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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; and be adapted to the changing needs of the people and society.

Within the framework of the *Pact 2020*, signed in January 2009, it is envisioned that Flanders will progress towards a competitive and multi-faceted knowledge economy distinguished by the generation of sustainable prosperity and welfare. In terms of prosperity and welfare, it will rank among the top five knowledge-intensive European regions. The competencies of people ensure prosperity. In order to make even better use of this asset, Flanders invests in actions to reinforce the talent of everyone living in Flanders and to keep more people at work longer. Flanders should further evolve into a more inclusive and open region, offering everyone the opportunity to participate. The education system should continue to provide top quality, both in vocational education and in training courses preparing for further education. It is also necessary to reinforce the synergy of schools with business, sports, culture and other networks. More and more young people will have the opportunity to gain international experience. Schools should be open and attractive and that should be expressed by both the school climate and the infrastructure. The Education Department will invest in tools to detect the competencies that are required to build a sustainable future. The Flemish authorities will examine in which way green technology can be introduced in the various education courses. Furthermore, an increased number of people should follow an education course that leads to social profit. (Government of Flanders, 2011).

The vision set out in the *Flemish Sustainable Development Strategy 2010-2014* is that by 2050 a holistic knowledge and learning system forms the basis of the society. High-tech knowledge is combined with great low-tech and basic knowledge (including cultural competencies), in order for people to have the knowledge and skills to take on their own lives and to provide for their basic needs. Education contributes to the realization thereof. Knowledge is the development of the entire human being. People have the capacity to live together, work together, start relations, deal with losses, difficulties and give meaning. They develop the required competencies (knowledge acquisition and data exchange, insight, skills and attitudes) in order to act sustainably in a complex society. Special attention is paid in that respect to system thinking and action competence. Education assumes great responsibility in the story of sustainability. Not only are young people educated to become critical contributors to society; in order to respond to the challenges of 2050,



an increasing number of people are also educated in the domains of science, technology and innovation. An efficient interaction between primary education, secondary education and high quality, research-based higher education contributes to this. Knowledge is regarded as a societal fact to which authorities, knowledge institutions, educational establishments, companies, socio-cultural organizations, environmental associations and individual citizens make a creative and innovative contribution. (Government of Flanders, 2012).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

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, and after successive revisions the political, legislative and administrative structures evolved towards a federal system. It is necessary to continue to invest in high-quality education which offers equal opportunities to everyone.

Since 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. On the basis of 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.

Article 24 of the **Constitution** guarantees freedom of education. Schools can be established and managed without any government connection. However, schools wishing to award 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 Schools Pact** has formed the basis for the organization of all educational institutions.

The **Act relating to the regulation of language in education** of 30 July 1963 specifies that the language of education in the Dutch-language area is Dutch. From September 2010, 6-year-old children can start primary education in a Dutch-speaking primary or elementary school only if they followed no less than 220 half days of Dutch-speaking nursery during the previous school year or if they have passed a language test. In addition, parents will also have to sign a declaration of commitment. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

The **Decree on Elementary Education** of 25 February 1997 introduced the concept of ‘school board’ as a synonym for ‘the organizing body’ (also referred to as ‘education provider’). This Decree also integrated all legislation regarding pre-primary/nursery and primary education (elementary education) into one coherent framework. The **Decree Education-II of 31 July 1990** introduced a new general structure for secondary education.

For mainstream pre-primary and primary education (e.g. elementary education), the developmental and final objectives are determined in the **Decree of 15 July 1997**. With regard to secondary education, the **Decree of 24 July 1996** ratified the final and developmental objectives of the first stage of mainstream secondary education; the **Decree of 18 January 2002** ratified the final objectives of the second and third stages of mainstream secondary education; the **Decree of 20 December 2002** ratified the final objectives of the third year of the third stage of mainstream vocational secondary education; and the **Decree of 7 May 2004** ratified the specific final objectives determined by decree for general secondary education.

The **Decree of 30 April 2009** ratified the revised final and developmental objectives in elementary and secondary education. It amended the final objectives for Dutch, French, world studies, nature and world studies, and technology, introduced in September 2010. This Decree also concerns advanced secondary education (e.g. post-compulsory vocational education leading to a qualification of level 4 in the Flemish Qualifications Framework after 1-, 2- or 3-semester courses of study) and higher vocational education. The Decree of 30 April 2009 introduced the Flemish Qualifications Framework, organized into eight levels. This framework provides a generic description of the characteristics of the competences that pertain to the qualifications at that level and comprises five descriptor elements: knowledge, skills, context, autonomy and responsibility. They determine the level of the qualification. The level descriptors are used to describe and classify both educational and vocational qualifications. There are, indeed, two types of qualifications (at each of the eight levels). All Flemish qualification certificates and the levels of the Flemish



qualifications structure will be linked to the various levels of the European Qualifications Framework. (*Ibid.*).

The **Decree of 17 July 1991** regulates the organization and functioning of the Inspectorate for all education levels, excepting universities and two-cycle higher education institutions. The **Decree of 8 May 2009** concerning the quality of education provides a new regulatory framework for the tasks of the in-service training providers, the inspectorate and the pedagogical counselling services.

The **Decree of 13 July 1994** redefined the administrative organization of university colleges and gave them greater autonomy. This Decree distinguishes between the Flemish autonomous university colleges (public institutions) and subsidized university colleges (subsidized private and provincial institutions). This Decree also created the student council. Student participation in higher education (including universities and associations) is now regulated by the **Decree of 19 March 2004**, which also contains provisions regarding the legal status of students.

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. The **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 university colleges and universities, and the relations of higher education institutions with other legal entities. The **Decree of 30 June 2000** modified article 34 of the Decree of 12 June 1991 regarding the universities in the Flemish Community.

The Decree of 4 April 2003 (**Higher Education Reform Act**) introduced a new degree structure in accordance with the two-cycle pattern of the Bologna process. Through the **Decree of 30 April 2004**, amended by the **Decree of 20 May 2005**, a credit system has been adopted replacing the organization of study by year, and the universities started to implement it from 2005/06. The independent Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization, responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes, was established in September 2003 after the adoption of the Higher Education Reform Act. The **Decree of 27 January 2006** ratified the regulations of the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization concerning the principles applicable to accreditation decisions and the testing of new programmes. The **Decree of 14 March 2008** regulated the financing of the activities of university colleges and universities.

The **Decree of 15 June 2007** thoroughly reorganized adult education and replaced the term 'social advancement education' by secondary adult education and higher vocational education within adult education. With the exception of language courses and the courses of Dutch as second language, which retain their orientation-stage classification, secondary adult education comprises courses of study organized at full-time secondary education level. The Decision of the Flemish Government of 11 April 2008 relates to the organization and activities of the adult education consortia ombudsman.

The status of teaching staff in community education (now referred to as GO!) is determined in the **Decree of 21 March 1991**. The status of staff in subsidized

education is regulated in another **Decree of 27 March 1991** relating to the legal position of some members of staff in subsidized education and in the subsidized pupil guidance centres. These two decrees regulate the recruitment, promotion, permanent appointment, rights and obligations of teaching staff. The **Decree of 16 April 1996** provided for the integration of all types of teacher training and in-service training into one coherent framework. The teacher training programmes were reformed by the **Decree of 15 December 2006**, which came into effect in September 2007. The **Decision of the Flemish Government of 5 October 2007** provides for the basic competences and professional profiles of teachers.

The **Decree of 12 June 1991** provides the legal framework of the conditions of service for academic staff at universities, and the **Decree of 13 July 1994** concerns the conditions of service for teaching staff at university colleges.

The **Compulsory Education Act** of 28 June 1983 stipulates 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 meets the legal requirements. In practice, it is only in exceptional cases that home education can actually be provided. 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 shall 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 to cover transportation costs for pupils who cannot find an educational establishment of their choice within a reasonable distance from their place of residence.

Administration and management of the education system

As a result of the constitutional revision of 1988, 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 requirements for obtaining a diploma, and the pension system. 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. Paid educational leave, military training and police training are also under the competence of the federal government. 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).

Within the policy area Education and Training, the Flemish **Ministry of Education and Training** comprises the **Department of Education and Training** (DOV), headed by the Secretary-General in charge of policy support, and four internal autonomous agencies (IVAs), without corporate personality, each in charge of policy implementation and headed by an administrator-general. These are: the **Agency for Educational Services** (AgODi), in charge of elementary (e.g. pre-primary and primary), secondary, part-time artistic education, pupil guidance centres, inspectorate and guidance; the **Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Allowances** (AHOVOS), which looks after the staff, the institutions and the students and course participants following higher education or adult education; the Agency for Communication on Education (AOC), in charge of external communication; and the **Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training** (AKOV). The AKOV was established under the terms of the Decision of the Flemish Government of 24 April 2009. It is an internal autonomous agency without legal personality in charge of the quality assurance system for pathways leading to certificates of recognized qualifications in education, vocational training, non-formal education and recognition of acquired competences (EVC) pathways. The **Agency for School Infrastructure** (AGIO) is an internal autonomous government agency with legal personality which subsidizes and funds the purchase, construction and renovation of school buildings for compulsory education and university colleges.

