

**National summary sheets on
education system in Europe
and ongoing reforms**

2009 Edition

BELGIUM – FLEMISH COMMUNITY

JANUARY 2009

1. Education population and language of instruction

On 1 January 2008, 29.27 % of the population in the Flemish Region was younger than 30 years of age; 890 819 youngsters were older than 4 and younger than 18 (Figures from the Study Service of the Flemish government (*Studiedienst Vlaamse Regering* – SVR). The language of instruction is Dutch.

2. Administrative control and extent of public-sector funded education

Since 1989 the federal state has transferred its responsibility for education to the Communities, save for the beginning and the end of compulsory education, the minimum diploma requirements and the pension system. Paid Educational Leave (under the remit of the Federal Minister for Work), military training (under the remit of the Federal Minister for Defence) and police training (under the remit of the Federal Minister for the Interior and the Federal Minister for Justice) also remain in hands of the Federal government. Every year, the Communities receive a State contribution (a dotation) for education. In addition, the Flemish government also has other forms of revenue, such as regional taxes and their own income, part of which is allocated to education.

The constitutional freedom of education is central to the Belgian education legislation which gives every natural person or legal entity the right to establish schools (the 'organising bodies' or, in elementary education, the 'school boards'). One other freedom is the right to organise schools, based on a specific denomination or non-confessional philosophy of life or on specific pedagogical or educational principles. It also gives pupils and their parents the freedom to opt for a school of their own choice (see also 4 ii).

The organising bodies select their own teaching staff and recruit and promote their own support, administrative and management staff in accordance with statutory legislation. For support and representation purposes they have set up umbrella organisations.

Flanders' education system has been organised into three distinct main '**educational networks**' (*onderwijsnetten*):

- GO!, Flemish Community Education (*onderwijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap*) which is funded by the Flemish Community and whose organising body is composed of the Board of Community Education and the 28 school groups (*scholengroepen*) (consisting of elementary and secondary schools); Go! is attended by 14.4 % of all elementary-school pupils and by 16.5 % of all secondary-school pupils;
- Subsidised official education (*gesubsidieerd officieel onderwijs*) which is organised by the cities, municipalities and provinces subsidised by the Flemish Community and attended by 22.3 % of all elementary-school pupils and by 7.8 % of all secondary-school pupils. Here, the municipal and provincial councils are the organising 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 organising body for a number of subsidised Flemish schools within the capital;
- Subsidised private education (*gesubsidieerd vrij onderwijs*) which is organised by private-law governing bodies, based on a confessional (Catholic, Jewish, Protestant) or non-confessional philosophy of life or on specific pedagogical or educational principles (the so-called alternative schools (*methodescholen*)); it is recognised and subsidised by the Flemish Community and is attended by 63.3 % of all elementary-school pupils and by 75.7 % of all secondary-school pupils. The overall majority of these schools belongs to the catholic educational network.

To qualify for subsidies/financing, schools must abide by the decretally-established educational structure, follow a curriculum which unambiguously features the final and developmental objectives (where pupils must attain the final objectives and pursue the developmental objectives), facilitate inspections by the inspectorate, participate at local-consultation-platform level (LOP – *lokaal overlegplatform*) and engage in decretally laid down participation.

Under the new compulsory-education financing system, all networks receive the same basic funding for operational resources, though with due consideration for the different levels of education, the education forms and the areas of study. A 3 % advance budget levy is used to guarantee the free choice for neutral education within GO! (Flemish-Community education). Another 4.5 % is allocated to official schools (GO! schools and subsidised official schools) offering a choice in philosophy-of-life education (between one of the recognised religions and non-confessional ethics). And finally, part of the budget is distributed beforehand on the basis of the social composition of the schools' pupil populations. The pupil characteristics operated are: the mother's level of education, the language spoken at home, whether the pupil qualifies for a grant and the school's neighbourhood. In 2008/09, the social budget item for elementary education amounts to 14 %, for secondary education to 10 %.

Flanders has very little commercial private education. In fact, commercial private education is neither recognised nor subsidised.

0.03 % of elementary-education pupils and 0.07 % of secondary-education pupils receive home education (provided by the persons exercising parental authority). It is accepted in terms of complying with compulsory education, provided it meets a number of minimum requirements and is monitored by the inspectorate. Home education does not entitle pupils to recognized proofs of study, however. To obtain official certificates, children must pass an exam in a designated school or before one of the examination boards.

