

Higher education advancement fund

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

PRACTICAL MEASURE/INITIATIVE

 BELGIUM-FL

Timeline

2021 Approved/Agreed

2022 Implementation

2023 Completed

ID number 43788

Background

In the context of Flemish Resilience Recovery plan, a strategic fund for innovation in higher education courses and for the training infrastructure in higher education has been set up: the Higher education advancement fund (*Voorsprongfonds*).

The current associate degree, bachelor and master programmes have a role to play in the supply of lifelong learning, but there is also a need for shorter, more flexible and modular pathways that can be offered as retraining and further training or as a deepening or broadening pathway. This could be post-initial education, but also micro-credentials, allowing certification of shorter pathway in higher education.

Objectives

The objective of the Higher education advancement fund is to make higher education in Flanders more digital, flexible and modern. One of the key points is to further develop lifelong learning in higher education, including more focus on labour market needs.

Description

The main actions within the key point 'further developing lifelong learning in higher education' of the Higher education advancement fund are:

1. Agile offer of lifelong learning

There is a need for retraining, reorientation and reskilling. This includes developing micro-credentials and reshaping of programmes, in which social partners are involved. It is essential to strengthen cooperation with the private sector, e.g. in the context of dual learning. New, innovative pathways should also be elaborated, aiming at vulnerable target groups, e.g. jobseekers, non-native speakers or newcomers whose higher education degree is not (fully) recognised.

2. Vision development on lifelong learning in higher education

There is a need for a widely supported and shared vision on lifelong learning in higher education. The government, together with the higher education institutions, social partners and other actors, will develop this vision. This also implies examining the possibilities for

developing a business model or funding mechanism to stimulate lifelong learning in higher education.

The European guidelines on reporting will be followed. The roll-out of the Higher education advancement fund will be steered and monitored by a steering committee, in which not only the Flemish government but also the implementing institutions and the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) are represented. In addition, thorough (scientific) monitoring of the various actions and results, will be provided for, both process-related and qualitative, both on the Flemish and the institutional levels.

For each action, a follow-up and evaluation strategy is provided. The efficient use of resources is monitored closely by Government Commissioners.

2021 Approved/Agreed

In 2021, the Higher education advancement fund was set up and adopted by the Flemish Government.

2022 Implementation

In 2022, 12 plans were approved to award a project grant under the Higher education advancement fund for colleges and universities. The plans are highly diverse.

Within the advancement fund, there are the following three main objectives:

- (a) the development of a Flemish education portfolio that is future-proof and agile;
- (b) developing lifelong learning within higher education;
- (c) strengthening digital forms of education.

Within each main objective, short-term and long-term actions are linked. The short-term actions are focused on a concrete development, e.g. a call to develop a policy, a track to develop a new training, or an investment incentive; they aim for a visible and measurable result within the duration of this Head Start Fund. Higher education institutions are responsible for these actions.

The long-term actions are broader, deal with aspects such as vision development and policy organisation at the Flemish level and run beyond the duration of the fund. Both are interconnected. The actions in the short term can provide input for the long-term process through their experiences and results; the broader process can also inspire the concrete actions already underway.

2023 Completed

The actions formulated in 2022 were finalised in 2023. A report was published by the Flemish government in which the details of the results were discussed. The *Voorsprongfonds* successfully achieved its objectives: higher education institutions introduced new and flexible programmes, developed micro-credentials to support lifelong learning, and invested in digital and hybrid teaching infrastructure. Overall, the fund strengthened innovation, collaboration, and digital transformation in Flemish higher education.

Bodies responsible

- Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy (until 2025)

Target group

Learners

Learners with migrant background, including refugees

Adult learners
Unemployed and jobseekers
Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment

Thematic categories

Governance of VET and lifelong learning

Engaging VET stakeholders and strengthening partnerships in VET

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Transparency and portability of VET skills and qualifications

Developing and applying qualifications smaller/shorter than full

Supporting lifelong learning culture and increasing participation

Promotion strategies and campaigns for VET and lifelong learning

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

VET agile in adapting to labour market challenges

VET as a driver for innovation and growth preparing for digital and green transitions and occupations in high demand

VET promoting equality of opportunities

Subsystem

CVET

Further reading

[Vision statement Higher education advancement fund](#)

[Communication](#)

[Communication from the Flemish Government - Considerations on the Higher Education Advancement Fund](#)

“ … ” Cite as

Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). Higher education advancement fund: Belgium-FL. In Cedefop, & ReferNet. (2026). *Timeline of VET policies in Europe* (2025 update) [Online tool].

<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/43788>