The **Education Inspectorate** of the Flemish Community is an autonomous service within the policy area of Education and Training with the task of monitoring the quality of education. The Decree of 8 May 2009 on the quality of education thoroughly reformed its structure abolishing the internal subdivision into levels of education. The Inspectorate will no longer conduct integral full inspections and now carries out differentiated full inspections, i.e. it inspects schools, academies and centres on the basis of individual school profiles. Every institution is subject to a full inspection at least once every 10 years. The comprehensive report (*Mirror of Education*) issued by the Inspectorate every year is presented to the government and the parliament.

The Educational Development Division (DVO) was set up in 1991 as a study service attached to the Inspectorate and which was among other things charged with developing final and developmental objectives. Under the Decree concerning teacher training and in-service training of 16 April 1996 the DVO was also assigned the task of developing professional profiles and key competences for the various types of teachers. In 1999, the DVO became a study service for the minister and the Flemish Government and in 2006 it became the **Curriculum Entity** within the Department for Education and Training, in charge of developing final objectives, developmental objectives and specific objectives, key competences for teacher training, study profiles, quality-assurance tools and criteria on curricula and plans of action on a pedagogical-didactical level. As of 1 September 2009, the staff and tasks of the Curriculum Entity were integrated into the newly founded Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV). (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).



The **Flemish Education Council** (VLOR), established in 1990, 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 on its own initiative. It comprises a general council and a number of individual councils, consisting of representatives of the organizing bodies, umbrella organizations, teaching staff, principals, parents' associations, 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 lifelong learning education. In addition, there are special consultation platforms, thematic committees and sectoral committees which consult with the representatives of the different socio-economic sectors.

Within the policy area Work and Social Economy, the **Flemish Public Employment and Vocational Training Service** (VDAB) was established by decree in 1984 and started operations in 1989. The VDAB organizes vocational training for jobseekers and the employed. In 2003 all the VDAB vocational training centres were transformed into competence centres. The Decree of 7 May 2004 transformed the VDAB into an external autonomous agency (EVA). VDAB is under the authority of the Minister in charge of employment and comprises representatives of employers' and employees' organizations. Since May 2006 VDAB has been working under a new structure in which all training and competence-development matters were assigned to a new general 'competence centres' directorate. The **Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training** (SYNTRA Flanders), under the authority of the Minister in charge of employment, was set up by the Decree of 7 May 2004 as an external autonomous agency. SYNTRA is the hub for an integrated policy on entrepreneurial training, in order to contribute to increased and enhanced entrepreneurship as an essential factor in the socio-economic development of Flanders. SYNTRA training centres offer a range of apprenticeships. In 2008, VDAB and SYNTRA Flanders concluded a framework agreement on the collective use of their respective buildings and training equipment. The **Social-Economic Council of Flanders** (SERV), which comprises representatives of employers and employees, gives advice on all draft decrees including those relating to education.

The **Flemish Agency Child and Family** falls within the policy area Welfare, Public Health and Family. This internal autonomous agency with legal personality is in charge of recognizing and issuing supervision certificates to childcare facilities, the allocation of subsidies and the enhancement of the quality of childcare services. This Agency provides a wide range of services, including clinical preventive guidance, vaccinations, and parenting support via its parenting support clinics. Child and Family also offers specific services for families who are going through a difficult time, and subsidizes centres for childcare and family support, family supportive foster care services and the confidential child protection centres.

Since April 2006 the Department Culture, Youth, Sport and Media within the **Flemish Ministry for Culture, Youth, Sport and Media** is responsible for the preparation, follow-up and evaluation of the policy and the **Agency Socio-Cultural**



Work for Youth and Adults is in charge of the implementation of the policy in the area of socio-cultural adult work, youth work, amateur arts and local cultural policy. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

After the passing of the 1994 decree concerning institutions of non-university higher education, all the former institutes combined into Flemish colleges of higher education (university colleges). 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 defined by 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.

The Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA) was established in 1996/97 to give advice and make proposals to the government with regard to education in university colleges (*hogescholen*). The Flemish Inter-university Council (VLIR) has similar functions with regard to university education. Since September 2010 the two bodies are being merged into the **Flemish Council of Universities and University Colleges** (VLUHR) on the basis of the Decree on Education XIX of 8 May 2009. The independent **Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization** (NVAO), responsible for the accreditation of higher education programmes was established in September 2003 after the adoption of the new Higher Education Act. The NVAO is financed by the Netherlands and the Flemish Community, 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 concept of the **organizing body** is central in the education system. The organizing body of an educational establishment is the government, or the natural or legal person who takes responsibility for it. The organizing bodies 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 that they do so in accordance with prevailing statutory legislation. In Flanders, over 990 organizing bodies at the basic education level and more than 340 bodies at the secondary level (as of 2010) 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 of 'organizing authority'.

From 1989, the organizing body in Flemish community education was the Autonomous Council for Community Education (ARGO), replaced in 1998 by the Flemish-Community Education. It is funded by the Flemish Community and organized by GO! and the 28 school groups (composed of elementary and secondary schools). The organizing bodies of community education are the 28 school groups in conjunction with the Board of GO! rather than one exclusive central body. Thus a three-tiered administrative structure came about. The central level is led by the Board



of GO! and the administrator. Unlike the other networks, the Board of GO! acts as central organizing body and not as an umbrella. Since 1 January 2003, policy supervision of the school groups resides with the Board and administrator, based on reports of the inspectorate and accountants' reports, while policy supervision of the Council and the administrator is carried out by the government. Each school group is governed by a general assembly, a governing board, a board of principals and a general director. At the local level the schools are managed by the head teacher assisted by the advisory school council. As of 2007 Community Education is called **GO! Education of the Flemish Community**.

The subsidized official education network is organized by cities, municipalities, and provinces and receives funds from the Flemish Community. The **municipal** and **provincial councils** are the organizing bodies. In the Brussels-Capital Region, the Flemish Community Commission pursues a cross-network education policy which complements the Flemish Community policy. It also acts as the organizing body for a number of subsidized Flemish schools located within the Brussels-Capital Region. The subsidized private education network is organized by private-law organizing bodies and is based on a specific denomination (Catholicism, Judaism, Protestantism) or on a non-confessional philosophy of life (e.g. non-confessional ethics course) or even on a specific pedagogical or educational principle (alternative schools). These schools are recognized and subsidized by the Flemish Community. The overall majority of these schools belong to the Catholic educational network.

At all levels and in all educational networks **participation bodies** have been set up. Schools are obliged to set up a school council comprising parents, members of staff, representatives from the local community and (in secondary education) students. They can also set up a pedagogical council (staff council), a parent and student council and are obliged to do so if 10% of the relevant group so request. At schools community level (joint ventures between various schools providing the same level of education within one of the 44 school zones), all the school councils of the affiliated schools must have a seat on a representative advisory board. Institutes for higher education are free to operate an open-forum model or fellow-management model to organize the participation of staff, students and the socio-economic and cultural sectors.

