide opportunities to all citizens to acquire basic competences that allow them to fully participate in all domains of society. A wide spectrum of training programmes is needed with a focus on broad employability as well as allowing adults to remain in touch with societal trends. The increase in demand will urge educational providers for adults, which encompasses also part-time art education, higher education and formal adult education to anticipate in terms of diversification of offer as well as enhancing capacity.

3 – EVALUATION OF PROGRESS TOWARDS THE EFA GOALS

3.0. General observations

3.0.1. Cost-free education in pre-primary, primary and secondary education

All schools of the different educational networks (Community schools, grant-aided public schools, grant-aided private schools) at pre-primary, primary and secondary level provide free education. No tuition fees are charged for enrolment in Flemish schools.

Any costs which are passed on for services such as meals, drinks, supervision must always be in proportion to the services rendered.

1. System of maximum charge for extra costs in elementary education (pre-primary and primary)

For **elementary education** a **maximum charge** applies, and there is also **an official list** of materials which are indispensable to attain the final objectives or pursue the developmental objectives which have been published, which means that schools have to provide children with these materials (such as copybooks, folders, school diaries, school books) free of charge¹¹.

A 'strict' **maximum charge** applies for all other expenses in elementary education (journals used in class, plays, sport activities, one-day out-of-school activities...). For the school year 2014-2015, this is 25 euro per child for 2-3-year-olds, 35 euro for 4-year-olds, 40 euro for 5-year-olds and children of compulsory school age in pre-primary education and 70 euro per pupil in primary education.

For trips of more than one day (extramural activities) for the school year 2014-2015, a less stringent maximum charge applies of 410 euro per pupil throughout the child's entire primary-school career. Schools have considerable autonomy with regard to extramural activities. However, these must be consistent with the school's pedagogical project, be supported by the school's entire community of parents and teachers, and must be announced in good time to the parents, who are free to decide whether their child will participate in the extramural activity lasting a complete day or more. The activities must also be the subject both of thorough preparation and of subsequent evaluation.

The effect of the introduction in 2008 of the maximum charge for elementary education was investigated by the Research Centre on Study and School Careers (SSL), which published its report in 2011¹².

2. Secondary education

¹¹ See Circular letter BaO/2007/05 on Cost management in primary education & Circular BaO/2001/13 on Extramural activities

¹² H. DE VOS, G. VAN LANDEGHEM, T. VEYT & J. VAN DAMME, *De maximumfacturen in het basisonderwijs. Gesprekken met directies en verbanden met schoolkenmerken. SSL/OD1/2011.40*, Leuven: Steunpunt 'Studie- en Schoolloopbanen'(SSL), 2011.

In secondary education there is no maximum charge system but the guiding principle¹³ is that schools are legally bound to adopt cost-control

For an overview of the regulations in this area, the Flemish Ministry provides a specific webpage: *Wetwijijs: kosten(beheering)*. Link:
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/wetwijijs/thema.aspx?id=180&fid=>

For an overview of the regulations in this area, see: [Wetwijijs: kosten\(beheersing\)](#)

3.0.2. Compulsory education from 6 to 18 years

In all Belgian education systems, compulsory education starts at the age of 6 to 18 years. The last two years (16-18) it is also allowed to follow part-time education at school combined with professional training with an employer (dual system). In any case full-time learning commitment is required.

3.0.3. Equal educational opportunities policy and funding mechanisms for elementary (= pre-primary and primary) education and secondary education

In order to help schools to implement inclusive policies towards students with disadvantaged backgrounds, the funding system of schools takes into account the socio-economic features of schools and students. These features are expressed in indicators for which a higher score entitles schools to a higher funding rate.

Since school year 2008-2009 a new funding mechanism for elementary and secondary schools has been set up.

The main change in comparison with the previous situation is that the funding principles apply to all schools regardless of the school network (Community education, grant-aided public education, grant-aided private education), while in the previous period each educational network had its own funding mechanism.

The new funding mechanism was designed to reach equitable treatment of all schools taking into account objective differences among schools and students justifying a higher amount of funding due to the obstacles and challenges certain school characteristics and pupil characteristics entail.

