



REPORT COMMISSIONED BY CEDEFOP USING THE OECD QUESTIONNAIRE

REVIEW OF CAREER GUIDANCE POLICIES
REPORT

Flemish-speaking Belgium – October 2003

N.B The views expressed in this document are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of Flemish-speaking Belgium (Flanders) or Cedefop.

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1. DESCRIPTION OF REMIT AND PROCEDURE

Background

In August 2000, the Education Committee and the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee of the OECD ⁽¹⁾ decided to review the policy initiatives and activities undertaken in the field of career guidance. The main aim was to obtain information on how career guidance is managed, organised and implemented. Above all, this concerned information deemed useful in relation to exchanges of views on lifelong learning and employment initiatives.

To that end, the secretariat of the OECD prepared a questionnaire for use in drawing up reports, at meetings between experts and policy-makers and during visits. The answers to the questions dealing with the various topics in the questionnaire should shed light on how career guidance is arranged in each of the OECD countries and also help compile a database of information that can be used as a basis for comparison.

Fourteen OECD countries responded to the invitation to participate in the review: Australia, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Korea, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom. Each of these countries submitted a completed questionnaire and was visited by a small review team.

Although some OECD member states and future member states did not complete a questionnaire, Cedefop ⁽²⁾ is trying to assess the career guidance situation in these countries by reference to the OECD questionnaire. This initiative is in keeping with the European priority accorded to guidance and counselling. Guidance is regarded as making a major contribution to the achievement of the four policy goals: lifelong learning, social inclusion, employment and economic development.

The World Bank is undertaking a similar initiative in respect of a number of other countries which did not complete the OECD questionnaire.

Description of assignment

This report gives an overview of career guidance policy and provision in Flanders.

⁽¹⁾ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

⁽²⁾ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

The term ‘information, guidance and counselling services’ refers to the services designed to assist individuals in making career choices, regardless of their age or the time in their life when they make such choices. These services can be organised separately or integrated into a wider range of services. In both cases they form part of the focus of the assignment.

Various initiatives or activities are therefore eligible to be mentioned in the context of this report, for example:

- activities at school or elsewhere that help students make course or career choices or survey the labour market;
- individual or group counselling on the choice of education, course, vocational training, reassessment of career direction, and so on;
- provision of information through personal contact or the Internet;
- services for young people without work experience (starters), jobseekers with work experience and people in employment;
- services for the design of instructional material and the dissemination of information.

The report is based on the structure of the OECD questionnaire.

Procedure

On the basis of the description of information, guidance and counselling, various ministers, ministries, departments, organisations (profit and not-for-profit alike), sectors and target groups were involved. Given the short space of time within which the report had to be completed, it was clear at the outset that not all potential projects and provisions could be described in accordance with the structure of the questionnaire. Priority was therefore given to describing the arrangements in the education, self-employed education and employment sectors.

A network of informants and critical readers was used in an attempt to report as fully as possible, notwithstanding the constraints, and in any event to cover the main or most recent initiatives. A word of thanks is due here to all those who worked on the project.

The basic information underlying the report has been obtained from legislation, press releases, policy notes and letters, websites, reports and preparatory reports. The work consisted mainly of searching for and processing this documentation.

It would not have been conducive to the readability of the text to explain all the abbreviations at the start and also to repeat this information in response to each question. A list of the most frequently used abbreviations is therefore appended.

Introduction

Historical basis

Belgium has a long tradition of career guidance. Measures to assess aptitude, particularly for technical subjects, were in place even before 1912. The intention was that the information obtained should be used in choosing a vocation⁽³⁾. The establishment of the Offices for Vocational Orientation by Christiaens in 1912 broadened the focus of career guidance. Greater attention was paid to living conditions and hence also to the specific problems faced by the disadvantaged in planning and pursuing a career. There followed a period of significant development, influenced by the spirit of the age and social changes.

Some factors that are of particular note in the evolution from 1912 to the present day are: (a) the growing importance attached to the involvement of the individual and his environment (evolution from 'orientation' to 'counselling' together with 'independent work forms'); (b) cooperation between two or more partners (coordination and network development), and (c) the growing importance attached to the role of the school or centre as the provider of education or training, which also has the job of looking after the needs of the most vulnerable users of this provision (evolution towards broader personal development, provision for counselling and provision for the specific needs of certain target groups).

The apprenticeship scheme for the self-employed also dates back more than 100 years. Throughout this period, the core of the concept remained unchanged: a job should be learned in the workplace, and there should be closely integrated career guidance at all stages of training.