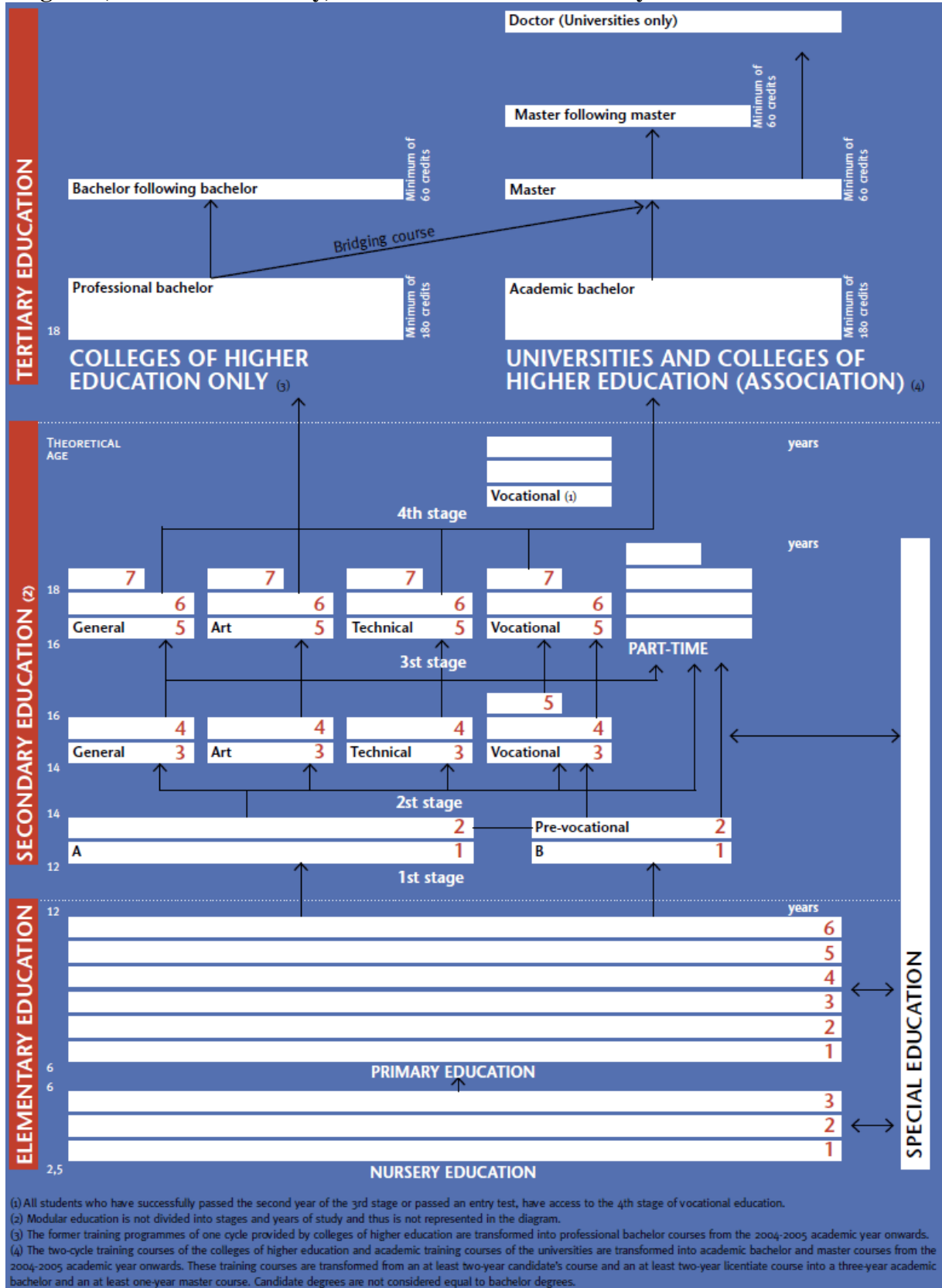
For support, representation in advisory and policy bodies and the protection of interests of affiliated schools, various groups of organizing bodies have set up a representative **umbrella organization**. The current umbrella organizations were founded at the end of the 1980s and the large educational network organizations emerged from former Belgian organizations. The umbrellas also organize the pedagogical support and coordinate further training activities for the affiliated institutions. The educational umbrella organizations receive a budget for further training of staff from the pupil guidance centres, the pedagogical counselling services and boarding schools, as well as for specific further-training initiatives. Umbrella organizations include: the Flemish Secretariat of Catholic Education (VSKO); the Education Secretariat of Cities and Municipalities of the Flemish Community (OVSG); the Provincial Education Flanders (POV); the Board of GO! which represents GO! and also acts as the central organizing body for GO!; the Flemish Community Commission (VGC) for Dutch-speaking schools in Brussels Capital



Region; the Organizing bodies of subsidized private Protestant-Christian Schools (IPCO); and the Forum of Small Education providers (OKO). Most of the schools in private education are affiliated to the VSKO.

Structure and organization of the education system

Belgium (Flemish Community): structure of the education system



Source: Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2008.



Pre-school education

Elementary education comprises nursery (or preschool) education and primary education. Nursery education caters to children from 2½ to 5 years of age (in exceptional cases, children aged 6); children are usually organized into three groups according to age. Nursery schools are often attached to primary schools, and since 2003 all new schools must adopt the nursery-primary education structure. Preschool education is not compulsory, but almost all children attend. Recognized childcare centres include crèches, which cater for children who are too young to go to school and children who attend nursery school on a part-time basis, and a limited number of playgroups that children from the age of 18 months can attend until they enter nursery education.

Primary education

Compulsory primary education is for children aged 6-12 and encompasses six years divided into three two-year cycles. Elementary schools usually adopt the year system, and every group of pupils has its own class teacher who teaches most subjects. A special teacher may be appointed for religious instruction or non-confessional ethics, music and physical education. Upon successful completion of primary education pupils receive the certificate of elementary education. Since 2002, surveys on the achievement of final and developmental objectives involving a representative sample of pupils are conducted at the end of the sixth grade of primary education. These surveys provide vital information on the performance of the education system in terms of what pupils have actually learned, what they know and what they can do.

Secondary education

The unified system of secondary education, introduced in 1989/90, comprises six years of study divided into three two-year stages. The first two-year stage provides a common education to all pupils. The first year of the B stream aims to provide students enhanced support for entering the A stream, although most students continue in the second, pre-vocational year. Students completing the B stream can enter vocational secondary education, or part-time vocational education. In the second two-year stage, students can choose between several tracks. General secondary education (ASO) leads to the diploma of secondary education; at the end of the third stage, an additional year (third year) may be offered in the form of a preparatory year for higher education. Artistic secondary education (KSO) combines a broad general education with active arts practice in ballet, performing arts and visual arts, leading to the diploma of secondary education; at the end of the third stage, an additional year (third year) is also offered in the form of a preparatory year for higher education. Technical secondary education (TSO) prepares students for a career and further education in 22 occupational fields. Upon successful completion of the third stage students receive the diploma of secondary education; an additional specialization year allows students to obtain a professional certificate. Starting from September 2009, the former additional specialization year of TSO and KSO come under the newly introduced vocationally-oriented advanced secondary education. Vocational secondary education (BSO) is offered in 19 occupational fields. Upon successful completion of the third stage students receive a certificate; those who wish to obtain the diploma of secondary education must complete an additional specialization year (third year). Part-time



vocational secondary education (DBSO) is offered by part-time secondary schools. SYNTRA training centres offer a range of apprenticeships to young people aged 15-25. Apprentices spend four days a week in a company and one day a week in a training centre; the duration of training varies between one and three years (usually three years). Courses lead to a professional qualification and, if the required general education component is completed, also to the diploma of secondary education. Post-secondary vocational education and training includes associate degree programmes offered by adult education centres and university colleges. In the case of nursing (programme lasting six semesters), associate degree programmes are provided in secondary schools; university colleges can offer associate degree programmes as of September 2009. (OECD, 2010).

Higher education

Higher education is offered at professionally-oriented university colleges and universities. The secondary education diploma grants access to all types of higher education; passing an entrance examination is required for programmes in medicine and dentistry. Students wishing to enter arts programmes have to pass an admission test. The Higher Education Reform Act of 2003 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 are now organized into two cycles. Bachelor's degree programmes normally last three years, equivalent to 180 European Credit Transfer Accumulation System (ECTS) credits, with one credit representing 25 to 30 hours of study; advanced bachelor's programmes for bachelor's degree holders normally last one year (60 ECTS). The duration of master's degree programmes is one year (60 ECTS); an additional year leads to the award of an advanced master's degree. The new system is fully implemented from 2007/08. Doctoral degree programmes offered at universities have a nominal duration of a minimum of two years and normally take four years to complete on a full-time basis (six to seven years in the case of part-time study).

The school year at the elementary (pre-primary and primary) and secondary levels extends from 1 September to 30 June and normally comprises 182 working days. The main holiday periods are: autumn (one week); Christmas (two weeks); spring (one week); Easter (two weeks); and summer (July and August). In primary education, the timetable comprises 28 to 29 50-minute teaching periods per week in each grade. In secondary education, the minimum is 28 teaching periods a week and the maximum is 36, with an average of 32 weekly periods for most students. Classes in elementary and secondary education are held from Monday to Friday. Wednesday afternoons in elementary education are mandatory half holidays. In secondary education, this half day is left up to the schools' discretion even though the large majority of schools also take Wednesday afternoons off. Classes start at the earliest at 8:00 and finish between 15:00 and 18:00. In primary education, lunch breaks last a minimum of 60 minutes (at least 50 minutes in secondary education). (Eurydice, 2011). At the higher education level the academic year is normally divided into two terms.

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 Schools Pact and the Schools Pact Law were in force. In contrast to this there was the pedagogical freedom that was defined and regulated by article 6 of the Law of 29 May 1959 on the Schools Pact. The 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 final and the developmental objectives.

The Decree of 17 July 1991 determined that each organizing body has the freedom to establish the timetables and curricula as long as these incorporate the developmental and final objectives. The Decree of July 1991 also charged the Department for Educational Development (DVO) with the task of formulating proposals regarding these objectives for pre-primary, primary and secondary education (mainstream and special education schools). (Ministry of the Flemish Community, 2001). Since September 1998, all nursery schools have to abide by developmental objectives on the basis of the Decree of 15 July 1997, amended by the Decree of 30 April 2009. Developmental objectives are minimum objectives in respect of knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes the educational authorities deem desirable for a particular pupil population and which the school must strive to achieve for all pupils. In nursery education only developmental objectives have been laid down which should be pursued in infants by the time they complete preschool education. For primary education, final objectives were defined in the Decree of 15 July 1997 and since September 1998 these have been compulsory for all schools. Final objectives are minimum objectives. Area of learning-related final objectives regarding pupils' knowledge, insight and skills must be achieved by every school for all pupils. Area of learning-related final objectives regarding pupils' attitudes must be pursued by every school for all pupils. Cross-curricular final objectives are minimum objectives which are not specifically related to one area of learning and can be aimed at through several areas of learning or educational projects. The Decree of 30 April 2009 amended the final objectives for Dutch, French, world studies, nature and world studies and technology. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

The common core curriculum of primary education comprises areas of learning and cross-curricular themes. The areas of learning are: physical education (including motor skills, healthy and safe lifestyle, self-awareness and social integration); art education (including visual arts, music, drama, dance, media and attitudes); Dutch (including from September 2010 listening, speaking, reading, writing, strategies, linguistics, (inter)cultural focus); French (including from September 2010 listening, reading, speaking, oral interaction, writing); world studies (including from September 2010 nature, technique, humankind, society, time and space, use of resources); and mathematics (including numbers, measuring, geometry, strategies and problem-solving skills, attitudes). French is a compulsory subject starting from grade 5; language awareness in French can also be offered from the start of mainstream primary education. The same division into areas of learning (not including French) is applied at the nursery (preschool) education level. The division



into areas of learning is not meant to give a certain structure to the education provided by individual schools. This is very much left up to the schools themselves. For instance, schools can decide themselves whether they offer certain contents of learning in an either more or less cohesive fashion. The cross-curricular themes are learning to learn, social skills, and information and communication technology (ICT), and apply also to secondary education. The ICT cross-curricular final objectives are broad and do not focus on any specific computer programme.