In order to realise the new funding system the operational budget was structurally increased with 85,235 mio for elementary education and 40 mio for secondary education.

1. Principles for distribution of operational budget: from school characteristics to pupil characteristics

The distribution of the resources for elementary and secondary education across the educational networks of community education, grant-aided public education and grant-aided private education has featured on the political agenda for decades. Partly also due to a favourable economic climate - making more operational resources available for education - the Parliamentary Act of 4 July 2008 took shape. *It introduced a new financing model which funds all schools in the same way with due regard for two objective differences, i.e. the guarantee of freedom of choice - a constitutional obligation*

¹³ Circular letter SE 78

within community education - and the onus on all schools organised by public authorities to offer various philosophy-of-life courses.

The financing model applies to the division of the operation resources, not the means for staff nor for investments in infrastructure.

Under the new financing system, part of the operational resources education budget will first of all be used to fund the objective differences between the schools. Subsequently, and only in case of regular elementary education and secondary education another part will be distributed on the basis of socio-economic pupil characteristics. Special education follows different rules in this respect and divides the remaining part of the budget equally over the students according to the type of special education they attend.

One of the pre-set budgets for operating resources on the basis of pupil characteristics

Part of the budget is subsequently distributed on the basis 4 pupil characteristics for which 4 social indicators that have a noticeable impact on student's school careers have been fixed as is shown in the table below:

Student characteristic	Indicator	Explanation
Cultural background of pupil	Education attainment level of the mother	This indicator relates to the whole array of knowledge, skills and attitudes. It is an indicator that gives an indication on the affinity between home culture and school culture
Financial capacity of the student's family	Entitlement for study grant	Study grants are distributed on means-tested basis (reserved for students from families with lower general income)
Linguistic and cultural capital of the student	Language spoken at home	Which language is used at home? Is it different from the instruction language? This is an indicator of communication and learning skills of the student
Social capital of the pupil	Place of residence of the student	Sociological characteristics of the neighbourhood in which the student lives

- In elementary education the share of the pre-set budget based on pupil characteristics amounts to 14%. Starting from the budgetary year 2012 (= operational resources school year 2011 - 2012) it increases with 0.1875% per year up until 2019 when it will amount to 15,5%.
- In secondary education the 2008-2009 share amounted to 10% and will be gradually increased to 11% in 2019.
- The part of the budget earmarked for distribution on the basis of pupil characteristics is divided in four equal parts across the four pupil indicators in elementary education (25% each), and in secondary education in the proportions

30% - 30% - 30% - 10% (this last for the living environment indicator). The amount per indicator is calculated by dividing the budget by the number of pupils meeting the indicator, with 4 different lump sums as a result.

3.1. Early childhood education

With cost-free pre-primary education from age 2.5 years to 6 and the guarantee that each child on Belgian territory has the right to access to pre-primary provision, regardless of their nationality or legal status, participation in pre-primary is close to 100 %.

No tuitions is paid. For the extra costs schools have to observe a maximum charge (see above).

Nevertheless, pre-primary is not (yet) part of compulsory education which start at age 6 until age 18. In a context of sound preparation of children from all social background, including disadvantaged groups and newly arrived immigrants which don't speak the language of instruction at home, **regular attendance** of the children to the pre-primary classes are of utmost importance.

The Flemish Ministry in cooperation with the schools takes several measures to raise the awareness of parents of the importance of pre-primary education.

There are also financial incentives for regular attendance to pre-primary education for families with lower incomes. They are entitled to a special study grants but only under the condition that the child attends school for a minimum number of days per school year according to its age.

- 150 half days for children until the year it will become 3 years old
- 185 half days for children in the year of their 4th birthday
- 220 half days for children in the year of their 5th birthday

3.2. Primary education

Primary education is cost-free and access is a constitutional right for each child on Belgian territory regardless of its nationality or legal status.

Funding system taking into account the socio-economic profile of schools and students: see information under 3.0.3.