Following four successive revisions of its constitution, Belgium has evolved since 1970 into a federal State⁽⁴⁾.

This system has three policy levels:

The federal State comprises all Belgian territory and the entire population of Belgium; examples of fields in which the State is competent are social security, justice, defence, public security and the maintenance of public order.

The Regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels Capital Region); the Regions are competent in matters relating to the economy, infrastructure, agriculture, the living environment and employment.

⁽³⁾ For further information on the history of the PMS centres (now Student Counselling Centres), see P. Sacré, *Historiek van de PMS-centra*, 1993, VUB-Press.

⁽⁴⁾ For further background information on the constitutional reforms and their influence on the organisation of Flemish education, see the following brochures: *Onderwijs in Vlaanderen* (Education in Flanders) and *Onderwijsontwikkelingen* (Educational developments). These are available in several languages. Both reports are published by the Education Department of the Ministry of the Flemish Community.

The Communities (the Dutch-, French- and German-speaking Communities); the linguistic Communities are competent in matters relating to education, well-being, health and culture.

There are clearly defined and delimited powers for each of these policy levels.



As a result of the constitutional reforms, career guidance policy initiatives mainly originate within the Regions and Communities. Agreements are made at federal level regarding policy fields delegated to the Communities only if it is considered that a minimum of consistency in the linguistic Communities should be guaranteed. The provisions governing compulsory schooling are one example of this.

In 1989, the Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency (VDAB) became a Flemish public sector body (VOI). Only then did it become possible for Flanders to pursue its own fully-fledged policy geared to the circumstances of its own labour market. In the run-up to this change, two successive stages of constitutional reform provided the requisite legal framework.

During the first stage, there was a transfer of power from the Government Department for Manpower Services (RVA) to the newly established VDAB. Subsequently, during the second stage, the VDAB was made completely independent of the RVA. This immediately led to the introduction of subjects that would receive specific emphasis, in particular high-risk groups, a code of conduct established by decree, and the application of IT to operation and supply.

At a later stage, the VDAB was split into three separate organisations:

- VDAB Management (universal service for employers and jobseekers and assurance of an independent service for jobseekers). ‘Arbeidsmarktbanksys’ became a subsidiary of VDAB Management. This is a partnership between the public and private labour market actors with a view to gathering all relevant labour market data on an online system;
- VDAB Training and Counselling (stimulatory policy pursued in relation to specific target groups of jobseekers, employees or employers);

- VDAB-NV Merit (services for employers in exchange for payment: T-Interim, Consultancy and Outplacement).

Recent developments have had an impact on this structure, on the position of the VDAB and private service providers and on the relationship and collaboration between them ⁽⁵⁾.

Flanders

Flanders chose to combine the parliament and government of the Flemish Region and those of the Flemish Community and thus form a single Flemish Parliament and a single Flemish Government. The name Flanders therefore refers both to the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region. Flanders is divided into five provinces: West Flanders, East Flanders, Antwerp, Flemish Brabant and Limburg.

This report deals solely with Flemish initiatives, in particular those managed or encouraged by the Flemish authorities. Brussels is a separate case. Initiatives undertaken by the Flemish community in Brussels are encouraged and financed by the Flemish Community or Brussels Capital Region. Initiatives undertaken by Brussels Capital Region have not been included in this report. Although Brussels has also seen increasing partnership in recent years ⁽⁶⁾, as well as efforts to achieve greater coordination, there is still criticism that policy initiatives of the two authorities are by no means always coherent or complementary.

A counterpart of the VDAB has been established in Brussels, known as the Brussels Regional Employment Services Agency (BGDA).

Initiatives undertaken by the French-speaking Community and Region (Wallonia) are described in a separate Cedefop report.

While both Communities have a shared heritage and culture, the autonomy accorded to the Communities and Regions by the constitutional reforms has swiftly resulted in processes moving at different speeds and with different emphases in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels.

Flanders has an extensive network of vocational provision and is by no means short of improvement measures. Some might even say that too many innovations have succeeded or supplemented one another in too short a space of time. This puts great pressure on the process of change and implementation attendant on each new initiative and makes it very difficult to keep a general, complete and up-to-date overview of the existing provision in the various sectors. These reservations increase the need for transparency of provision. Similarly, the demand for provision to be better matched to the needs of the customer (demand-oriented system) has grown in recent years. All of this has led to projects and forms of partnership

⁽⁵⁾ See questions 1, 3 and 7.