The government supervises the quality of secondary education by setting final objectives and developmental objectives (to be incorporated into the curricula), vocational qualifications and a minimum timetable, defined as the core curriculum. For the core curriculum (with the exception of the course philosophy of life, e.g. non-confessional ethics) subject-related final objectives have been formulated. These are minimum objectives which the authorities consider necessary and attainable for a specific student population. Minimum objectives are: on the one hand, a minimum level of knowledge, understanding and skills every student in a particular student group must acquire in the course of the learning process; and, on the other hand, a minimum of attitudes schools pursue for all students. For mainstream secondary education they are laid down per stage and per branch. Attitudinal subject-related final objectives do not have to be attained but should be aimed for. Subject-related final objectives regarding knowledge, insight and skills entail an obligation of result for the schools. Whether or not these are attained will be assessed when the school is inspected and will be considered in light of the school context and the characteristics of the student population. In addition to subject-related final objectives there are also cross-curricular final objectives. These are minimum objectives which are not related to a particular subject of study and are pursued through several subjects or educational projects. The cross-curricular final objectives entail an obligation of effort for the schools and therefore they do not need to be incorporated into the curricula. In 2010, the results of the Education Policy and Practical Scientific Research (OBPWO) study entitled *Ten-year cross-curricular final objectives: an evaluation* was published. The results of this study also led to the development of new cross-curricular final objectives. Only for the core curriculum of first year B and the prevocational year of the first stage developmental objectives have been developed instead of final objectives. These are minimum objectives in respect of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes the educational authorities deem desirable for a particular student population and which the school must strive to achieve for all students. Developmental objectives may be subject-related or cross-curricular. Specific final objectives are objectives in relation to skills, specific knowledge, insights and attitudes a student must have acquired to go onto further, higher education. These competences are obtained via the specific component of a progression-oriented structural component. They are defined for the second grade of the third stages of general (ASO), technical (TSO) and artistic (KSO) secondary education and have been developed on the basis of the characteristic components of a specific branch of knowledge. In terms of TSO and KSO, this means that (contrary to ASO) specific final objectives are defined for a number of structural components only, i.e. for those structural components which are purely progression-oriented in nature. In practice, specific final objectives have currently been defined for all the structural components of ASO and for the structural component 'top sports' in TSO. For the other structural components, specific final objectives are as yet to be defined. The objectives in the specific component of TSO, KSO and vocational secondary (BSO), which are not of a



progression-oriented nature, will be derived from the vocational qualification profiles of the relevant labour-market sectors. The government does not formulate any final or developmental objectives for: the optional component in the first stage; the basic optional curriculum subjects in second grade A of the first stage; the occupational fields in the first stage of secondary education; and the complementary component of the second and third stages. (*Ibid.*).

The final objectives, specific final objectives and the developmental objectives are ratified by the Parliament. They were developed by the Curriculum Entity (ex-DVO, Educational Development Division) now merged into the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training. The final and specific final objectives will henceforth be developed on the basis of descriptor elements laid down by the Decree of 30 April 2009 concerning the qualifications structure. Secondary schools may also deviate from the set final and developmental objectives on the basis of their pedagogical project and on condition that they go through a weighty procedure (Decree of 15 July 1997). Subject-related final and developmental objectives for the first stage of secondary education were introduced in September 1997. Cross-curricular final objectives were also formulated regarding: learning to learn, social skills, civic education, health education, environmental education, and ICT. Subject-related final objectives for the second and third stages of secondary education were introduced in a phased manner from 2002/03. Final objectives were formulated for all the core curriculum subjects of the various courses of study. In addition, cross-curricular final objectives were formulated. These cross-curricular final objectives are classified into themes, which are the same for all branches of education (ASO, TSO, KSO and BSO). In the second and third stages two extra themes are added to those included in the first stage, e.g. artistic and creative education, and (only in ASO) technical-technological education. Subject-related final objectives are defined per stage and per branch of education, except for the third stage of BSO, for which separate final objectives have been defined for the first two grades, and for the third grade in the case of the subjects physical education and 'project general education'.

Starting from the 2008/09 school year, the provisions of the Decree of 18 January 2002 concerning final objectives, curricula and the derogation procedure (except for the subject physical education) will also apply to general education in part-time vocational secondary education, and 'general education' in the apprenticeships respectively. The cross-curricular final objectives will be governed by these provisions from school year 2010/11 onwards.

As of 1 September 2010, the new mainstream secondary education (including BSO) cross-curricular final and developmental objectives will apply across the board (and will no longer be enforced on a stage-by-stage basis). Their common denominator is essential skills which are generically formulated (e.g. non-subject based) and relate to: communication skills, creativity, perseverance, empathy, aesthetic skills, exploring, flexibility, initiative, critical thinking, media smartness, an open and constructive attitude, respect, collaboration, responsibility, self-image, independence, meticulousness, and thoughtfulness. These are crystallized in a number of contexts, such as physical health and safety, mental health, socio-relational development, the environment and sustainable development, the politico-judicial society, the socio-economic society, the socio-cultural society. These are pursued right throughout the six grades of secondary education and refer to the 'ultimate



comportment' that is considered desirable in students who have completed secondary education and to learning as a continuous process. In addition, there are new: cross-curricular final objectives concerning 'learning to learn' for the first, second and third stages (with final objectives regarding views on learning, information acquisition, information processing, problem solving, adjusting the learning process, ability to make educated study and career choices); cross-curricular final/developmental objectives for ICT for the first stage of secondary education; and cross-curricular final objectives for technical and technological education for the second and third stages of ASO. (*Ibid.*).

The developmental and final objectives specify which minimum knowledge and skills pupils should acquire, but do not specify *how* this should be achieved. Schools enjoy complete freedom in this regard. Curricula contain essential information on the concrete practice of teaching and are tailored to a well-defined group of students. Moreover, they give tips on teaching strategy and its realization. In principle, they may be developed by the individual school boards or the organizing body but, in practice, they are usually developed by the educational umbrella organizations. Normally, the schools affiliated to these umbrella organisations adopt the approved curricula. However, the curricula must, insofar as they have been specified, always unambiguously feature: the subject-related final and developmental objectives; the specific final objectives; and the recognized vocational qualifications or, instead, the preset competences. These curricula may (though this is not mandatory) include the objectives that the organizing body has explicitly formulated on the basis of its own pedagogical project in general or on the basis of its own vision on the subject in particular. Said objectives may also form the object of a different internal document. In every structural component all schools operate one or more curricula which have been approved by the government to ensure that the core curriculum and the specific component are realized. The Inspectorate assesses the curriculum on the basis of the set criteria and the final and developmental objectives and advises the Minister for Education as to their approval. As regards the realization of the optional or complementary component, no curricula have to be submitted to the government for approval. In the course of the full inspection of the school, the Inspectorate is able to ascertain whether the optional or complementary component is realized but does not make this a prerequisite for accreditation or funding/subventions.

In the first grade of the first stage of secondary education the timetable is divided between subjects that make up the core curriculum and the optional component (optional subjects), where applicable. In all the other grades, the timetable is divided between the core curriculum, the specific component (subjects that are inherent to the basic optional curriculum subject, the occupational field or the course of study respectively) and a complementary component (complementary offer which the school or even the students may select). The government only prescribes a minimum timetable, defined as core curriculum subjects, which depend on the stage/branch. In other words, the organizing bodies themselves decide how the weekly timetable is divided. As regards the core curriculum, minimum teaching periods are linked to the various lists of compulsory subjects for the first stage only; only an overall figure is given rather than a number of teaching periods per individual subject. Moreover, the government may, on condition that the same core curriculum level of study is guaranteed, grant educational institutions individual deviations from the

aforementioned minimum teaching periods. In the second and third stages, the allocation and distribution of teaching periods for the core curriculum may be organized at the discretion of the school.

Recognized vocational qualifications are complete and ranked units of competences that students need before they can practice a vocation as a professional. These are (vocational) competence profiles, defined by the Social-Economic Council of Flanders (SERV), which the government recognizes as vocational qualifications. These competences are acquired through the specific component of a vocationally-oriented structural component. As long as no recognized vocational qualifications have been defined, a set of competences, which the government formulated on the basis of descriptor elements from the qualification structure of a recognized reference framework, are used to define the specific component of a vocationally-oriented structural component. The combination of final objectives and specific final objectives, the combination of final objectives and one or more recognized vocational qualifications or of one or more recognised vocational qualifications (at levels 4 or 5 of the Flemish Qualifications Framework only) on their own, constitute educational qualifications which are recognized by the government. (*Ibid.*).