The Flemish Ministry of Education and Training consists of:

- The Department of Education and Training, (*Departement Onderwijs en Vorming* – DOV) headed by the Secretary-General, in charge of policy support;

- 4 agencies who look after policy implementation under the guidance of a general administrator: the Agency for Educational Services (*Agentschap voor Onderwijsdiensten – AgODi*) (the services for elementary, secondary, part-time artistic education, pupil guidance centres, inspectorate and guidance); the Agency for Higher Education, Adult Education and Study Allowances (*Agentschap voor Hoger Onderwijs, Volwassenenonderwijs en Studietoelagen – AHOVOS*); the Agency for Education Communication (*Agentschap voor Onderwijscommunicatie – AOC*) and the Agency for School Infrastructure (*Agentschap voor Infrastructuur in het Onderwijs – AGIO*);
- a Governing Council, where consultation takes place between the minister and the 5 leading officials;
- the Flemish Education Council (*Vlaamse Onderwijsraad – VLOR*) as the strategic advisory council, which a.o. issues its advice on all preliminary draft decrees and education-policy reports and documents to be presented to the Flemish Parliament. VLOR also systematically organises consultation between all the education actors and social partners who in fact all have a seat on the VLOR board.

In the current Flemish government (2004-2009) the Minister for Education and Training also has Work under his remit. The minister is assisted by a cabinet, a.o. composed of educational experts.

Consultation structures have been developed at all levels and across all educational networks. All schools must establish pedagogical, parents' and pupils' councils as well as a school council. At school community level (*scholengemeenschappen*) (cooperation between schools providing the same level of education within the 44 school areas) all these school councils of the affiliated schools must have a seat on the representative advisory board). In higher education participation of staff, students and socio-economic and cultural organisations can be organised along the lines of either a participation or a co-administration model.

The inspectorate supervises the quality of education in all schools by means of systematic full inspections, carried out on a team basis. These inspections culminate in school reports which are published on the website of the Ministry of Education. Every year a public report called 'de onderwijsspiegel' (education mirror) is published which contains the most important findings on education and is presented to Parliament. The inspectorate is subdivided according to levels; a separate inspectorate supervises the quality of all philosophy of life courses.

Higher Education uses internal self-evaluation which is used as a basis for external evaluations by an external assessment panel composed of a peer group of experts (coordinated by The Council of Flemish University Colleges, VLHORA (*Vlaamse Hogescholenraad*) and The Flemish Interuniversity Council, VLIR (*Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad*). In turn, these reports form the basis for accreditation by the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation, NVAO (*Nederlands-Vlaams Accreditatie Orgaan*). It is in fact the NVAO who formally recognises programmes which meet international quality standards.

Network-specific pedagogical counselling services provide guidance to schools and teaching staff. The Pupil Guidance Centres (*Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding – CLBs*) look after pupil guidance.

3. Pre-primary education

As soon as an infant turns 2.5 years of age, he/she can be registered in a nursery school on the first day after the next school holiday. From the age of 3 they can be registered on any school day. Pre-primary education is free and not compulsory. It is a part of elementary education (*basisonderwijs*), just like primary education (*lager onderwijs*), and new schools must offer both pre-primary and primary education. 99 % of all 5-year olds attend pre-primary education.

Children who at the age of 6 are not yet mature enough to progress to primary education can remain in pre-primary education for another year. In special pre-primary education this transfer can be deferred for 2 years.

4. Compulsory education

(i) Phases

Primary education	From 6 to 12 years of age
Secondary education	From 12 to 18 years of age
1 st stage: 1 st grade A – 1 st grade B 2 nd grade – 2 nd Pre-vocational year	From 12 to 14 years of age
2 nd stage has four education forms: general – technical – artistic – vocational secondary education	From 14 to 16 years of age
3 rd stage: general – technical – artistic – vocational (or part-time vocational secondary education)	From 16 to 18 years of age

Belgium does not operate a system of compulsory schooling but imposes compulsory education for a period of 12 years. Compulsory education starts in the school year the child turns 6 years of age and ends as soon as the youngster reaches the age of 18.

Full-time education is compulsory until the age of 16. Pupils who have successfully completed the 1st stage of secondary education can opt for part-time compulsory education when they become 15 years of age (see 5).

(ii) Admission criteria

Pupils are allowed to attend primary education from the age of 6. To enter secondary education a certificate of elementary education is required. Pupils can enter primary education from the age of 5 or secondary education without a certificate subject to permission from the relevant class council, the parents and the pupil guidance centre.

Elementary and secondary-education schools do not charge any registration fees; they may only pass on a limited number of 'extra' costs. In elementary education, these extra costs have been capped since 1 September 2008. In secondary education, these costs must first be debated at school-council level and must then be notified in writing, at the latest at the start of the school year (e.g. via the school regulations).