⁽⁶⁾ Brussels' priority policy is one example of this.

geared towards greater coordination, better coordination of provision (complementarity), the joining of forces and a stronger position for users.

Question 1: Overview of context

‘Career guidance’ is generally integrated into a wider range of activities and is usually related to initiatives aimed at providing education and training ⁽⁷⁾ or employment. Various terms are used to refer to efforts in this field, for example educational and vocational guidance, school career guidance, work path guidance, learning path guidance, career orientation, life career guidance, and so on. Various services are currently involved in the provision of these types of career guidance.

These services differ from one another because:

- the target groups differ;
- the objectives and intended results differ;
- they have been established not by government initiative, but by sectoral funds;
- they may or may not be part of a broader partnership or alliance;
- they employ specific methods or in any event methods applied differently according to the target group or the influence of legislation;
- local authorities may or may not be involved;
- their career guidance efforts may be related either closely or indirectly to other forms of counselling (health, integration, mental and social functioning, learning to learn, etc.);
- a different government minister is responsible;
- different bodies have direct responsibility for implementing initiatives and achieving results.

Despite this diversity, there are significant points of contact and in some cases even overlapping. For that reason, the Flemish Ministers for (a) Education, (b) the Interior and Culture, Youth and Civil Service Affairs, (c) Employment and Tourism and (d) Economic Affairs, Foreign Policy, Foreign Trade and Housing concluded an agreement on 7 July 2000 ⁽⁸⁾ in the form of an action plan entitled ‘Lifelong learning in the right direction’ (Een leven lang leren in goede banen) and planned the establishment of a forum known as the Training

⁽⁷⁾ For an overview of the providers of vocational training, see www.ttnet-vlaanderen.net - a guide published by the Flemish Leonardo da Vinci agency.

⁽⁸⁾ The Culture Minister joined in signing the plan in late 2001.

and Alignment Information Service (DIVA) ⁽⁹⁾ to improve the coordination of educational activities. The Culture Department has made a significant contribution to DIVA not only in the context of lifelong, but also lifewide learning.

In some situations, these administrative agencies also collaborate with services that operate under the responsibility of the Flemish Minister for Welfare, Health, Equal Opportunities and Development Cooperation. This applies to career guidance for the disabled target group involving assistance for young people or with policy on the integration of ethnic minorities.

Obviously, the Flemish authorities also undertake career guidance initiatives in their capacity as employer. Projects involving personal development are launched and monitored by the Training Branch of the General Affairs and Finance Ministry. At present, two projects are central to these efforts: the Career Development Centre (LOC) and the redeployment system (for teaching Community personnel). The equal rights officer of the Flemish Community monitors the various equal opportunities initiatives and provides assistance on an individual basis and on request to the administrative agencies in mapping out specific career stages for personnel from the equal opportunities target group (e.g. the disabled, ethnic minorities and women).

Responsibility for career guidance initiatives therefore lies with various government ministers, but in particular with the Flemish Minister for Education, the Minister for Employment and the Minister for Economic Affairs. ‘Responsibility’ also exists at various levels and with various partners.

Responsibilities and powers in the education sector

‘Education’ means: primary education (nursery school, primary mainstream and special education ⁽¹⁰⁾); secondary education (full-time and part-time courses (general secondary education (ASO); technical secondary education (TSO); vocational secondary education (BSO) and secondary education in the arts (KSO, including special education); adult education (continuing ‘social advancement’ education, primary education, individually supervised courses, second opportunity education and central examining board), and universities and colleges of higher education.

The Education Department is divided into five branches: primary education, secondary education, higher and university education, and permanent education and support.

Each branch prepares and implements educational policy and is headed by a director-general. The secretary-general is responsible for overall control and coordination.

⁽⁹⁾ Known by the acronym ‘DIVA’ (www.diva.be) and previously known as the ‘training interface’. DIVA, which is under the control of the Ministerial Committee for Training, is the main tool of the Flemish government for managing lifelong and lifewide learning activities.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Provision was also made for education for sick children and for schooling at home.

The term competent authority (inrichtende macht) refers to the government body or natural or legal person responsible for one or more institutions (schools, centres or student guidance centres). The competent authority is broadly autonomous. It determines, among other things, what methods are used to implement the obligations imposed on schools, centres and student guidance centres by legislation in exchange for recognition and financial support.

