Memorandum of Understanding Benelux - Baltic States

On 8 November 2019, the Flemish Minister of Education, together with his colleagues from the other Communities of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the Member States of the Benelux and the Baltic States for the automatic mutual recognition of higher education diplomas. The signing ceremony took place in Brussels in the margins of the Council of Education Ministers of the European Union.

The Benelux and the Baltic States are thus pioneers in the European Higher Education Area. After all, they are the only regions in Europe that have laid down legally enforceable recognition of each other's higher education degrees. This is based on mutual trust, which in turn is based on solid quality assurance systems and practices.

Both the Benelux countries and the Baltic States recognise the level of each other's higher education diplomas. The Benelux started this in 2015 (with expansion in 2018), followed by the Baltic States. Thanks to this 'diploma agreement' between the Benelux countries on the one hand and the Baltic States on the other hand, an obstacle to study or work across the border is removed. It also means administrative simplification and cost savings for citizens.

Fifth STEM monitor

STEM action plan

In order to stimulate youngster to train for careers in mathematics, science, engineering and technology, the Flemish Government has drawn up a STEM action plan for the period 2012-2020. The Flemish labour market needs more people with a STEM profile and with the increasing digitisation and technology, this demand will only increase. Within the framework of this action plan, the STEM monitor was developed, which for the 5th time in a row provides insights into the evolution of relevant STEM indicators such as intake, progression and outflow data of pupils/students in STEM-related courses of study in secondary education, students in adult education and students in higher education.

STEM monitor 2019

The STEM monitor of June 2019 (data for the school year 2017-2018) confirms the steady growth: more and more young people are choosing to study engineering and science-related subjects and enrol in these courses of study. The number of pupils in STEM related courses of study is also growing in secondary education in the 2nd and 3rd stage. In school year 2010-2011 (reference year) 53,806 young people entered a technical or scientific education in the 2nd or 3rd stage, in 2017-2018 this the
The percentage of girls in STEM courses of study in secondary education is particularly striking. Compared to 2010-2011, their share has increased by almost 4 percentage points in the 3rd stage of secondary education (from 27% to 31.27%). The number of STEM diplomas in secondary education also increased by 2 percentage points compared to the baseline measurement. In general education (ASO) courses of study, the increase is even more than 4 percentage points.

Meanwhile, more than half of the pupils in ASO leave with a STEM diploma: the growth went from 51.1% in school year 2010-2011 to 55.5% in school year 2017-2018.

Students in higher education also find it easier to find their way to technical, scientific and mathematical courses of study. Compared to academic year 2010-2011, the proportion of young people entering STEM study programmes has risen. The gender difference continues to exist even though the proportion of women is gradually increasing: in the academic bachelor's programme, the proportion of STEM women is now approaching 40%. It is noteworthy that there is an increase in the amount of young women with a secondary education with a STEM diploma that start a STEM course of study in higher education compared to 2010-2011. The general STEM inflow into higher education now stands at just under 47%.

### STEM objectives 2020 almost achieved

These positive evolutions ensure that the 5 objectives (see below) formulated to be achieved by 2020 by the STEM Platform (i.e. the independent STEM Advisory Body of the Flemish Government) are in sight or even have already been achieved. With 3 more annual measurements to go, it is feasible to achieve the 5 indicators.
In secondary education, the impact of the modernisation of secondary education and the full implementation and further outroll of dual learning will undoubtedly still play a role. For example, there are new attainment targets that have been introduced in September 2019, which also contain specific STEM attainment targets in the first stage of secondary education (see 14.2 for additional information). Schools and teachers will also be supported to use a strong STEM methodology and to further develop this – supported by a consortium of Flemish Associations of Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences. With the modernisation of secondary education, STEM will also become a separate course of study, with a focus on further studies or a job in the labour market. This systemic optimisation will further increase STEM visibility and further strengthen the innovative STEM image. In dual learning (see 14.2) more attention is paid to STEM training and young people are given the opportunity to immediately convert their knowledge into a real work situation.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Aandeel meisjes in secundair onderwijs (instroom 3de graad) % of girls in secondary education (inflow 3rd stage)</td>
<td>27,40 %</td>
<td>30,67%</td>
<td>31,27%</td>
<td>33,33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Aandeel studenten STEM-richtingen in Professionele Bachelor</td>
<td>23,82%</td>
<td>26,41%</td>
<td>26,64%</td>
<td>27,82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aandeel vrouwen in Professionele STEM-Bachelors % of women in Professional STEM Bachelors</td>
<td>21,13%</td>
<td>22,88%</td>
<td>24,09%</td>
<td>25,20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Aandeel STEM-richtingen in Academische bachelor % of STEM courses of study in Academic Bachelor’s programmes</td>
<td>31,60%</td>
<td>34,41%</td>
<td>34,45%</td>
<td>33,02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Aandeel vrouwen in Academische STEM-bachelors % of women in Academic STEM Bachelors</td>
<td>37,07%</td>
<td>40,27%</td>
<td>39,37%</td>
<td>33,50%</td>
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**Growth package**