The equal educational opportunities policy (*gelijke onderwijskansenbeleid* – GOK) copper-fastens the statutory right to register in a school or geographical location of choice, regardless of skin colour, national or ethnic background, religion or sex, at least on condition that the school has places available, the pupil was not expelled during a previous school year and the pedagogical project and the school regulations are underwritten. Local Consultation Platforms (*Lokale Overlegplatforms* – LOPs) must ensure the implementation of the equal educational opportunities policy at local level.

(iii) Length of the school day/week/year

The school year commences on 1 September and ends in practice on 30 June.

In elementary education a timetable of 28 50-minute teaching periods applies. Secondary education must offer between 28 50-minute teaching periods (required minimum) and 36 teaching periods a week. In practice, however, most pupils follow at least 32 teaching periods. Classes in elementary and secondary education are evenly spread across the five working days (Monday to Friday). In elementary education, Wednesday afternoons are a statutory half-day. Secondary

schools are free to choose their half-day but they generally also opt for Wednesday afternoons. Classes start at 8 a.m. at the earliest and end between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. Lunch breaks are at least 50 minutes long.

(iv) Class size/student grouping

Schools are free to decide on the group system they operate but pupils are generally divided according to age. Elementary schools have one teacher per class, the form teacher, but sports and philosophy of life education are taught by specialist teachers. In secondary education, all the different subjects are taught by specialist teachers.

(v) Curricular control and content

The organising bodies have the autonomous right to draw up curricula, to develop their pedagogical project, to choose their didactical methods and to draw up school rules, provided they respect the statutory guidelines and adhere to the principles of democracy.

For all of compulsory education minimum objectives have been put in place. These are developed by the Curriculum Entity and submitted to the Flemish Educational Council for advice and subsequently approved by the Flemish Parliament. Final objectives are minimum objectives. The government deems the area-of-learning related final objectives regarding a minimum level of knowledge, understanding and skills to be peremptory and attainable for a specific pupil population. Area-of-learning related final objectives regarding attitudes, on the other hand, must only be aspired to by each school in all pupils. In addition, there are also cross-curricular final objectives which do not specifically appertain to one area of learning but which can be aspired to by several areas of learning or educational projects. A well-argued derogation from the final objectives in function of a specific pedagogical project can only be granted after a weighty procedure is gone through and then only subject to decretal ratification. The developmental objectives for pre-primary education and special elementary education are minimum objectives to be pursued. The **curricula** which may be developed by the organising bodies must contain recognizable final objectives, must be approved by the inspectorate and have to be ratified by the Flemish Parliament.

The core curriculum in **elementary education** sets out the developmental objectives for *pre-primary education* in the areas of learning physical education, artistic education, Dutch, world studies and introduction to mathematics. In *primary education* developmental objectives are supplemented by final objectives in the areas of learning physical education, artistic education, Dutch, French, world studies, mathematics and the cross-curricular themes 'learning to learn', social skills and ICT.

The 1st stage of **secondary education** is not yet subdivided into education forms (see 4i). In the 1st grade, 27 teaching periods must be dedicated to common subjects while in the 2nd grade common subjects are allocated 24 teaching periods. The 2nd and 3rd stages have a **common part** per education form. Then, there is an **optional part** which is more extensive in technical, artistic and vocational secondary education than in general secondary education.

The compulsory subjects in the 1st and 2nd stages are: 'Philosophy-of-life education', 'Dutch', 'French' (except in the vocationally-oriented grades), 'English' (from the second grade, except in vocationally-oriented grades), 'mathematics', 'natural sciences' or 'physics' or 'biology', 'history' and 'geography' (in the vocationally-oriented grades, pupils can choose between the latter two or opt for 'community studies'), 'artistic, visual or music education' (only in the 1st stage), 'physical education' and 'technological education' (only in the 1st stage and not in the pre-vocational year).

Public Education (subsidised public and community education) must guarantee a choice between non-confessional ethics and religion. It must also use official curricula which have been developed by the public- education bodies.

Since 2000, a modular-education experiment has been running within vocational secondary education, which is available to pupils from the second stage onwards. This experiment will continue until the scheduled secondary-education reforms are in place (before the end of the next government term).

(vi) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The organising bodies are free to choose their own evaluation policy and to issue official certificates.

In elementary education transition to the next grade is decided by the school.

The certificate of elementary education can be obtained at the end of the 6th grade of primary education, the 1st year of secondary education and the preparatory year vocational education (2nd year secondary education). This certificate gives pupils access to grade 1 A of secondary education. If the pupil did not obtain a certificate of elementary education he/she normally goes to grade 1 B.