Elementary education (pre-primary and primary education)

As mentioned, childcare for children who are too young to join nursery education and out-of-school care for children up to the age of 12 is under the competence of the Flemish Agency Child and Family. Recognized childcare centres include crèches, which cater for children who are too young to go to school and children who attend nursery school on a part-time basis, and a limited number of playgroups that children from the age of 18 months can attend until they enter nursery education. Some childcare centres additionally provide out-of-school care, either in the same premises (infants), or in separate premises (primary school children). Parents pay an income-related contribution. In addition, child minders who are affiliated to a child minding service look after children who are too young to go to school or children who attend nursery school on a part-time basis only. They can also provide out-of-school care for primary-school children. There are also local community-oriented childcare services and independent childcare centres and self-employed child minders, operating under the supervision of the Agency. Recognized childcare centres and recognized child minding services provide childcare for a minimum of 220 working days a year. Initiatives for out-of-school care are not subject to a minimum number of annual opening days. Recognized childcare centres and child minding services provide childcare for a minimum of 11 consecutive hours a day between 6:30 and 18:30. They can also extend this service provision before 6:30 and after 18:30, or by providing childcare during weekends and at night. In 2004, a self-evaluation tool was developed to measure the well-being and involvement of children in childcare. In 2008, there were 790 recognized and subsidized childcare facilities and over 2,500 facilities (including child minders) with a supervision certificate granted by the Agency. More than 88,400 young children were attending and an additional 73,400 children were receiving out-of-school care. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

Elementary (or basic) education comprises nursery (preschool) education and primary education. Nursery education caters to children from 2½ to 5 years of age (in exceptional cases, children aged 6). Nursery schools are often attached to primary



schools, and since 2003 all new schools must adopt the nursery-primary education structure. Classes are usually organized in three groups according to age. When there are not enough children to form three groups (mainly in rural areas), children of different ages can be combined in one group. Preschool education is not compulsory, but almost all children attend. The transition from preschool to primary education is monitored by the Pupil Guidance Centre (CLB), at the request of the school team, with the parents' consent and in conjunction with the school's educational team. The final decision always lies with the parents. CLBs offer pupil-oriented services but can also support schools and parents in the optimization of pupils' welfare. The care provided by CLBs is complementary to that organized by schools and covers four areas: learning and studying; the school career; socio-emotional development; and preventive health care. Starting from September 2010, 6-year-old pupils can start primary education in a Dutch-speaking primary or elementary school provided that they followed no less than 220 half days of Dutch-speaking preschool education during the previous school year or if they have passed a language test.

Compulsory primary education is for children aged 6-12 and encompasses six years divided into three two-year cycles. Elementary schools usually adopt the year system, and every group of pupils has its own class teacher who teaches most subjects. A special teacher may be appointed for religious instruction or non-confessional ethics, music and physical education. Upon successful completion of primary education pupils receive the certificate of elementary education. The certificate can also be obtained at the end of the first year of secondary education.

According to the Decree on Elementary Education of 1997, on the basis of a pedagogical project schools must create an educational and learning environment in which pupils can experience a continuous learning process. This environment must be adapted to the developmental progress of the pupils. Elementary education is responsible for the education of all pupils and must continue to permanently guide as many pupils as possible through continuous attention and broadening of that care. The general objectives of preschool and primary education are aligned and translated into developmental and final objectives which indicate more concretely what is considered desirable and achievable for children in elementary education.

In preschool and primary education the emphasis is laid on a broad core curriculum which mainly focuses on the child's personal development, including cognitive development, attitudes and values, providing the foundations for further education and social integration. The school's first concern is that every child acquires the necessary basic competences, and all children are entitled to that minimum.

The school board (organizing body) has full autonomy when it comes to organizing the education it offers, which it lays down in a school plan, and enjoys the same autonomy as regards the drafting of the timetables. Usually pupils receive 28 to 29 teaching periods (of 50 minutes each) per week, Monday to Friday. There is no school on Wednesday afternoons (Decision of the Flemish Government of 17 April 1991). Classes commence at the earliest at 8:00 and end at 15:00 at the earliest and at 17:00 at the latest. Lunch breaks take at least one hour. Often classes in the morning and/or afternoon are paused for playtime. Sometimes there is also contiguous pre- or after-lunch playtime. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).



At preschool level, only developmental objectives have been laid down and they form the common core curriculum. These were formulated for following five areas of learning: (i) physical education (motor skills, healthy and safe lifestyle, self-awareness and social integration); (ii) art education (visual arts, music, drama, dance, media and attitudes); (iii) Dutch (listening, speaking, reading, writing, linguistics); (iv) world studies (including from September 2010 nature, technique, humankind, society, time and space); and (v) mathematical initiation (numbers, measuring and space–geometric initiation). All schools must organize activities for all children in all these areas of learning. The Inspectorate checks whether the developmental objectives are pursued. The school boards or the educational umbrella organizations draw up a curriculum, organized around the developmental objectives, which is approved by the government upon the advice of the Inspectorate who subsequently checks that the curriculum is also followed. Objectives and activities are set for all age groups in a continuous learning curve towards primary education. Activities are often centred on a specific theme or point of interest. These themes are frequently linked to the calendar year, but may also be topics that the infants bring up themselves. Working in corners as an organizational structure is found in most preschools. Children are given the chance to experiment, discover, discuss, etc., either independently or with the help of other children (and adults). (*Ibid.*).

As mentioned, the common core curriculum of primary education comprises areas of learning and cross-curricular themes. The areas of learning are: (i) physical education (including motor skills, healthy and safe lifestyle, self-awareness and social integration); (ii) art education (including visual arts, music, drama, dance, media and attitudes); (iii) Dutch (including from September 2010 listening, speaking, reading, writing, strategies, linguistics, (inter)cultural focus); (iv) French (including from September 2010 listening, reading, speaking, oral interaction, writing); (v) world studies (including from September 2010 nature, technique, humankind, society, time and space, use of resources); and (vi) mathematics (including numbers, measuring, geometry, strategies and problem-solving skills, attitudes). French is a compulsory subject starting from grade 5; language awareness in French can also be offered from the start of mainstream primary education. The division into areas of learning is not meant to give a certain structure to the education provided by individual schools. This is very much left up to the schools themselves. For instance, schools can decide themselves whether they offer certain contents of learning in an either more or less cohesive fashion. The cross-curricular themes are learning to learn, social skills, and information and communication technology (ICT), and apply also to secondary education. The ICT cross-curricular final objectives are broad and do not focus on any specific computer programme.

Pursuant to the principle of educational freedom decisions regarding teaching methods and teaching aids are taken by the school board. Hence, there are no official guidelines. Working in corners and contract work are important tools to help pupils acquire independence in their primary education years. In the case of working in corners, a few hours a week (at the discretion of the school) are allocated to allow pupils to discover things in the various corners of the classroom, to allow them to apply already familiar items to everyday situations or to allow them to try and find a solution to a problem. Pupils may also use these periods to carry out a task of their own choice which features in their contract. They have to make sure that they have completed their assignment (planning) by a pre-set date, hence, the term contract



work. Contract work is a formula in which an activity package is put together for each pupil covering a certain period of time. To complete the package (volume), children are given a certain amount of class time in which they can decide relatively independently about the duration and sequence of their activities.

The school boards/organizing bodies are free to choose their evaluation and assessment methods, provided that they respect the existing regulations. In preschool education, the assessment of children is mainly based on observation, using a system for monitoring progress in relation with the developmental objectives.

In primary education, the pupils' progress is 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 body. 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 onto the next grade. There is increasing expertise in working with instruments such as child or pupil monitoring systems to observe and monitor pupils' development (for example, the instruments of the Centre for Experience-Based Education), and the scales which chart the involvement and wellbeing of children. Since 2002, surveys on the achievement of final and developmental objectives involving a representative sample of pupils are conducted at the end of the sixth grade of primary education. These surveys provide vital information on the performance of the education system in terms of what pupils have actually learned, what they know and what they can do. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

Integrated education is a form of collaboration between mainstream and special education schools aimed at giving youngsters suffering from a disability and/or learning or behavioural problems an opportunity to attend a number of or all classes in a mainstream school, on a temporary or permanent basis. Inclusive education supports the integration of pupils with a moderate or severe intellectual disability into mainstream primary and secondary schools (not in preschools). In general, special education is organized in schools which are independent from mainstream schools; in some cases they are connected to other social and educational institutions for the disabled. Special education is organized at preschool, primary and secondary education level. In special elementary education the development objectives are organized into areas of learning similar to those in mainstream elementary education. Certain areas of learning are more elaborated or have been developed differently. For certain areas of learning in some education types the final objectives for mainstream elementary education have been adopted as developmental objectives. The objectives selected are defined in the individual educational plan. (*Ibid.*).

In 2004/05, there were 2,218 preschools 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 preschool and primary education. The total number of pupils enrolled in primary schools was 420,678, of whom 26,768 children were enrolled in special education.

