

Introducing work-based learning in higher and adult education

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

REGULATION/LEGISLATION

 BELGIUM-FL

Timeline



ID number 28006

Background

In 2018, the Decree on the legislative framework for the implementation of dual learning at secondary education level was adopted. In 2018, the Ministers for Education and Work expressed their ambition to introduce dual learning also in higher education and formal adult education. These ambitions were echoed in the Coalition Agreement of the Flemish Government (2019-24), indicating that a policy framework and regulations for dual learning would be developed for these two education levels.

Objectives

The government of Flanders aims to intensify and increase the share of work-based learning in higher education and formal adult education programmes to close the gap between education and the labour market.

Description

In May 2018, the Flemish Parliament adopted the law to integrate higher profession-oriented education (formerly called HBO5 programmes) into a fully fledged component of higher education (as short-cycle programmes leading to an associate degree). To stress this difference, the name HBO5 was taken out and replaced by the associated degree programmes (HBO programmes). At least one third of the learning period in this type of programme must be work-based, which is intended to attract adult learners (aged 18+) who have not yet found their place in higher education. The level of these associated degree programmes is higher than in secondary education, but lower than in a professional bachelor programme.

Inspired by the new dual learning in secondary education, the work-based component in higher and adult education is under revision. In 2019 and 2020, institutions from higher (HBO-programmes) and also adult education can respond to annual calls to test a new dual learning variant for their vocational programmes. These pilot projects aim to define a structured and generalised approach to dual learning which can be rolled out in formal adult education and higher education.

As education and labour market partners are involved, both the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training and the Flemish Ministry of Work and Social Economy are responsible for the development and implementation of dual learning in Flanders. The Flemish Partnership Dual Learning is established with the authority to recognise a company as a high-quality workplace in the context of dual training and other alternating courses. It is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the agreements in the workplace, informing companies about dual learning, supporting and mobilising companies according to the supply of workplaces and to provide advice on dual learning, such as through annual monitoring reports. Representatives of employers and employees, educational institutions, other providers of dual learning (training centres for entrepreneurial training, 'Syntra'), the Regional public employment agency (VDAB), Department of Work, Department of education, SYNTRA Vlaanderen are part of the partnership.

2018 Approved/Agreed

2019 Implementation

In the academic year 2019/20, full integration of the associated degree programmes at university colleges has started. From March 2019 to August 2020, 14 projects were financed by the Flemish European Social Fund (ESF) Agency, exploring the possibilities of dual learning in higher education and formal adult education.

2020 Implementation

In November 2020, the Flemish ESF agency launched a second call for proposals to stimulate dual learning in the two education levels.

2021 Implementation

In 2021, several ESF funded projects exploring the feasibility of dual learning in higher and adult learning started for at least two academic school years (2021/22 and 2022/23). 10 projects in higher education and 5 projects in adult learning were executed. Several training programmes are redesigned as a dual pathway, whereby several organisational aspects are explored (how to arrange the programme, how to engage companies, what regulatory framework would support these dual programmes, ...).

2022 Implementation

In formal adult education, the Flemish Government adopted a Decree on the implementation of dual learning in adult education on 25th of March 2022. Starting from 1 September 2022, adult education centre (*Centra voor Volwassenenonderwijs*, CVO) can offer dual tracks with up to 50% of work-based learning which lead to a professional qualification. The CVO targets groups such as adults who want to obtain a qualification, certificate or diploma, jobseekers and unemployed people seeking to improve their employability or retrain for a new profession, workers aiming to upskill, reskill or change careers, or early school leavers who wish to obtain a qualification later in life.

In higher education, the possibilities of dual learning was explored in the mentioned ESF funded projects.

2023 Implementation

In 2023, the implementation of dual learning in formal adult education continued, especially in the healthcare sector this measure is used. Sectoral social partners are ready to extend their services to adult education centres in organising dual programmes.

New pilot projects in higher education institutions and centres for adult education were added. Universities and high schools are exploring the possibility of dual learning in different programmes, the graduate track to professional bachelors and educational

masters. Different fields were implicated: chemistry, accounting, retail management, education, marketing, tourism and recreation management, transport and logistics. All of these programmes had a share of at least 33% in work-based learning, while some reported even 60 to 70%.

Additionally, more funding was made available to support the implementation of dual learning, including subsidies for companies who participate in dual learning tracks. Formal partnerships with companies were also made.

2024 Implementation

In 2024, the implementation of formal adult education in dual learning continued. The number of students participating in dual learning increases steadily, as are the number of possible study fields and agreements. This growth is being monitored. Most of the students participate in dual learning as an employee.

2025 Implementation

In 2025, the implementation of formal adult education in dual learning continued. The number of possible study fields increased yearly, based on agreements between sectoral and educational partners. 'Assistant cook' and 'care worker' are the trajectories that have been organised up till now. Most learners participate in dual learning as an employee, whereby their employer provides the workplace learning environment. In Flemish adult education, in addition to dual learning, other forms of intensive workplace learning are also offered, however these programmes do not comply with the provisions of the Flemish regulations on dual learning in adult education.

Bodies responsible

- Flemish Department of Education and Training
- Flemish Department of Work and Social Economy (until 2025)
- Flemish Partnership Dual Learning
- Flemish Department of Work, Economy, Science, Innovation and Social Economy

Target group

Learners

Young people (15-29 years old)

Adult learners

Unemployed and jobseekers

Persons in employment, including those at risk of unemployment

Thematic categories

Modernising VET offer and delivery

Modernising VET standards, curricula, programmes and training courses

Expanding VET programmes to EQF levels 5-8

Reinforcing work-based learning, including apprenticeships

European priorities in VET

VET Recommendation

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

VET as an attractive choice based on modern and digitalised provision of training and skills

Subsystem

IVET CVET

Further reading

[Decree on the development of associate degree programmes within the university colleges and the strengthening of teacher training within the university colleges and universities](#)

[Communication to the Flemish Government on dual learning in adult education of 4/12/2020](#)

[Decree dual learning in adult education](#)

“ … ” Cite as

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<https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/tools/timeline-vet-policies-europe/search/28006>