In secondary education the deliberation class council (*delibererende klasseraad*) (composed of all the teachers who have taught the pupil in question) decides whether a pupil will go onto the next year and which type of orientation certificate (*oriënteringsattest*) he/she shall receive. A: pass, B: selective transition which excludes some education forms or courses of study, C: the year must be repeated.

A diploma of secondary education (*diploma secundair onderwijs*) can be conferred at the end of the:

- 3rd stage after the 2nd grade General Secondary Education (*algemeen secundair* – ASO), Technical Secondary Education (*technisch secundair* – TSO), Artistic Secondary Education (*kunstsecundair* – KSO) and after the 3rd grade Vocational Secondary Education (*beroepssecundair* – BSO), organised as a specialisation year.
- 4th stage BSO after the 1st or last grade.

At the end of the other stages pupils are presented with **certificates** (*getuigschriften*). In a number of grades and education forms pupils must pass an **integrated test** (*geïntegreerde proef* – **GIP**). After the optional higher education preparatory year a **certificate of regular course attendance** (*attest van regelmatige lesbijwoning*) is issued. In the higher grades pupils can also obtain a **certificate of business administration basics** (*getuigschrift over basiskennis van het bedrijfsbeheer*).

5. Post-compulsory education/upper secondary and post-secondary level

(i) Types of education

Part-time compulsory education starts at the age of 16, or from the age of 15 for pupils who have attended the 1st stage of secondary education and comes to an end the moment the pupil turns 18. The reformed alternance-training system henceforth requires youngsters' **full-time commitment** for no less than 28 hours a week (just like in full-time secondary education) and comprises a component 'learning' and a component 'on-the-job learning'. Youngsters may choose between:

- an apprenticeship, which combines theoretical training at one of the 24 SYNTRA campuses with practical training in an SME (under an apprenticeship agreement with the employer);
- part-time education in one of the 48 Centres for Part-Time Vocational Education, *Centra voor Deeltijds Beroepssecundair onderwijs* – CDOs (connected to secondary schools offering full-time technical secondary education, TSO, or vocational secondary education BSO) in combination with on-the-job learning either consisting of labour-market participation or a personal-development pathway, or preparatory pathway or bridging project.

Youngsters registering for alternance training are screened and receive systematic pathway-to-work-guidance.

- Youngsters who do not yet have any clear career perspectives and remain indecisive about the training programme they wish to pursue can follow a preparatory pathway (of up to 312 hours).
- Youngsters who are prepared to work but still need to develop their work attitudes and skills can avail of a bridging project to get 40 weeks' work experience (800 hours maximum) with a public administration or a non-profit association.
- Socially-vulnerable youngsters who are not yet able to work in a labour-oriented fashion are offered a personal-development pathway by a Centre for Part-time Training (*Centrum voor Deeltijdse Vorming*).

Aside from personal-development pathways, the 21 recognised Centres for Part-Time Training, CDVs (set up by 6 training organisers) can also provide general education within part-time education and support pupil-specific activities at a Centre for Part-Time Education (*Centrum voor Deeltijds Onderwijs* – CDO). Regional consultation platforms (*regionale overlegplatformen*) were established to attune the regional education and training provision.

The 4th stage of vocational secondary education does not come under compulsory education.

(ii) Admission criteria

Alternance training is available to all youngsters who qualify for part-time compulsory education and may be followed until the end of the school year in which the person turns 25 years of age.

Youngsters cannot qualify for a personal-development pathway unless they have registered for a particular training course with a CDO and then only until the end of the school year in which their compulsory education comes to an end.

The 4th stage of vocational secondary education is open to pupils who have obtained a diploma of secondary education or a proof of study of the 2nd grade of the 3rd stage of secondary education.

(iii) Curricular control and content

Part-time vocational secondary education is offered 40 weeks a year and consists of 15 50-minute teaching periods a week. CDOs can make their own general-education and vocationally-oriented training-roster arrangements (in practice, often 1 day of 7 teaching periods is dedicated to general education and 1 day of 8 teaching periods to vocational training). In function of the local situation, certain derogations may apply.

Apprenticeship training essentially takes 3 years, with a minimum of 1 year. Depending on age and prior education a shorter training period may be possible.

Apprenticeships comprise:

- theoretical training for a minimum of 30 weeks per school year which includes general education (minimum 4 hours a week) and vocational technical training (minimum 4 hours a week). This may be supplemented by other courses, such as language courses or remedial courses for pupils who have fallen behind in their education. The training is provided by trainers at a SYNTRA campus and takes 1 day a week (1.5 days for 15-year olds).
- practical training (4 days a week) with a self-employed person or within a small or medium-sized enterprise, provided by the employer.