3.3. Meeting the educational needs of young people and adults

Several measures can be mentioned:

3.3.1 Action plan on early school leaving

in Flanders the number of young people which leaves school prematurely, i.e. reaching age of 18 (end of compulsory education) without obtaining the secondary qualification remains substantive. In order to address this problem a new and comprehensive strategy has been drawn

up which must counter the phenomenon. This exercise resulted in an action plan on early school leaving. The objective of the plan is to reduce early school leaving to 5,2% by 2020.

The elaboration of the plan is based on the European frame of reference. Reducing the number of unqualified school leavers requires at first a preventive approach, followed by interventions when a pupil threatens to leave compulsory education, supplemented by compensating actions for young people who left school without a qualification. Moreover, the action plan contains measures on monitoring, analysis/identification and the coordination of the policy.

On 27 September 2013 the Flemish Government took note of the action plan. The anticipated timing to realise the various actions included in the plan differs and depends on the action in question which is put forward.

3.3.2. Action plan ‘Truancy and other Forms of Limit-crossing Behaviour’

In 2006 an action plan entitled ‘tackling truancy’ was presented to the Flemish Parliament. In the years which followed the plan was implemented, but in 2009 some issues remained to be addressed. Therefore the current government decided to focus on truancy and in March 2012, after an evaluation of the previous program, an action plan entitled ‘Truancy and other Forms of Limit-crossing Behaviour’ was presented by the Flemish Minister of Education and Training.

The new plan contains actions which can be categorized in six topics, situated on a continuum of mapping the phenomenon, informing and sensitizing, prevention, guidance, and sanctioning. The focus of the action plan was broadened to include limit-crossing behaviour in school in general - of which truancy is but one form – because the different forms of limit-crossing behaviour often have the same origin and can be tackled in the same way and in cooperation with the same partners.

The action plan on truancy addresses directed all pupils in compulsory education. In addition, it focuses on specific target groups who are at risk of early school leaving, or who are in need of a different approach. Specific target groups are pupils in home teaching, pupils in voluntary or non-voluntary care, teenage mothers, pupils in compulsory education in Brussels, travellers, and pupils with a Middle or Eastern European background.

Various partners are involved in the implementation of the action plan, including actors from the policy domain of Youth, Public Centres for Social Welfare, cities and communities. These actors contribute by sharing their expertise and supporting the communication and dissemination of information towards youngsters on the topic of limit-crossing behaviour in schools.

In the framework of the Action Plan on Truancy a scientific research project was set up in March 2012 to examine the profile of truants and the influence of schools and environments on the problem of truancy. With a view to collecting good practices from abroad a one week study visit on ‘an approach to limit-crossing behaviour in schools’ was organized in November 2012. The [group report](#), written by the participants of the study visit, was published on the Cedefop website:.

http://studyvisits.cedefop.europa.eu/assets/upload/documentation/SV_Group_reports/92_BE_GroupReport_Nov12.pdf

Other actions in the Action Plan include the development of specific material for the medical sector, the mapping of the use of municipal administrative sanctions in the case of truancy, and the evaluation of the existing provision of school replacing educational programmes.

In addition, initiatives were set up to reach out to specific target groups. Options to limit early school leaving by teenage mothers were examined a. o. by organising focus groups with experts on the topic. A legislative initiative was prepared which provides for a clear framework, maternity leave and the right to temporary home teaching. With regard to school absence prior to school holidays measures have been taken for both schools (providing day care, avoiding an early start of deliberation days) and parents and pupils (absence in the week preceding a school holiday and the week following a school holiday is only possible with a medical certificate). Specifically with regard to youngsters in voluntary or compulsory care cooperation between community institutions and federal detention centres was facilitated by liaison officers. This cooperation has been structurally anchored in a declaration of commitment.

The implementation of various actions from the plan started as early as 2012. The entire plan will be implemented by mid-2014, after which the action plan will be evaluated.