Flanders comes second in the EU in terms of poverty and social exclusion, which is an excellent achievement. However, achieving the Europe 2020 target - a reduction to only 10.5% people in poverty by 2020 - remains a major challenge for Flanders. That is why Flanders has transformed their
child benefit system to the Growth Package, a set of financial allowances that the Flemish government provides for each child. Every child who lives in Flanders will receive this Growth Package from 1 January 2019 onwards. It gives families the best opportunity to raise their child(ren) and help them develop fully. The growth package will therefore have a positive effect on the poverty figures.

The growth package consists of the following elements:

- A number of benefits support all children who live in Flanders. For example, whenever a child is born or adopted, a one-off starting amount is given to their family and parents. Afterwards, parents receive a monthly basic amount per child, as financial support for their upbringing. Finally, every child receives a school bonus as a boost at the start of the new school year. Even children who do not yet go to school receive the bonus to support their upbringing costs.

- Some children need extra support can receive a social allowance and a care allowance. The social allowance is for families who have a hard time bearing upbringing costs with their income. The allowance increases the capacity of less wealthy families and is calculated based on family income and size. The payment is automatically allocated as soon as you are entitled to it. The care allowance provides extra support for orphans, half orphans, foster children and children with specific support needs. Children with a disability or disorder, in addition to the basic amount, can receive a supplement for children with specific support needs (in the old system: "increased child benefit"). The amount of the allowance depends on the extent to which the specific support needs have consequences for the child and their family.

- Finally, the Growth Package encourages participation in childcare and education - children have more opportunities if they participate. For example, those who use Dutch-language childcare in Flanders or Brussels (and where parents do not pay based on their income) can count on a childcare allowance. Pre-schoolers of 3 years old who are subsequently enrolled in Dutch-language education and pre-schoolers of 4 years old who remain enrolled and who have sufficient attendance at school receive a childcare allowance. In addition, children from the age of 3, who attend Dutch-language school in Flanders or Brussels, can expect an annual school supplement if the income of the parents (or the parent and his or her partner where the child is domiciled in the event of divorce) meets the conditions.

2018

Implementation of the decree on part-time education in the arts

On 22 December 2017 the Flemish Government attached its final approval to the draft decree on part-time education in the arts. In the months succeeding the approval the implementation of the decree was prepared.

On 20 April 2018 the Flemish Government attached its final approval to the decision on the attainment targets in part-time education in the arts. Current and concrete attainment targets raise clear expectations on the learning results in view, which are at the same time sufficiently challenging and realistic. From 1 September 2018 the academies apply the new attainment targets.

On 4 May 2018 the Flemish Government also attached its final approval to the decision on the programme offer, the organisation, staff complement, collection of enrolment fees and the certification in part-time education. In each division of part-time education in the arts the programmes are brought up to date. Often it concerns new programmes as a result of certain evolutions such as the rise of electronic music, but also older or alternative forms of arts can be offered in the academies.
At the beginning of July 2018 it was laid down that deprived groups can take part in part-time education in the arts at a reduced enrolment rate. From school year 2018-19 onwards they pay at most a quarter of the normal enrolment fees. This measure was taken by Flanders to stimulate a group of vulnerable people to take part in a programme of part-time education in the arts.

Also in July 2018 the programmes for part-time education in the arts were approved. 140 academies were given the go-ahead for about 777 new programmes. This move signals the end to the prohibition of organising new programmes in part-time education in the arts, which was in valid for the last seven years. The new programmes indicate that almost two out of three academies in Flanders will organise in school year 2018-19 for the first time programmes for music and drama to children from the age of six. This possibility was created by the new decree on education in the arts, which was approved at the end of 2017.