Personal-development pathways are flexible pathways, and may comprise the following combinations:

- a personal-development pathway totalling 28 (50-minute) periods, comprising the components 'learning' and 'on-the-job earning' (no labour-market participation).
- a personal-development pathway totalling 15 (50-minute) periods, comprising the component 'learning' in combination with a bridging project or a preparatory pathway;
- a personal-development pathway totalling 13 (50-minute) periods which comprises the component on-the-job learning (no labour-market participation) in combination with part-time education at a Centre for Part-time Education, CDO.

The **4th stage of vocational secondary education** comprises 3 courses of study (*studierichtingen*) (in 3 areas of study (*studiegebieden*)): visual arts and fashion design (2 years each) and nursing which takes 3 years and which is also organised in modular form. In light of their specific nature no core curriculum has been imposed for these courses.

(iv) Assessment, progression and qualifications

The following proofs of study may be conferred by **part-time vocational secondary education**:

- Certificate of acquired competences (*attest van verworven competenties*): if the youngster either failed to successfully complete a module of a modular course or a non-modular training course.
- Modular certificate (*deelcertificaat*): if the youngster successfully completed a module of a modular course.
- Certificate (*certificaat*): if the youngster successfully completed a modular or non-modular course.
- A certificate (*getuigschrift*) of the second stage of secondary education: if the youngster obtained at least one certificate (*certificaat*) and adequately attained the objectives of the curriculum.
- A proof of study (*Studiegetuigschrift*) from the second grade of the third stage of secondary education: if the youngster obtained at least one certificate (*certificaat*) and adequately attained the objectives of the curriculum.
- A diploma of secondary education: if the youngster is in possession of a certificate (*getuigschrift*) of the second stage of secondary education, has obtained at least one certificate (*certificaat*) and has duly reached and met the objectives of the curriculum.
- A certificate (*getuigschrift*) of basic knowledge of business administration: if the youngster has followed a minimum of 4 school years of secondary education, the first grade not included, or

has spent 4 years in an apprenticeship programme, and meets all the terms and conditions of basic knowledge of business administration

When the student successfully completes his apprenticeship he will receive a recognised certificate (*getuigschrift*) which gives him access to entrepreneurial training. Once he has obtained this certificate, he immediately meets the licensing conditions regarding professional knowledge for the majority of the regulated professions. As a result of the new decree of 10 July 2008 regarding the system of alternance training, new arrangements will come into effect from 2009/10.

- Certificate (*certificaat*): if the youngster completed his training successfully.
- Apprenticeship certificate (*getuigschrift leertijd*): if the youngster successfully completed a training pathway.

In addition (as is the case in part-time education), the certificate of the second stage of secondary education, the proof of study of the second grade of the third stage of secondary education and the diploma of secondary education can also be conferred to pupils who have completed their general education, on condition that they have obtained at least 1 certificate (*certificaat*).

Youngsters who have followed a personal-development pathway are presented with a personal-development pathway certificate (attest) of acquired competences by the CDV. This certificate gives a detailed description of the various steps of the personal-development pathway that were completed successfully.

6. Tertiary education

(i) Types of institution

The higher-education system in Flanders consists of university colleges (*hogescholen*), universities and associations of university colleges and a university.

Pursuant to the Bachelor's-Master's-Doctoral structure the following types of programmes are organised:

- Professional Bachelor's programmes are professionally oriented and are only organised by university colleges. They dovetail with secondary education.
- Academic Bachelor's programmes at university colleges within an association or at universities are geared towards a transition to the Master's programmes. These also link into secondary education.
- Master's programmes link into academic Bachelor's programmes and are offered by universities and university colleges within the framework of an association.
- Promotions to doctorate are organised by the universities.
- For further in-depth study there are the advanced Bachelor's programmes (organised by university colleges) and advanced Master's programmes (offered by universities).

Flanders numbers 5 **associations**. An association is an institutional collaboration between a university and one or more university colleges.

(ii) Access

Students can register for a Bachelor's programme provided they are in possession of a diploma of secondary education, a degree of higher social-advancement education (excluding proofs of

pedagogical competence), or a foreign diploma or certificate which is recognized as being equivalent.

There are only entrance exams for students wishing to register for a Bachelor's programme in medicine and dentistry. The areas of study audio-visual and visual arts, music and performing arts in higher artistic education also operate an entrance-exam system. Students may also be asked to sit a language test.

An academic Bachelor's programme gives direct access to a Master's programme.