3.3.3. Project ‘Innovating and Excelling in Education’

Regardless of the many efforts by both the government and local actors to establish a social mix, schools with a disproportionate number of ethnic minority pupils still exist in Flanders. Especially in primary schools which are located in a neighbourhood with a specific demographic and socio-economic profile a social mix is hard to realise. Regardless of additional means and staffing the quality of education in these schools is subjected to great pressure, because children often start here with a leeway. In order to guarantee excellent quality of education in these schools the project ‘Innovating and Excelling in Education’ (PIEO) took off in September 2012.

‘Innovating and Excelling in Education’ is a project by order of the Flemish Minister of Education and Training and under the guidance of the King Baudouin Foundation. The project looks for ways to realise maximum learning gains, educational achievements and well-being for all pupils in predominately black schools. To this aim (educational) innovations are set up in a couple of schools for a period of five subsequent years (2012-2017). The pilot project takes place in four cities/regions: Ghent, Brussels, Antwerp and the mining area in Limburg. 13 primary schools take actively part in the project.

Taken into account the fact that additional means and staffing alone are not enough, the pilot project looks for new ways to offer education in schools with a disproportionate number of ethnic minority pupils. In order to realise this the government does not impose 13 identical innovation pathways, but expects the schools to work on at least three levels: the level of the child (*enabling*), the level of the learning environment (*instruction*) and the level of the school (*management*). Sufficient leeway is given to the school for adapting the project to the local needs after consultation with local governments, school advisory services and the PIEO project team.

The day-to-day management of the project is executed by a team of eight innovation coaches and one process manager. A team of experts from the world of educational research and innovation management supports the schools and the coaches during the entire process. To conclude a task force with representatives from all parties involved steers the project.

The project 'Innovating and Excelling in Education' is scientifically supported and monitored. An important additional objective is the transfer of the gained expertise and insights to the entire Flemish educational field. In order to reach this aim an expansion towards other schools and a maximum involvement of the most important educational stakeholders is needed. An example is the transfer of the expertise on guidance to a. o. the regular school advisory services.

For the pilot project financing of 688.000€ was provided for the period November 2012 – August 2013. The budget for the school year 2013-2014 amounts to 837.000€.

3.3.4. Media literacy

On 4 May 2012 the Flemish government approved a Concept Note on Media Literacy. Its strategic objective is to promote digital skills and competence development with regard to digital media. With the concept note the government aims to reach four objectives: (1) streamlining and gearing of the policy on media literacy, (2) promoting competence development with regard to media literacy, (3) creating equal opportunities from an e-inclusive approach and (4) creating a safe and responsible media environment. In order to realise these aims the concept note contains an action plan with about 40 concrete actions which represent a budget of over seven million euro.

In 2013 and 2014 the focus lies on the further implementation of the actions in the concept note on media literacy. In this regard a pilot project on media literacy has been set up to enhance strategic competences in media literacy and digital media. The aim of the pilot project is to collect input to adapt the curriculum on media education in primary schools.

Also in 2013 a frame of reference was developed to clarify what media literacy is and how we can incorporate it in pre-primary and compulsory education. For the general public a competence profile on media literacy was elaborated and a publication entitled 'What is media literacy'. In addition, a new enquiry of the ICT-monitor was delivered in 2013, which contains data on the ICT-infrastructure of schools, on the effective integration of ICT and on the competences of teachers and pupils. Also in 2013 actions were undertaken to improve the professionalization of teachers in using ICT and digital media.

In the future further actions and initiatives will be elaborated on the safe use of ICT, online privacy, competence development and reducing the digital gap.

3.3.5. Broadening access of underrepresented groups to higher education

The parliamentary act on the financing of the functioning of university colleges and research universities in Flanders from March 2008 provides for a fund to stimulate access of underrepresented groups to higher education. University colleges and universities can apply these

resources to encourage equal opportunities and diversity in their institutions, and more specifically to take measures which promote the intake and transfer of students from communities which are underrepresented in higher education. From the fiscal year 2008 onwards these funds have been divided in proportion to the size of the institute.

Education Decree XXIV, which was approved by the Flemish Parliament in April 2014, provides for a thorough reform of the fund. In cooperation with the institutes of higher education strategic objectives have been set during the academic year 2013-2014. In addition, concrete aims have been established with regard to the intake, transfer and number of school-leavers from underrepresented groups. These aims will be incorporated in the management agreements, as will be the way in which they will be measured and financed. The model for the allocation of the available resources will gradually change to a distribution based on the results obtained by the institutes.