**Launch STEM Monitor 2018**

On 21 July 2018 the new STEM Monitor 2018 was presented in Flanders. In the framework of the STEM action plan 2012-2020 the Monitor gives insight in the evolutions of relevant STEM indicators such as data on the number of pupils in secondary education, adult education and higher education who start, continue and finalise a STEM programme.

The STEM Monitor 2018 (data school year 2016/17) indicates that never before so many youngsters in Flanders have opted for a STEM programme in the second and third stage of secondary education. Taking into account the reducing number of pupils in secondary education because of demographic developments, the growing share of STEM shows that the STEM Action Plan 2012-2020 has been effective and efficient. Positive is also the fact that the share of girls in STEM courses of study in secondary education has risen by 3,3% since 2010-2011 (benchmark). Also the number of STEM certificates granted is on the rise. More than half of the pupils leaving general secondary education in Flanders holds a STEM certificate.

There are however important differences between the various types of secondary education. Also in technical secondary education the share of pupils opting for a STEM course of study is on the rise, but the development is less pronounced than in gse. In vocational secondary education there is a rise of STEM pupils in the first grade of stage two (grade 3 of secondary education), but not yet in the third stage (starting in grade 5), where we can witness a decrease.

Also in higher education the share of students entering a STEM programme is on the rise, in comparison with academic year 2010-2011 (benchmark). Gender differences remain, but the share of women is slowly increasing. In the academic bachelor programmes the share of ‘STEM women’ is already above 40%.

**Results of the third update of the ICT monitor published**

The monitor on ICT use in Flemish schools (MICTIVO3 2018) in primary and secondary education and centers for adult basic education has been published. It was the third edition of this five yearly study. The study gives a state of affairs in the field of ICT infrastructure, hardware, software, ICT use and skills, media literacy, ... in the Flemish schools and outlines the evolutions.

The new monitor shows that the ICT infrastructure in our Flemish schools is increasing. An average Flemish primary school has 1 PC, laptop, tablet or Chromebook per 4 pupils. In secondary education, 1 per 2 pupils is available. A point of attention is that the computer park in education is subject to aging. Positive is that the age of laptops and desktops is compensated by the purchase of new tablets and chromebooks.
Striking is the great breakthrough of digital school boards. In primary education, most schools (93%) have digiboards, 10 years ago it was only 8%. The increase also occurs in secondary education. From 29% in 2008 to almost 80% last school year.

Almost every school has a digital pupil tracking system that provides teachers with feedback on how their pupils/students are doing and giving them insight into the results of their education.

The presence of software for pupils with disabilities has also been increased in primary and secondary education.

Computers or tablets are mainly used for preparation of classes, presentation and communication with colleagues. ICT use during class is on the rise. ICT is the least used for testing or project operation.

Teachers find their students more skilled and media-wise in dealing with ICT than 5 or 10 years ago. Almost all pupils in primary and secondary education have access to the internet at home, although computer use is mainly used for free time.

Approximately 2 out of 3 schools have an ICT policy plan that contains provisions on the use of data management, privacy, ICT security or purchasing policy. Approximately 1 in 3 lower and half of secondary schools indicate the existence of a specific policy plan on 'social media' (communication with third parties, use of social media by school professionals, policies on cyberbullying and sexting). However, it is clear that a large number of teachers do the content of these plans. The ICT monitor can be found here: https://onderwijs.vlaanderen.be/monitor-voor-ict-integratie-in-het-vlaams-onderwijs-mictivo-2018

In order to support schools in their ICT policies and raise awareness, the learning materials network for and by teachers KlasCement will get extra staff members. It is required to become a knowledge center for ICT coordination.

SELFIE is also being launched in Flanders. A free and free online self-evaluation tool developed by the European Commission for schools where a digital school profile is drawn up. Use is made of standard online questionnaires that lead to a school-specific report with strengths and weaknesses in terms of infrastructure, ICT use and vision. This self-assessment process can help to eliminate the weaknesses in the ICT policy.

**Recognition of acquired competences and integrated quality assurance framework**

On 1 June 2018 the Flemish Government attached its approval on principle to a draft decree which offers a common framework for assessing and certifying acquired competences. From next year onwards competences, experience or knowledge acquired in a job, hobbies or self-tuition can be recognised on the basis of existing professional qualifications. This will result in an increase of the labour opportunities of job-seekers and a faster filling of vacancies for shortage occupations. In addition, everyone will be encouraged to be in control of its own career, to take part in lifelong learning and to obtain a qualification.