Students who have obtained a professional Bachelor's degree must first follow a bridging programme (transition programme between the professional Bachelor's and Master's programmes with a minimum study load of 45 credits and a maximum load of 90 credits). A preparatory programme is a transition programme between the academic Bachelor's and Master's programmes, which may be a prerequisite if the Bachelor's degree does not correlate directly with the particular Master's programme in question.

Students wishing to follow an advanced Bachelor's programme must be in possession of a Bachelor's degree. Access to the advanced programmes may however be restricted to specific Bachelor's programmes. In that case graduates of other Bachelor's programmes must first follow a preparatory programme.

A prerequisite for an advanced Master's programme is a Master's degree. Institutions may further restrict access to graduates of Master's programmes with specific programme characteristics.

Doctoral programmes are only open to holders of a Master's degree.

(iii) Qualifications

Bachelor's programmes lead to a Bachelor's degree and Master's programmes lead to a Master's degree. Either of these degrees can also be obtained on the basis of accreditation of prior learning or prior qualifications (*eerder verworven competenties* – EVC and *eerder verworven kwalificaties* – EVK). To obtain a degree of doctor candidates must defend their dissertation in public.

7. Special needs

Aside from mainstream education, Flanders also offers **special education** which is subdivided into types according to the nature and degree of the disability: 6 types at pre-primary education level catering for 0.82 % of infants; 8 types at primary-education level catering for 7.05 % of pupils; 4 education forms at secondary level catering for 4.16 % of pupils.

Within mainstream education children with special needs are facilitated through:

- Integrated education (*geïntegreerd onderwijs* – GON) at all levels of education with special support for pupils provided by a member of staff from special needs education. During 2007/08, 6 417 pupils were supported by special elementary education and 2 342 pupils by special secondary education.
- Inclusive education (*inclusief onderwijs* – ION) which takes in a maximum of 100 primary school children suffering from a moderate to severe intellectual disability (type 2); they all receive individual learning-pathway support.
- The equal educational opportunities policy (*gelijkeonderwijskansenbeleid* – GOK) which provides extra educational support in elementary and secondary schools for disadvantaged children. GOK also supervises the right of registration and encourages temporary art-initiation

projects. During school year 2005/06 elementary education catered for 128 270 GOK pupils and secondary education for 26 145 pupils.

Elementary education also pursues an integrated special-needs policy which is coordinated at school-cluster level.

In addition there are also specific facilities for migrant pupils:

- Reception education for non-Dutch speaking newcomers in mainstream education (*onthaalonderwijs voor anderstalige nieuwkomers* – OKAN) looks after 1 450 pupils in mainstream elementary education and 1 749 pupils in mainstream secondary education. During 2008, OKAN was extended and now covers two years of extra teaching periods and support and also caters for children residing in open asylum centres.
- the Brussels Curriculum provides extra language training in the 1st stage of Dutch-speaking secondary education in Brussels.
- Extra support measures in the peripheral municipalities of Brussels, the language boundary municipalities and the municipalities bordering on those are in place to assist Dutch-speaking elementary schools with the integration of non-Dutch speaking children.
- The educational priority policy (*onderwijsvoorrangsbeleid* – OVB) allocates extra teaching periods to schools in special elementary and secondary education.

To counter learning lags, 'the complementary education policy at local level' supports structural educational projects in 13 cities with regional services and 14 smaller cities without regional services.

8. Teachers

Since 2007, teachers can take either one of two training routes:

1) Integrated teacher training which is organised by university colleges and which leads to a Bachelor's degree in pre-primary, primary and secondary education, respectively.

This programme takes 3 years and comprises 180 credits, including 45 for teaching practice.

2) Students who have already obtained a different higher-education degree or adult-education diploma or who have acquired relevant experience and only need to get educational/pedagogical training, can attend a specific teacher-training programme, which involves a 60-credit study load, of which 30 credits specifically for teaching practice. These programmes are organised by universities, university colleges and CVOs, Centres for Adult Education.

Not only can the practical component be acquired through pre-service training, i.e. teaching practice, but also through in-service training, i.e. a trainee teacher (*Leraar-In-Opleiding* – LIO) position or a teaching assignment of 500 hours per annum. The trainee teacher receives a salary (the salary of a teacher who does not possess a pedagogical-skills certificate) and is supported by the teacher-training college, a member of staff of the centre, the institution or the school he/she is employed by, in charge of mentoring.