In 2010/11, there were 2,527 educational institutions providing full-time elementary education (preschool and primary), including 191 special education institutions. Within mainstream elementary education, there were 171 preschools, 176 primary schools and 1,989 elementary schools organizing both preschool and primary education. A total of 669,607 children were enrolled in elementary education, of whom 259,399 in preschool and 410,208 in primary education. At the preschool level, 257,424 children (of whom 126,049 were girls) were enrolled in mainstream education and 1,975 children (of whom 622 were girls) in special education. At the primary level, 381,983 pupils (of whom 190,515 were girls) were in mainstream education and 28,225 (of whom 10,467 were girls) were in special education. The number of teaching staff (in full-time equivalents and including managing staff) in elementary education was 52,919. Out of this total, 46,811 (of whom 39,654 were women) were in mainstream education and 6,108 (of whom 5,009 were women) were in special education. (Flemish Authorities, 2011).

Secondary education

As mentioned, the unified system of secondary education, introduced in 1989/90, comprises six years of study divided into three two-year stages. The first two-year stage provides a common education to all pupils. The first year of the B stream aims to provide students enhanced support for entering the A stream, although most students continue in the second, pre-vocational year. Students completing the B stream can enter vocational secondary education, or part-time vocational education. Almost 85% of the students were enrolled in the A-stream in the first stage of secondary education in 2010. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training & University of Antwerp, 2010).

In the second two-year stage, students can choose between several tracks. General secondary education (ASO) leads to the diploma of secondary education; at the end of the third stage, an additional year (third year) may be offered in the form of a preparatory year for higher education. Artistic secondary education (KSO) combines a broad general education with active arts practice in ballet, performing arts and visual arts, leading to the diploma of secondary education; at the end of the third stage, an additional year (third year) is also offered in the form of a preparatory year for higher education. Technical secondary education (TSO) prepares students for a career and further education in 22 occupational fields. Upon successful completion of the third stage students receive the diploma of secondary education; an additional specialization year allows students to obtain a professional certificate. Starting from September 2009, the former additional specialization year of TSO and KSO come under the newly introduced vocationally-oriented advanced secondary education. Vocational secondary education (BSO) is offered in 19 occupational fields. Upon successful completion of the third stage students receive a certificate; those who wish to obtain the diploma of secondary education must complete an additional specialization year (third year). Part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO) is offered by part-time secondary schools. SYNTRA training centres offer a range of apprenticeships to young people aged 15-25. Apprentices spend four days a week in a



company and one day a week in a training centre; the duration of training varies between one and three years (usually three years). Courses lead to a professional qualification and, if the required general education component is completed, also to the diploma of secondary education.

Post-secondary vocational education and training includes associate degree programmes offered by adult education centres and university colleges. In the case of nursing (programme lasting six semesters), associate degree programmes are provided in secondary schools; university colleges can offer associate degree programmes as of September 2009. (OECD, 2010).

In 2010, in the second and third stage of secondary education four out of ten students entered ASO. A considerable share of the student population entered either TSO (32.1%) or BSO (25.6%); a small share of students (2.1%) opted for KSO. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training & University of Antwerp, 2010).

General secondary education (ASO) emphasizes a theoretical approach to subjects and is clearly aimed at facilitating student progression to higher education. Technical secondary education (TSO) puts the emphasis on translating theoretical knowledge into practical skills. It prepares students for both a vocation and higher education studies. Artistic secondary education (KSO) offers a more 'artistic' range of subjects and thus prepares students for higher artistic education, without however excluding non-artistic follow-up courses in higher education or a professional career after graduation. Vocational secondary education (BSO) is a practically-oriented branch of education in which students receive a general education and are also trained to practice a specific vocation.

In secondary education classes are normally made up of students of the same age. However, due to school failure and repetition classes are often more heterogeneous especially in vocational education. Each subject is taught by a teacher specialized in that particular field. Teachers' qualifications depend on their skills certificates. Teachers teach several grades and students are taught by different teachers. The organization of the school day, week and year is decided by the individual school boards. In full-time mainstream secondary education and in special secondary education classes are normally spread over nine half days from Monday to Friday. The half day off (morning or afternoon) can be picked freely and in practice this usually falls on Wednesday afternoons. Classes start at the earliest at 8:00 and finish between 15:00 and 17:00. In full-time secondary education a school week consists of a minimum of 28 (50-minute) teaching periods (36 weekly periods in the case of nursing). The maximum number of weekly periods qualifying for government funding or subsidies is 32 teaching periods, excepting: the second year of the first stage with a minimum of four weekly periods dedicated to practical subjects (i.e. a maximum of 34 periods); the prevocational year (a maximum of 34 periods); TSO, KSO, BSO (a maximum of 36 periods); the third stage ASO with no less than two weekly periods for physical education and at least one weekly period for artistic education or aesthetics (a maximum of 33 periods); postsecondary vocational education (a maximum of 36 periods). (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).



As mentioned, for the core curriculum (with the exception of the course philosophy of life, e.g. non-confessional ethics) subject-related final objectives have been formulated. These are minimum objectives which the authorities consider necessary and attainable for a specific student population. Minimum objectives are: on the one hand, a minimum level of knowledge, understanding and skills every student in a particular student group must acquire in the course of the learning process; and, on the other hand, a minimum of attitudes schools pursue for all students. For mainstream secondary education they are laid down per stage and per branch. Attitudinal subject-related final objectives do not have to be attained but should be aimed for. Subject-related final objectives regarding knowledge, insight and skills entail an obligation of result for the schools.

In addition to subject-related final objectives there are also cross-curricular final objectives. These are minimum objectives which are not related to a particular subject of study and are pursued through several subjects or educational projects. The cross-curricular final objectives entail an obligation of effort for the schools and therefore they do not need to be incorporated into the curricula. Only for the core curriculum of first year B and the prevocational year of the first stage developmental objectives have been developed instead of final objectives. These are minimum objectives in respect of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes the educational authorities deem desirable for a particular student population and which the school must strive to achieve for all students. Developmental objectives may be subject-related or cross-curricular. Specific final objectives are objectives in relation to skills, specific knowledge, insights and attitudes a student must have acquired to go onto further, higher education. These competences are obtained via the specific component of a progression-oriented structural component. They are defined for the second grade of the third stages of ASO, TSO and KSO, and have been developed on the basis of the characteristic components of a specific branch of knowledge. In terms of TSO and KSO, this means that (contrary to ASO) specific final objectives are defined for a number of structural components only, i.e. for those structural components which are purely progression-oriented in nature. In practice, specific final objectives have currently been defined for all the structural components of ASO and for the structural component 'top sports' in TSO. For the other structural components, specific final objectives are as yet to be defined. The objectives in the specific component of TSO, KSO and vocational secondary (BSO), which are not of a progression-oriented nature, will be derived from the vocational qualification profiles of the relevant labour-market sectors. The government does not formulate any final or developmental objectives for: the optional component in the first stage; the basic optional curriculum subjects in second grade A of the first stage; the occupational fields in the first stage of secondary education; and the complementary component of the second and third stages. (*Ibid.*)

In the first year of the first stage the timetable is divided between subjects that make up the core curriculum and the optional component (optional subjects), where applicable. In all the other years, the timetable is divided between the core curriculum, the specific component (subjects that are inherent to the basic optional curriculum subject, the occupational field or the course of study respectively), and a complementary component which the school or the students may select. The government only imposes a minimum timetable, defined as core-curriculum subjects, which depend on the stage considered. The organizing bodies themselves decide how the weekly timetable is organized.

In the first stage (A stream, not considering the prevocational year) the compulsory subjects of the core curriculum are: philosophy of life (religion or non-confessional ethics), Dutch, French, English (possibly also in the first year), mathematics, natural sciences, history, geography, artistic education or visual arts and/or music, physical education, and technique. The minimum amount of teaching periods to be devoted to these subjects is at least 27 periods per week in the first year and 24 weekly periods in the second year, of which at least 14 periods must be organized on the basis of at least one common minimum curriculum which must be followed by all the students of a particular educational institution. In addition, in the first year students may choose to take on new subjects and/or supplement the subjects from the core curriculum with extra classes on some of those subjects. In the second year, and depending on the basic optional curriculum subject chosen, the students may choose between the following basic optional curriculum subjects: agri- and biotechnology, artistic education, ballet, construction and woodwork techniques, Greek-Latin, graphic techniques, commerce, hotel-catering, industrial sciences, Latin, maritime education, mechanics-electricity, modern sciences and social and technical education. Overall, the school week comprises of a maximum of 32 to 34 teaching periods.

In the second stage of ASO, TSO and KSO, the following subjects are part of the core curriculum: Dutch; a second/third modern language (French and English in ASO; French and English in TSO and KSO, in the first year starting from 2012/13 and in the second year starting from 2013/14); mathematics; history; geography; (applied) natural sciences or physics and/or chemistry and/or biology, whether or not in an integrated form; physical education; and philosophy of life (religion or ethics). For BSO, the following subjects are part of the core curriculum: Dutch; history and/or geography (these two subjects may be integrated in social studies); mathematics and/or applied natural sciences and/or applied physics and/or applied chemistry and/or applied biology, whether or not in an integrated form; physical education; philosophy of life; and French or English (in the first year starting from 2010/11, and in the second year from 2011/12).