3.3.6. Implementation of the concept note on languages at school

In July 2011 the Flemish Government approved the concept note on languages at school of the minister for Education and Training. This note on languages provides for some initiatives on enhancing the knowledge of the Dutch language. A good knowledge of Dutch is crucial for a successful and motivating school career. Other actions in the concept note are aimed at enhancing the knowledge of foreign languages, which is considered a cultural wealth and a precondition for social and economic mobility. In this context children will be offered the opportunity to start learning foreign languages at an earlier age than in the past.

A couple of actions and initiatives from the concept note were incorporated in Education parliamentary act XXIII (adopted on 19 July 2013) and will be put into effect on 1 September 2014.

One of the main factors leading to delays in the school career and to early school leaving is a limited or even absent knowledge of Dutch – the language of instruction in the Flemish Community. For this reason sufficient attention is paid to monitoring the knowledge of Dutch and to adapt the provision of Dutch language training to the needs of the pupil. Schools are expected to perform a wide screening of all children who enter for the first time in regular primary education or in regular secondary education in order to map their proficiency in Dutch. To this aim a “Toolkit Wide Evaluation Competences Dutch” has been developed which, on the principles of broad evaluation, offers a set of valid and reliable instruments to teachers and schools to measure the competences of Dutch. After this evaluation a school can set up a language trajectory tailor-made for each pupil individually. Remediation within regular classes is possible. Primary schools may also choose to organise language immersion classes, which offer intensive training of Dutch. Secondary schools may oblige Dutch classes after school for those pupils who do not master the Dutch language sufficiently to take part in the regular classes.

As concerns the policy on foreign languages schools are able to offer from 1 September 2014 the subject of French from the third year (second stage) of regular primary school (since 2004 the

subject of French is obligatory in the third stage of primary education). Also foreign languages other than French, such as English – as an important world language – or German – as the third official language in Belgium – can be offered as initiation. In addition, from 2014-2015 onwards schools in fulltime and part-time regular secondary education may offer all living languages as the subject ‘modern foreign languages’ within the curriculum.

Education Parliamentary Act XXIII also provides for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). This allows for a former pilot project to be implemented in all interested secondary schools from 1 September 2014 onwards. This means that up to 20% of all non-language subjects, such as geography, mathematics or physical education, may be taught in French, English or German.

The quality of a language policy is determined by the competences, material and staffing of those in front of the classroom. Therefore the language note pays a lot of attention to a rich language environment for teachers. To motivate each school to invest in languages, policy instruments will be developed to support them in the development and implementation of such policy, e.g. a quality charter for inclusive and divers language policy. In addition, agreements have been made with the other communities of Belgium in order to facilitate the exchange of native speakers (teachers).

3.3.Raising levels of adult literacy

New Strategic Plan ‘Raising Literacy’ (2012 – 2016)

The Plan ‘Raising Literacy’ (2005 – 2011) sketched the outlines for a structural literacy policy in Flanders. A wide range of operational objectives and actions were set up in various policy domains which strived for a systematic and structural raising of literacy competences. An evaluation of this plan revealed that various actions contained the building blocks for further policymaking. Since all policy domains involved and various actors within the field of action pleaded to continue with a policy aimed at raising literacy, the Flemish Government approved on 14 December 2012 a new Strategic Plan on ‘Raising Literacy’, which runs from 2012 until 2016.

In order to obtain and keep a valuable place in our knowledge society citizens are in need of competences which allow them to process independently information from texts, documents and numerical data, and to make use of computers and multimedia. Until today too large a share of the Flemish population does not command these necessary basic skills in the field of languages, mathematics and computer use, as a result of which they entail difficulties in their personal or professional life. For this reason raising the level of literacy of the population is the central mission of the new plan for 2012-2016. This mission connects to Pact 2020, which strives to restrict functional illiteracy.