All the various training programmes will become equivalent and shall be based on the same basic teaching competences. They will take prior qualifications and prior learning into consideration and shall all lead to the same degree of teacher. They will also fall under the same quality assurance system, i.e. the external reviews. Mentors, experienced teachers, will be in charge of guidance and support for trainees, trainee teachers and beginning teachers. A training programme for mentors will also be put in place. To boost professionalization, support teacher-training programmes and

encourage cooperation between these programmes, 4 expertise networks (*expertisenetwerken*) were established (each within the framework of an association) and a cross-association regional platform (*regionaal platform*) was set up.

Every year, the government sets a number of priority in-service training themes; once the in-service training programmes focussing on these themes have been approved, they are offered free of charge to all the networks. During the 2008-2009 school years, all themes featuring within the language-policy paper are revisited, supplemented by a theme on language awareness.

Teachers are not civil-servants but have their own specific status depending on whether they teach in community education or subsidised education. The differences between them are gradually being erased. The conditions of service are also laid down in collective labour agreements (*collectieve arbeidsovereenkomsten* – CAOs), which are concluded following collective consultation and remain in force for the full government term.

9. Current reforms and priorities

Useful sources of information in this regard are the 2008-2009 Education and Training Policy Letter (*Beleidsbrief Onderwijs en Vorming 2008-2009*) from the Flemish Minister for Education and Training (<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/beleid/>), the newsletters published on the website of the Ministry for Education and Training (<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/nieuws>) and the Edulex database which features all prevailing legislation and regulations (<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/edulex/>). The 'decathlon' priorities of the Flemish Minister for Education and Training are: financing for education geared towards equal opportunities and a second wave of democratisation, more result-oriented efforts from the educational institutions with systematic assessments, partnership between schools and parents, screening of Dutch-language skills at key moments in pupils' school careers, a language policy in all schools for all subjects, exchange of good practices, more infants in smaller classes, support for a motivated choice of course and profession, the creation of a higher vocational education system, tackling discrimination on the labour market.

i) Main recent changes

- The new operational-resource financing systems for elementary and secondary education (see 2), reformed adult education and the university colleges and universities have come into effect.
- A new private-public financing system has been set up to renovate school buildings and also covers 211 more energy-efficient buildings which need to meet the E70 standard. The school-building renovation programme has been expanded with an experimental project to build 25 Passive Schools, which hardly require any heating at all. Energy-saving investments in existing schools are also subsidised. Schools will also have to appoint an energy coordinator and set up an energy accounting system. All schools larger than 1 000 m² will need to get an energy-performance certificate (*energieprestatiecertificaat* – EPC) from an energy expert.
- To erase technological lags in schools, the secondary-school investment operation was repeated. Moreover, the VDAB competence centres will henceforth put their high-technology training infrastructure at the disposal of pupils in the final TSO, BSO and BuSO grades, free of charge. VDAB and SYNTRA Flanders also concluded a framework agreement on the collective use of their respective buildings and training equipment.
- In elementary education, the cost of study has been capped and a school allowance for pupils has been introduced. Henceforth, pupils in the alternance-training system (see 5 i) can also

qualify for a school allowance. In the other levels, the allowances were increased. From now on, a family file will be used for all children of the one family, for all levels of education. School allowances are however linked to a faster and more efficient control on absenteeism and registration of pupils; even in Brussels, in collaboration with the French-speaking Community Minister for Education.

- To get all infants to attend pre-primary school, 'Child and Family' (in charge of childcare quality assurance) has been called upon to approach parents of children who have not been registered in pre-primary education and pre-primary schools have been given extra entry teaching periods to improve infant support. The Local Consultation Platforms (LOPs) act as a nucleus of information transfer on infant participation. Schools were also given extra special-needs hours (and an integrated care lump sum – *geïntegreerde zorgenveloppe*) as well as extra teaching periods to implement the equal educational opportunities policy (*gelijkeonderwijskansenbeleid*).
- In compulsory education, numerous initiatives were taken in terms of health policy and education (balanced diet and exercise, reducing the consumption of soft drinks and sweets, blanket ban on smoking in schools), health and safety policy and accident prevention, (cyber) bullying, steaming, violence at school and (in secondary education) choice-of-course and vocational guidance and the stimulation of a sense for entrepreneurship. A number of education, training and work-experience databases were also set up. (In-company training for pupils and teachers is made easier, expanded and fostered).
- The Pupil Guidance Centres (*Centra voor Leerlingenbegeleiding* – CLBs) will streamline their services so that every CLB will be in a position to offer a basic package.
- The 2008 adult-education reforms integrated adult basic education into education and the establishment of adult-education consortiums resulted in regional cooperation. Following the reforms, modular education and pathway-to-work-guidance take central stage.
- From the combined ministerial briefs education and work, a competence agenda with the social partners has been set so that educational, training and non-formal education organisations and the corporate sector would identify and develop the essential competences. Also EVC, accreditation of prior learning, will be reinforced.