In the third stage of ASO, the following subjects are part of the core curriculum: philosophy of life; Dutch; French; English or German; mathematics; natural sciences or physics and/or biology and/or chemistry; history; geography; and physical education. Concerning TSO and KSO, the subjects are: philosophy of life; Dutch; French or English (in the first year starting from 2014/15, and in the second year starting from 2015/16); mathematics; history; geography; and physical education. With regard to BSO, the subjects are: philosophy of life; Dutch; French or English (in the first year from 2012/13 and in the second year from 2013/14); social studies or history and/or geography; and physical education. In the third stage of ASO (first and second years), out of the maximum number of weekly periods (32), 18-20 periods are to be allocated to the core curriculum, 8-14 periods to the specific component, and 0-4 periods to the supplementary component. Concerning TSO, in the second and third stages out of the maximum number of weekly periods (36), 13-20 periods are to be allocated to the core curriculum, 14-23 periods to the specific component, and 0-4 periods to the supplementary component. With regard to KSO (visual arts), in the second stage out of the maximum number of weekly periods (36), 17-21 periods are to be allocated to the core curriculum, 15-19 periods to the specific component, and 0-2 periods to the supplementary component. In the third stage, the breakdown is as



follows: 13-16 periods are to be allocated to the core curriculum, 18-23 periods to the specific component, and 0-2 periods to the supplementary component. In the case of BSO, in the second and third stages out of the maximum number of weekly periods (36), 8-13 periods are to be allocated to the core curriculum, 21-26 periods to the specific component, and 1-4 periods to the supplementary component. (*Ibid.*).

Students are assessed by means of tests and exams, organized by the individual teacher under the ultimate responsibility of the school's organizing body (Decision of the Flemish Government of 19 July 2002). Continuous assessment is also an option. The class council acts as the central assessment body; it comprises the principal or his/her representative and all the members of the teaching staff. They may be assisted by the deputy principal, the technical advisor (coordinator), support staff and/or the members of staff providing the students with psychosocial or pedagogical counselling (these have an advisory role). The maximum number of days that may be spent on the assessment of students is 30 (or 60 half days); schools who have introduced the system of continuous assessments cannot spend more than nine days (or 18 half days) on the assessment of students. At the end of each year students receive an orientation certificate, which can be: an A certificate if the student has completed the year successfully; a B certificate if the student is admitted to the following year but excluding certain branches and/or courses; and a C certificate if the student cannot progress to the following year.

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 were in special education.

In 2010/11 there were 1,071 secondary schools including 111 special education schools. Out of the 960 mainstream secondary schools, 42 also organized part-time vocational secondary education (five schools were offering part-time vocational secondary education only) and 16 schools also organized courses for associate degree in nursing. A total of 424,820 students (of whom 208,690 were girls) were enrolled in full-time mainstream secondary education, and 19,487 students (of whom 7,084 were girls) were in special education. An additional 7,871 students were enrolled in part-time secondary education and 5,837 students in associate-degree courses (nursing). The number of teaching staff (in full-time equivalents and including managing staff) in secondary education was 61,929. Out of this total, 55,782 (of whom 32,764 were women) were in mainstream education and 6,147 (of whom 3,086 were women) were in special education. (Flemish Authorities, 2011).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The Ministry of Education and Training is tasked to develop educational policy relying on systematic information on the state of the education system. A wide array of research is conducted on the state of education. The Flemish Community also participates in international benchmarking surveys, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, in 2000, 2003 and 2006), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, in 2006), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, in 2003), and the International Civic and Citizenship in Education Study (ICCS, in 2009).



The Flemish Government imposes minimal standards of educational quality by means of the final objectives (or attainment targets) and developmental objectives. School curricula include these targets and objectives. As a means of system evaluation the Ministry organizes wide-scale tests (the National Assessment Programme, *Peilingen*, established in 2002) to check whether or not the attainment targets and developmental objectives are obtained by the students. The results of the National Assessment Programme serve as a basis to critically question the feasibility and quality of the attainment targets and developmental objectives and to gain insight in the way schools have implemented those targets and objectives. The National Assessment Programme may serve as a basis for adjustment of the attainment targets and developmental objectives. Other possible reasons for adjustments are the recommendations stemming from scientific research and compliance with Flemish policy or international reports based on changing circumstances and expectations towards education.

The National Assessment Programme is not intended to be or to become a system of central examination. The Flemish Community has decided not to impose central examinations. The main stakeholders in the education sector agree that central examinations would not contribute sufficiently to the overall evaluation and assessment framework to outweigh the wide array of perceived disadvantages.

Freedom of education implies schools are allowed to set out their view on quality within the framework imposed by the government. Since the issuing of the Decree on quality of education (2009), schools are the key actors in quality assurance. Other key partners are the School Advisory Services (to support the schools in their efforts to improve their quality), the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV), and the Inspectorate. The latter one is tasked to perform external inspections in order to check whether the schools comply with the regulations for recognition and financing or subsidizing, whether the schools comply with the regulations concerning school-specific policy and whether the schools systematically monitor their own quality. To meet the obligation to self-monitor their quality, schools may perform self-evaluations relying on one of the available tools developed by academic institutes or umbrella organizations. The impact of self-evaluation does depend largely on the school's policy-making capacities, but also on the perspective the school had adopted for the purpose of the self-evaluation (accountability versus development). The School Advisory Services support schools in their self-monitoring processes.

A notable feature of the external inspection is the 'differentiated approach' adopted by the Inspectorate in 2009. Rather than performing a comprehensive inspection of the entire school, the Inspectorate selects a limited research focus. The focus is determined separately in each school, relying on the issues in schools that could serve as a lever for further school improvement and on the objective data in which the school discerns itself from other comparable schools in either positive or negative manner. The external inspection makes schools account for their efforts to develop and ensure quality education, but is at the same time development-oriented.

Finally schools are under continuous assessment by means of a number of imposed (or strongly recommended) cooperation structures with other schools (local consultation platforms, school communities) and internal consultative bodies (e.g.



school council with parents, personnel, local community and for secondary schools also students). (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training & University of Antwerp, 2010).

Since 2005 there has been a gradual implementation of individualized job descriptions for teachers and the adoption of the teacher appraisal cycle. The purpose of this cycle is to strengthen teacher's performance. The cycle comprises maximally four years and contains at least one appraisal discussion. The last part of the teacher appraisal cycle is a formal evaluation discussion after which an evaluation report is drafted. A positive conclusion has no effect regarding salary or other advantages. If conducted well however, the cycle will contribute to the professional development and well-being of teachers. An unsatisfactory conclusion may lead to sanctions. The cycle for teacher appraisal is implemented at the same time for school principals, with only some minor adjustments. School principals are evaluated by a representative of the governing body of their school.

Schools carry a large responsibility in student assessment. They have to develop an evaluation policy. Certificates (in primary education) and diplomas (in secondary education) are generally awarded by schools. A small number of students opt to obtain their certificate/diploma via the Examination Board of the Flemish Community. Although there is only limited research available on student assessment practices, there seem to be large differences between primary and secondary education. In primary education large steps have been taken towards the adoption of the 'broad assessment culture'. Some of the main features of the broad assessment culture are that evaluation is conceived as a part of the learning process, the focus is on formative assessment rather than on summative testing, alternative assessment methods are used, competences rather than knowledge are evaluated and students may be more involved in the evaluation process. The traditional evaluation culture (evaluation of knowledge by means of summative written tests) is still more common practice in secondary education. Student assessment practices are implicitly testing whether the attainment targets and developmental objectives have been achieved by the students. The evaluation methods provided with textbooks or educational methods are based on the curricula of the umbrella organizations, which in turn include the attainment targets and developmental objectives. Teachers are often unaware of the overlap between their teaching and assessment practices and the attainment targets and developmental objectives. At present, a diploma of secondary education, irrespective of the educational programme, allows the student to enrol in higher education. The importance dedicated to formative tests that contribute to study career counseling has recently increased. Strengthening the efficiency of study career counseling is one of the major challenges that is believed to turn down the high retention rates. (*Ibid.*).

The importance of numerical indicators for evaluating educational quality has gained importance in the most recent decade. Numerical data provide the education system and schools with an informed basis for assuring their quality, for assessing their efficiency and for development and adjustment of policy and practices. There are, however, no ranking or comparisons based on numerical data, because the Ministry of Education and Training and all stakeholders are convinced that increased competition between schools or teachers would not contribute to the quality of the education system, in respect with the culture of the pedagogical-didactic approach



towards quality of education. The shift towards output measurement has been most clear at the levels of system evaluation and school assessment. Student achievement is the most important indicator for the quality of the education system. Whether students reach the attainment targets and whether students achieve good scores in an international context, is traditionally the subject of most forms of system evaluation. This is believed to be the core indicator of effective education. Additionally, the capacity of the education system to provide equal opportunities to every student is increasingly being perceived as an important quality indicator. In addition to these two main indicators, many other topics of the education system are also assessed, such as financial efficiency, school control mechanisms and the transition to higher education or the job market.