The recognition of competences takes place in a trajectory of four phases, starting with a description and mapping of the own competences, and ending in their assessment and certification. For the final two steps a person can turn to a RAC-testing centre, such as the Adult Education Centres, the VDAB (Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency) or Syntra (Flemish Agency for Entrepreneurial Training). From 2019 all these testing centres are subject to new conditions. They will
have to base themselves on professional qualifications which are established by actors within the domain of work and give an extensive description of what one must know and be able to do.

Also on 1 June 2018 the Flemish Government attached its approval on principle to a ‘common quality assurance framework for vocational training’. With this decision every vocational training programme will every six years be subject to a renewed and similar quality test to guarantee that the programme effectively aims for the competences of the vocational qualification. This will apply to all vocational training programmes offered by a programme organiser or RAC-testing centre outside education. The quality control will take place by an independent supervisory body on the basis of a common quality assurance framework. By doing so the government will guarantee the quality of the programmes.

The two decrees are currently negotiated with the social partners.

**Expansion of the Erasmus + program**

The European Education Ministers approved the successor of Erasmus + on 26 November. Through Erasmus +, young people and teachers are given the opportunity to study abroad, learn a different language and gain life experience. In 2018 there were more than 10,000 Flemish participants. Flemish Minister of Education is aiming for at least 30,000 participants a year in the future.

**Further steps in the automatic and mutual recognition of higher and secondary education diplomas**

The European education ministers also agreed to continue work on the automatic and mutual recognition of higher and secondary education diplomas. Pupils and students still experience too many difficulties to have their diplomas recognized in other European member states. Existing procedures are expensive and sometimes time-consuming.

In concrete terms, the member states have agreed to take significant steps forward by 2025. They want to recognize diplomas in secondary education and higher education with a view to access to higher education and to further higher follow-up studies.

Furthermore, Member States have agreed to speed up recognition of shorter learning periods of up to one year abroad. Institutions must make agreements between them for this. The Ministers of Education want to prevent pupils and students from having to repeat their year unnecessarily.

**Decree part-time education in the arts**

On 22 December 2017 the Flemish Government attached its final approval to the draft decree on part-time education in the arts (see [2017 - New decree on part-time education in the arts](#)). The new decree is based on three ambitions: simplifying regulations, a firm anchoring in education, and a connection with the arts and pre-primary and compulsory education. After the final approval by the Flemish Government, the draft decree was submitted with the Flemish Parliament. The new decree will become operational in September 2018.

Also on 22 December 2017 the Flemish Government attached its first approval on principle to two implementing orders to the draft decree on part-time education in the arts. Subject of the first implementing order is the programme offer, organisation, staff establishment, collecting enrolment fees, and certification of part-time education in the arts. The second order focuses on local cooperation initiatives between schools for elementary and secondary education. After the first approval on principles the draft orders were subject of negotiations with the social partners. Both implanting orders were approved on principle for a second time by the Flemish Government on
respectively 16 and 9 March 2018. After the second approval on principle the draft implementing orders were handed over to the Council of State for advice.

On 9 February 2018 the Flemish Government attached a first approval on principle to an implementing order on concordance in part-time education in the arts. By implementing the new decree for part-time education in the arts a number of existing subjects will change their name. By means of the concordances the staff members involved will retain the rights and duties assigned within an old subject when teaching under a new subject name. After the first approval on principle by the Flemish Government the draft order was subject of negotiations with the social partners, after which is was handed over to the Council of State for advice.

On 2 March 2018 the Flemish Government attached its second approval on principle to the decision on the attainment targets in part-time education in the arts (see [2017 - New decree on part-time education in the arts](#)). Current and concrete attainment targets raises clear expectations on the learning results in view, which are at the same time sufficiently challenging and realistic. From 1 September 2018 the academies will apply the new attainment targets. The approval of the attainment targets signifies a final anchoring of the sector of part-time education in the arts within the education sector in Flanders.