Educational networks are associations that represent the competent authorities. They take over certain responsibilities from the competent authorities. For example, they organise counselling for teachers and in-service training. Flanders has traditionally had three educational networks: community education, subsidised public education and subsidised private education. The first two categories are government-organised forms of education: the Flemish government (community education) and the local authorities (subsidised public education), often referred to collectively as ‘public education’.

Schools and centres belong to one of the three networks and have a competent authority which bears responsibility for the provision of education, including the counselling of students (e.g. course counselling). The school or centre is headed by a principal. In recent years scale enlargement has been encouraged. This has led to forms of partnership and alliances between schools (combined schools).

Student Guidance Centres ⁽¹¹⁾ (CLBs) must, among other things, guarantee the provision of independent and objective course counselling for students. They do this in cooperation with schools or with the ‘Syntra’ training centres (apprenticeship scheme for the self-employed). This cooperation is elaborated formally and specifically in the form of policy plans or policy contracts. Specific working agreements between the schools or the Syntra offices and the CLBs are part of this. They include, for example, agreements on the provision of career guidance.

In recent years, more and more responsibility has been assigned to education providers, while users have also begun to play a significant role. This process of increasing local responsibility has occurred at all educational levels and is being accompanied by a growing focus on quality assurance and a duty to account for the quality and results achieved. The participation of parents and students and the involvement of other partners are discussed in the chapter on stakeholders.

Responsibilities and powers in relation to courses for the self-employed

The network of the Flemish Institute for Independent Entrepreneurship (VIZO) portrays itself as the hub of activities designed to promote high-quality entrepreneurial skills in Flanders. As such, it is the organisation to be contacted by anyone who is or wishes to become a self-

⁽¹¹⁾ CLBs were introduced to Flanders in September 2000. The 75 CLBs are the product of the merger of 300 former Psycho-Medico-Social (PMS) Centres and School Inspection Centres (MSTs).

employed business person. The network organises: (a) apprenticeships; (b) courses for the self-employed; (c) continued training and retraining; (d) counselling for the self-employed and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and courses for business counsellors, and (e) promotion of craft skills.

The VIZO network has traditionally been characterised by the provision of courses in the workplace⁽¹²⁾, the close involvement of employers and sectors and integrated career guidance.

Over 200 occupations can be learned under an apprenticeship scheme.

The network consists of various partners at different levels. The powers of each of these partners and how they discharge their duties indicate who bears responsibility for, among other things, career guidance and how this responsibility is borne. As will become apparent in subsequent chapters, the system is in a state of flux.

VIZO was established as a public body with legal personality. By founding the institute, the government integrated two kinds of powers⁽¹³⁾ and assigned different duties and responsibilities to a single institute. The institute has responsibility for promoting youth employment and training more and better educated entrepreneurs.

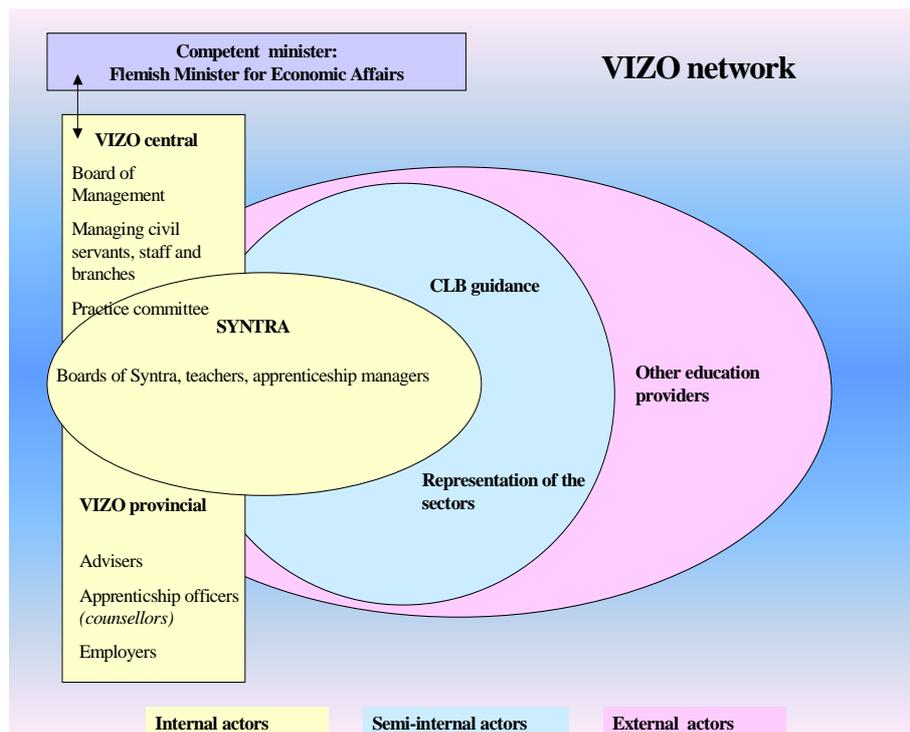
VIZO is managed by a management board, which is assisted by a ‘practice committee’⁽¹⁴⁾. Day-to-day management is in the hands of a civil servant, who is supported by a staff and by administrative employees and advisers. Advisers work at either central or provincial level.