In the context of the new plan on raising literacy suggestions for operational objectives and/or actions were formulated by the policy domains of Education and Training; Work and Social Economy; Culture, Youth, Sports and Media; Welfare, Public Health and Family; and the Flemish

Community Commission, in close cooperation with experts from the field of action or key organisations. In total one mission, four strategic objectives (SO) en 46 operational objectives or actions were formulated.

- SO1: Literacy is raised by a targeted approach in compulsory education and innovation in adult education.
- SO2: Literacy becomes a horizontal focus point in the policy domains Welfare, Culture, Work and Media.
- SO3: Structural partnerships for literacy are being developed.
- SO4: The practices and policy on literacy are further professionalised.

At present the plan continues to be further implemented. Additional policy measures will also be linked to the results of the PIAAC study of the OESO.

3.4. Gender equality

Boys and girls receive equal opportunities in education. Nevertheless statistical data show that boys are more at risk in terms of grade repetition and reaching the end of compulsory schooling without secondary education qualification. They also tend more to follow vocational tracks in secondary education rather than general secondary education programmes which typically prepare for higher education.

There are also more boys in special schools for special educational needs (or learning disabilities).

Girls also make a relatively more smooth transition to higher education and have better completion rates, while at many higher education institutions man are still overrepresented in full professor and university management position.

Female underrepresentation is particularly visible in MST programmes. An Action plan on MST has been adopted in 2012 aimed inter alia to encourage girls to choose for a MST programme or professional career.

3.5. Quality of education

Recent initiatives include:

3.5.1. Towards a more efficient governance of schools

In Flanders various databases are being developed and interlinked to collect data on pupils and schools. In turn these data can contribute directly to the development of educational policy. Since 1 September 2013 all schools and Centres for Part-time Education (Centres for Adult Education and Adult Basic Education Centres) provide data in real time to the ministry of education by use of the "Discimus" database. This project allows for a central collecting of data on enrolments, deregistrations, attendance, pupil characteristics, etc. In order to process the data gathered by Discimus, a "Data Warehouse Project" is being developed to analyse the obtained information and to translate this information into policy recommendations. Discimus has won the "e-Gov Award for User-friendliness" from Agoria and the "Indigo Innovation Award" in the category Efficiency. In addition, the database has been included on the shortlist of the European Public

Sector Award 2013 (EPSA 2013). Discimus has already been recognised as an example of best practice.

Similar databases on adult education ("DAVINCI") and higher education ("DHO") have been developed. The information from these databases will serve as input for the "Knowledge Centre on Education and Training". The Knowledge Centre aims to set up an intensive cooperation with a multitude of stakeholders from the educational sector in order to facilitate an efficient and relevant exchange of data, information and knowledge with all actors in the educational network. The Centre plans to realise these goals through a number of projects, such as the portal site "Mijn onderwijs" (= my education), which was launched in November 2013, the further digitalisation of paper documents such as official letters, and the data collection "School" which provides information per school on numbers of pupils, demographics, and pupil characteristics. The school boards and schools in primary and secondary education will be the first to be granted access to these projects. Gradually new documents will be added to the portal site and other educational actors (e.g. institutions of higher education, centres, part-time arts education, ...) will join the digital platform.

3.5.2. Quality assurance and accreditation in higher education

A system of quality assurance in the Flemish higher education system has been operational since 1991. Over the years this system has been subject to various developments. On 6 July 2012 the Flemish Government adopted a parliamentary act which provides for the adaptation of the system of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in Flanders. This act introduces an institution review in addition to the existing programme accreditation.

The new system of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education will be implemented in various stages. Starting in the academic year 2013-2014 programme accreditations will be granted according to the new system, which focuses on the content and on closing the gap between the intended and achieved learning outcomes of the programme. In the course of the academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 a first round of institution reviews will be carried out, which will constitute a benchmark. The second round of institution reviews will be executed in the academic years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. At that point in time all programme accreditations will be granted and a third round of accreditations will be set up, for which the modalities will be determined at a later point in time.

4 – IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES FOR REACHING THE GOALS OF EDUCATION FOR ALL

We refer to the previous (section 3) and following (section 5) section since our national strategies and programmes for the different 5-year administrations include actions related to the goals of education for all.