### 2017

**New decree on part-time education in the arts**

On 12 May 2017 a new draft decree on part-time education in the arts was subject of a first approval on principle by the Flemish Government. The key elements of the draft decree are:

- a stronger orientation at the local level
- more freedom for the academies
- options for lifelong learning
- room for differentiation
- up to date attainment targets
- tackling administrative burden
- keeping an open-end system (more pupils equals more means)

From 1 September 2018 children from the age of six will be allowed to take all disciplines in part-time education in the arts in Flanders. Where up until now they can only take part in dance classes or classes on visual art, they will from school year 2018-2019 be granted access to music and drama. For children of 6 and 7 years old initiation training can be organized where they get acquainted with various artistic domains and uncover which form of expression meets best their talent and personality.

The draft decree provides a closer cooperation between part-time education in the arts, pre-primary education, compulsory education and higher education (teacher training programme). Local cooperation initiatives strengthen the cultural awareness and cultural expression of youngsters who now do not take part in part-time education in the arts.

The prohibition on setting up new programmes is lifted which allows school governing boards to establish new seats. This improves the participation opportunities for pupils and enhance equal opportunities. The norms with regard to rationalization and distance guarantee that the offer stays sufficiently rational and spread.

In the renewed part-time education in the arts it will be possible to offer new training programmes,
such as producer, choreographer or a training to become a DJ. The option of spreading the programme over time is introduced, which facilitates the combination of work and taking part in part-time education in the arts.

Until now there are no basic competences, attainment targets of developmental goals established for part-time education in the arts, while the final goals are written down in minimal curricula which are over 25 years old and thus outdated. The new draft decree introduces sober and up to date attainment targets. In order to lay these down the Flemish Government attached on the 1 December 2017 its first approval on principle to an order on the attainment targets in part-time education in the arts. The order is now subject of negotiation in competent sector committees.

**Strategic Plan Literacy 2017-2024**

On 15 September 2017 the Flemish Government approved a third plan on raising literacy, the Strategic Plan on Literacy 2017-2024. In this third plan an approach based on projects is replaced by a structural anchoring of a number of good practices in the field of prevention, remediation and sensitization. Responsibility is shared by all policy domains and actors involved.

The plan contains five strategic goals:

1. Realizing a significant raise in the number of youngsters leaving secondary education with sufficient literacy competences, which allows them to function independently and to participate in society and to personally develop and learn.

2. Raising literary within a family context in order to break the transfer of illiteracy from one generation to the other.

3. Strengthening the literacy competences from job-seekers and employers in the framework of their professional training, their pathway to work or within their employment, with the aim of raising their chances to find and keep employment and enabling them to keep pace with the evolutions on the labour market.

4. Strengthening the literacy competences of people in poverty, with the aim of raising their chances to exit from poverty and enhancing their participation in society.

5. Raising digital literacy of youngsters and adults, to allow them to keep track of the quickly digitalizing society.

The Strategic Plan on Literacy 2017-2024 contains the spearheads of the Flemish literacy policy for the future. The plan will, in consultation with the policy domains and actors involved, be implemented in commitments. These will be anchored in a declaration of commitment between the Flemish Government and the actors involved. This declaration will be presented to the Flemish Government for approval.

**Implementation of the STEM Action Plan**

Flanders continues to implement the STEM action plan which was established in 2012 and aims at
inciting more students to choose for a career in exact sciences or technology. The Flemish minister of Education and Training is responsible for the coordination of this strategic interministerial plan which runs from 2012 until 2020.

Recent action have been implemented in the context of the STEM:

- A STEM portal was opened which clusters all information on STEM in Flanders.

- 92 schools received a budget for a long-term project to link STEM to energy and climate, which fits the goals of the second Flemish summit on climate. These projects run for a duration of two school years (2017-2019).

- In May 2017 the STEMmonitor 2017 was published. This publication offers an update on the number of pupils and students opting for STEM in secondary and higher education.

- The regional technological centres organised 25 intensive CPD-workshops to schools in technical and vocational secondary education.

- Support was offered to two learning networks on STEM for elementary and secondary education which, in cooperation with the pedagogical guidance services and the teacher training programmes, spread good practices on STEM in schools.

- Also the network for the STEM-academies was further supported.

**Automising of school and study grants**

Flanders continues to work on automising the process of applying and granting scholarships for pupils and students. Application forms which have been filled out in advance have been sent to persons receiving a scholarship or grant in the previous years. This resulted in an automised set-up of 190,000 dossiers as a result of which in school year 2016-2017 for the first time over 500,000 dossiers were processed. The automatic granting of school and study grants is part of a policy on fighting poverty and creating equal education opportunities.
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