TIMSS 2003 confirmed the top position of the Flemish Community in mathematics for both primary and secondary education, although the overall result has decreased since the previous participation in TIMSS in 1995. Students' performance for science was slightly lower than for mathematics but still better than average. Boys obtain better test results than girls in both mathematics and science. TIMSS 2003 showed this gap has increased since 1995. Students with low-educated parents score significantly lower than students whose parents have attended higher education. PIRLS 2006 indicated that primary school students from the Flemish Community are situated in the group just below the top group on their reading skills. A remarkable result is the small gap between the best and the less-able readers. The review also pointed out that the guidance and achievement of non-Dutch-speaking students in Dutch-language education is still problematic. (*Ibid.*).

“The average performance of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science is very strong by international standards, as indicated by the PISA study in 2003 and 2006, in which Flanders has been consistently among the best performing countries. On average 15-year-olds in Flanders have strong mathematics, literacy and science skills, as indicated by PISA results. The proportion of high-achievers in PISA is also high. But some students have weak general skills. Although their proportion is low in comparison to OECD countries, these students are likely to face difficulties both during their education and training, and in the labour market. Within regular secondary education, the proportion of students who perform below the minimum level of mathematic, reading and scientific literacy is high in part-time vocational education (DBSO) and vocational education (BSO). It is clearly important that these students get adequate support in upper secondary education to remedy these weaknesses and prepare them for careers, which will place increasing demands on their literacy and numeracy skills. Research conducted by the Centre for Language and Education shows that BSO students hardly improve their literacy skills between the third and the sixth year of secondary education. Flemish 15-year-old students perform very well on average in literacy mathematics and science, but the spread in the distribution of the scores in reading and mathematics is wider in Flanders than the OECD average, and the impact of socio-economic status (SES) on performance is greater in Flanders than the OECD average. This impact is also asymmetrical: it is stronger among students with lower SES than among those with high SES. Flemish students repeat grades more often than their peers in many other OECD countries. Students who repeated one or more grades are mainly concentrated in BSO. According to PISA 2003, half of 15-year-old BSO students reported repeating a grade

once or more compared to one third in technical secondary (TSO) and less than one tenth in general secondary (ASO).” (OECD, 2010).

Teaching staff

The teacher training programmes were reformed by the Decree of 15 December 2006, which came into effect in September 2007. The Decision of the Flemish Government of 5 October 2007 provides for the basic competences and professional profiles of teachers.

Since September 2007, prospective teachers have two options: (i) integrated teacher training organized by university colleges and leading to a bachelor’s degree in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, respectively; the training programme takes three years to complete corresponding 180 ECTS credits, including 45 credits for teaching practice; (ii) students who have already obtained another higher education or adult education diploma or who have relevant professional experience and only need to get additional pedagogical/teaching training can follow a specific teacher training programme. This training programme involves a 60-credit study load of which 30 credits are specifically allocated to teaching practice. These programmes are organized by universities, university colleges and Centres for Adult Education (CVO). They may be organized to dovetail with a subject-related programme, or as a built-in programme or even as an autonomous programme for people who want to pursue a teaching career. The practical component can be acquired through pre-service training, i.e. teaching practice, and also through in-service training, a Trainee Teacher (LIO) position, which is a 500-hour a year teaching assignment. The trainee teacher receives a salary and is supported by a staff member of the centre, the institution or the school where he/she is employed which is in charge of mentoring and also receives support from the teacher training college. All the different teacher training programmes are equivalent and based on the same basic teacher competences. Prior qualifications (EVK) and accreditation of prior learning (EVC) can also be taken into account, and will all lead to the same diploma of teacher. Like primary school teachers, pre-primary school teachers are trained through integrated teacher training programmes organized by the university colleges. Teachers are not civil servants but have their own specific teacher status.

The advanced bachelor’s programme in special education and the advanced bachelor’s programme special-needs provision in mainstream schools and remedial teaching provide further specialization and are accessible to all educational staff.

SYNTRA Flanders provides 120 hours of initial advanced training for its trainers mainly focusing on pedagogical and didactical matters. Moreover, advanced training is organized periodically and focuses on technical elements or on specific aspects of the pedagogical-educational approach. Employers (who provide four day a week apprenticeship training) are given sequential training. These training programmes focus on issuing instructions to apprentices, their coaching and conflict management. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2009).

In the past, programmes for nursery, primary and group-1 secondary school teachers were organized by the teacher training colleges, and for group-1 secondary



school teachers through the so-called lower secondary school teacher training. Originally, these were classified as upper secondary education but from 1970 they were integrated into the structural higher education framework. After the 1995 merger operation, these institutions were reformed to teacher training departments within the newly-merged university colleges. (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training, 2010).

The professional profile was updated by the Decision of the Flemish Government of 5 October 2007. It is a common profile for all teachers and is based on 'archetype' functions described in the Decree of 1996 concerning teacher training and in-service training, namely the teacher being: guide in the learning and developmental processes; educator; content expert; organizer; innovator and researcher; partner of parents/carers; member of a school team; partner of outsiders; member of the educational community; and participant in culture. The basic competences have also been updated by a Decision of the Flemish Government of 5 October 2007. They have been sub-divided into three sets, one for nursery education, one for primary education and one for secondary education. With regard to the basic competences, the same clusters of competences are used as those in the professional profile, but they are referred to as functional units instead of 'archetype' functions. For all 'archetype' functions and functional units, the following professional attitudes apply: decision-making skills; relational-mindedness; critical attitude; inquisitiveness; organizational skills; sense of cooperation; sense of responsibility; flexibility. The teacher-training programmes are based on the basic competences.

The government has laid down the skills certificates within each level of education. This is done for each office and in secondary education for each subject, stage, and branch (ASO, TSO, BSO, KSO). A skills' certificate comprises a basic diploma, a certificate of teaching competence (teacher training) and/or useful experience. There are three types of skills' certificates, i.e. required, acceptable, and other. Teachers with a required skills' certificate have followed a specific form of previous education in function of the subject they teach. The diploma requirements in relation to the level depend on the type of subject, the stage, the branch of education, the module and/or training programme. An acceptable skills' certificate means that one has a basic diploma of the same level as the required skills' certificate but not in the specific field. A certificate of teaching competence (teacher training) is a prerequisite for either a required or an acceptable skills' certificate. In the case of other skills' certificate, teachers shall have a basic diploma of a certain (minimum) level. Three years of useful experience suffices for some subjects.

The status of staff in community education (now GO! Education of the Flemish Community) is determined in the Decrees of 27 March 1991 relating to community education and subsidized education and the subsidized pupil guidance centres, which form the cornerstone of the legal-status arrangement of staff working in elementary and secondary education, special education, boarding schools, and the pupil guidance centres. The Decree of 25 February 1997 also features a number of legal-status provisions. At the start of a teaching career the teacher is always given a temporary appointment of definite duration. This is an appointment of no more than one school year either in a vacant or non-vacant position. After a minimum of three school years a temporary member of staff can reach the second stage in their career: the temporary appointment of continuous duration. This is a uniform priority system



for teachers working within community education and subsidized education alike. A third stage in the teaching career is the permanent appointment.

The Decree of 13 July 2007 reformed the teacher evaluation system and linked evaluations to the introduction of individualized job descriptions. As of 1 September 2007, the use of job descriptions came effectively into force in elementary education, boarding schools, homes for children of parents with no fixed abode and in part-time artistic education. Evaluations in all those facilities commenced on 1 September 2009. (*Ibid.*).

Since 2009/10, in-service training for institutions is arranged by the new Decree of 8 May 2009 concerning the quality of education. With regard to in-service training, this Decree stipulates the in-service resources for the institutions, the in-service training on the initiative of the government and in-service training on the initiative of the pedagogical guidance services. The institutions remain responsible for their own in-service training policy and receive resources for this purpose. Every year, schools must draw up an in-service training plan. Every year, the government sets a number of priority in-service training themes; once the in-service training projects focusing on these themes are approved, they are then offered free of charge to all the networks. Since the issuing of the new Decree of 2009, the resources that were initially earmarked for the so-called in-service training umbrellas have been transferred to the pedagogical counselling services.

The teaching time is the total number of hours (60-minute 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 24 and a maximum of 28 lessons (50-minute 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 26 hours (60-minute long). These hours must coincide with the period of the normal presence of pupils. In secondary education the teaching time depends on the stage and type of subject, and ranges from a minimum of 20 to a maximum of 29 50-minute lessons per week in a full-time position.

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Web resources

Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO): <http://nvaio.net/>
[In Dutch. Last checked: September 2012.]

Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Training (AKOV):
<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/wegwijs/AKOV/> [In Dutch. Last checked: September 2012.]

Flemish Education Council: <http://www.vlor.be/> [In Dutch; some information available in English and French. Last checked: September 2012.]

Flemish Education Inspectorate: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/inspectie/> [In Dutch. Last checked: September 2012.]

Flemish Ministry of Education and Training: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/english/>
[In Dutch; some information available in English and French. Last checked: September 2007.]

Recognition of Prior Learning Portal: <http://www.evcvlaanderen.be/> [In Dutch. Last checked: September 2012.]

Vocational Training Service Portal: <http://www.lerenenwerken-dbo.be/> [In Dutch. Last checked: September 2012.]

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

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