For instance, at the beginning of the legislative term 2009-2014 the Flemish Minister of Education formulated the key objectives for education in a policy paper, which is presented to the Flemish Parliament. The [‘Policy Paper on Education 2009-2014’](#) contains the following strategic goals:

- to train open, versatile, and strong personalities
- to grant opportunities to each talent
- to stimulate the learning of Dutch and foreign languages in order to participate in a globalised society
- to prepare pupils for a successful start on the labour market
- to recognise teachers as key figures in the training of open, versatile and strong personalities
- to reinforce the societal interrelation between education and local, regional and international networks
- to enable every educational institution to offer top quality education
- to invest in sustainable and modern infrastructure

5 - PERSPECTIVES FOR POST-2015: POLITICAL CONTEXT 2014-2019

In view of informing the incoming Flemish Government after the Parliamentary elections of 25 May 2014 the Flemish administration prepared a note on the budgetary prospects for 2014-2015. Budget planning for Flemish education should take due account of the budgetary constraints of the Flemish administration as a whole¹⁴, due to three main factors:

- (1) The current financial-economic crisis which hampers economic growth.
- (2) The current implementation of the 6th reform of the Belgian Federal State which entails further devolution of competences to the Communities and Regions, for which the latter will have to provide appropriate financial and staff resources.
- (3) The increasingly strict interpretation of the European legislation of governmental accounts under Council Regulation (EC) No 2223/96 of 25 June 1996 on the European system of national and regional accounts in the Community and its amending acts. The new Governmental administration 2014-2019 plans to abstain from all DBFM projects relying on guarantees for refinancing, too high participations in capital and financing of projects with public funds which are not in conformity with market prices¹⁵. In terms of financing educational infrastructure and in view of search for alternative funding mechanisms involving public-private cooperation the new Government plans a systematic ex-ante impact analysis in terms of the applicable EU Regulation¹⁶. In this context, efficient resource use in education, which represents more than 1/4 of Flemish public expenditure is of utmost importance.

The new Flemish Government took office on 25 July 2014 for a five year administration period (2014-2019). The general priorities for the Government were laid down in the Governmental Agreement¹⁷. For education due account has been given to the challenges mentioned above, in particular to the capacity problem in schools due to demographic developments, reorganisation of secondary education in view of new skills needs and economy of scale and training of qualified teachers. The new Government will also fully recognise the autonomy of schools and take a general attitude of trust in schools and teachers which will be translated in a preference for ex-post and administratively light-weight control mechanisms.

In summary policy priority will focus on the following issues:

- Quality enhancement with a focus on making educational outputs and outcomes more visible
- Striking the balance between school autonomy and accountability, taking into account the administrative burden
- Addressing infrastructural needs of education institutions both in terms of capacity and renovation

¹⁴: *Bijdrage van de Vlaamse administratie aan het regeerprogramma van de Vlaamse Regering 2014-2019: Nota budgettaire ruimte*, Brussel: Vlaamse overheid, 2014. .

¹⁵ *Regeerakkoord Vlaamse Regering 2014-2019*, July 2014, p. 159.

¹⁶ *Regeerakkoord Vlaamse Regering 2014-2019*, July 2014, p. 97.

¹⁷ *Regeerakkoord Vlaamse Regering 2014-2019*, July 2014.

- Reform of the teachers' professional careers
- Enhancing teaching and learning of mathematics, science and technology (MST) and increasing the number of graduates in these subjects
- Transition between secondary and higher education
- Redesigning the school landscape (economy of scale and cooperation between schools).

6 – ANNEXES AND STATISTICS

1. Reference for statistical information:
the publication “Flemish Education in figures”

<http://www.vlaanderen.be/nl/publicaties/detail/flemish-education-in-figures-2012-2013-1>

2. Reference for more general information and details of ongoing reforms:

- the website of the Flemish Department of Education and Training
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/English/>

- the country webpage of Eurypedia (Eurydice network):
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Belgium-Flemish-Community:Overview>