ii) The planning stage of reforms and initiatives

- As of 2010/11, children will have to follow at least one year of Dutch-speaking pre-primary education (or display a proficiency in Dutch) before they can be registered in a Dutch-speaking primary school. From 2009/10, a 'commitment statement' from parents, will also have to form part and parcel of the school regulations.
- Certain final and developmental objectives will be fine-tuned (and will come into effect from 2010/11 onwards). These will focus on linguistics and linguistic aspects, foreign languages tested against the European Reference Framework for Foreign Languages, the link between natural sciences and technology, with a focus on a sustainable environment and technical literacy. A continuous alignment of learning from pre-primary education through to the 1st stage is a central basic principle and, henceforth, cross-curricular objectives are no longer defined on a stage-by-stage basis but for secondary education as a whole.
- The educational provision between the 6th grade of secondary education and the Bachelor and Master degree studies will be reformed in line with the proposed sub-degrees of the Bologna process. Higher Vocational Education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs* – HBO) will comprise higher vocational adult education (*hoger beroepsonderwijs van het volwassenenonderwijs*) as well as

the 4th stage BSO and the 7th technical secondary education, TSO, and artistic secondary education, KSO, specialisation years. This will lead to EQF professional qualifications, levels 4 and 5.

- The reform of secondary education will be one of the tasks for the next government. Meanwhile, a task force has begun developing a number of proposals which shall form the subject of further discussions in 2009.
- Various reports containing policy recommendations on artistic and cultural education and on the scheduled reform of part-time artistic education (*deeltijds kunstonderwijs – DKO*) (for youngsters and adults) were also published during 2008.
- A learning-care framework draft decree is also in the making. It should be introduced as of 2009/10 as the new reference framework on care for elementary and secondary-education pupils with special needs.
- To coordinate and harmonize the existing higher-education decrees following the various reforms, a new higher-education basic decree has been put on the agenda.
- The main debate within higher education centres on the structural organisation once the academisation process has been completed in 2013. Will the academic programmes currently offered by the university colleges continue to exist or will they move and only be hosted by universities? Will the university colleges offering professional Bachelor's programmes also be integrated into universities?
- The scheduled academisation of higher artistic education also features on the agenda.
- A draft decree regarding the establishment of a quality-assurance agency is being prepared. This agency will encompass both the inspectorate and the Curriculum Entity. Full school inspections will henceforth have to be more differentiated on the basis of valid and realistic risk indicators.
- The Flemish Qualification Structure decree will operate professional qualifications rather than vocationally-oriented final objectives. This should allow for qualifications to be classified into one of the 8 European Qualifications Framework (EQF) levels.

iii) Pilot projects

- Since 2005, specific legislation has been in place on temporary project initiatives or 'pilot projects'.
- As a result of the right to register in a school of one's own choice, some schools were literally faced with registration queues. Over the next two school years, schools can trial an experimental application procedure, subject to the consent from the local consultation platforms.
- The Broad School pilot projects are aimed at stimulating cooperation between schools and other social sectors with a view to creating a broad learning and living environment within the framework of the equal educational opportunities policy.
- Time-out projects provide intensive guidance for pupils causing major problems at school.
- During school year 2008/09, a number of liaison officers were appointed to pave the way for the reintegration of youngsters who were admitted to a centre for special youth care (because they had been involved in crime or on account of their problematic home situation) into education.

- The project 'Duurzaam naar school' (To School the Sustainable Way) was launched to encourage as many elementary-education pupils as possible to either cycle or walk to and from school.
- During September 2007, a 3-year pilot project on multilingual education CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning – CLIL) was launched in 9 general and technical secondary-education schools whereby 10-15 % of classes are taught in a different language, mainly French and English.
- Within the framework of the Competence Agenda, 40 new pilot projects on choice of course (mainly for the technical courses of study) and on-the-job learning were launched. There are also a number of pilot projects on stimulating competence development within companies and organisations.
- In tutoring experiments, higher-education students provide structural school-career assistance to disadvantaged primary and secondary-education pupils.
- Within part-time artistic education (*deeltijds kunstonderwijs* – DKO), innovative projects were launched which focus on collaboration with other levels of education, cultural organisations and amateur art groups, and the use of ICT.

Finally, five centres for adult education are hosting **training programmes for trainers of adults** (*opleiding van opleiders voor volwassenen* – OOV) this current school year.

For more detailed information on the education systems in Europe, you may consult the EURYDICE data base, EURYBASE (<http://www.eurydice.org>)