VIZO can establish various committees and determine their powers and composition. Persons are nominated to sit on these committees by the organisations concerned. One example is the CLB committee, which has prepared agreements between VIZO and the educational networks. This committee drew up a text outlining its views on student guidance during apprenticeship and submitted a model policy contract to the Syntra offices. Although VIZO is free to establish committees as it sees fit, it has a statutory obligation to establish particular committees. One of these was the apprenticeship officer committee. To date, apprenticeship officers have worked as self-employed persons. Recognition of apprenticeship officers is a matter for the ‘practice committee’.

⁽¹²⁾ Particularly in apprenticeship schemes, the emphasis is on the four-day course and guidance in the workplace. However, the course for entrepreneurs also requires the student to be in the relevant (or a related) occupation. Otherwise, the student must follow an additional practical course. This is comparable to the apprenticeship agreement during an apprenticeship scheme.

⁽¹³⁾ The integration concerned teacher training policy (previously carried out by the Institute for Continuous Education for the Self-Employed) and administrative monitoring (previously carried out by the Education for the Self-Employed Service of the Education and Permanent Education Branch). Regionalised services of the Economic and Social Institute for the Self-Employed were also transferred to the Institute. The National Coordination and Consultation Committee for Continuous Education for the Self-Employed had previously been absorbed by the Institute for Continuous Education.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Its composition is discussed in response to question 4.



Flanders has five Syntra umbrella organisations, which together organise 21 teaching places. These provide the vast bulk of training for the self-employed. The Syntra are autonomous not-for-profit organisations, which are managed by professional and interprofessional associations from the region. They are reliant on VIZO for their subsidy.

Responsibilities and powers in relation to employment

The Employment Branch is part of the Economics, Employment, Home Affairs and Agriculture Department of the Ministry of the Flemish Community. Its duties include preparing, implementing and evaluating Flemish labour market policy. It also plays a coordinating and support role in relation to policy. The Employment Branch consists of a directorate-general, employment unit, migration and labour market policy unit, employment inspectorate and the European Social Fund (ESF) Agency.

The VDAB has a socioeconomic function. Job vacancies must be filled as quickly and efficiently as possible (economic function), while jobseekers, including those belonging to groups that are hard to place, must have the best possible chance to integrate into the labour market (social function). The VDAB is a Flemish government institution which operates under a management contract ⁽¹⁵⁾.

The VDAB is run by an administrative committee. This committee is composed of equal numbers of representatives of employees' and employers' organisations and can establish working groups. One example of such a working group is the central coordination committee,

⁽¹⁵⁾ See also questions 3 and 11.

which is one of the places where the dual role of public employment service agency and private labour market intermediary are combined.

The day-to-day executive of the VDAB consists of an administrator-general and four assistant administrators-general.

The VDAB consists of a central management board, 13 local customer centres (regional VDAB office) and a regional vocational training service in Brussels.

A subregional placement committee is attached to each regional VDAB office. At this local level, cooperation with other partners is arranged in the form of a 'local job shop'.

The VDAB structure has been modified on various occasions in recent years and a fresh reorganisation is now underway. This is being carried out in conjunction with the overall reform of the Flemish administrative system (under the Better Administrative Policy Programme). Further changes in responsibilities and powers can therefore be expected. The restructuring will take place in three stages: (1) the hiving-off of commercial services; (2) the establishment of Jobsys, and (3) the division of the VDAB into a management and 'actor' agency.

As part of stage 1, the public company 't-groep' and the public holding company for a 'social' object 'Werkholding' were set up on 16 December 2002. t-groep brings together two services with different trade names, namely the 't-interim' office and Ascento (the entire range of HRM services⁽¹⁶⁾). The profits from these activities are used by the Flemish government to fund employment-related socioeconomic projects. The principal activity of Werkholding is to participate in t-groep and in similar entities established under private law. The public company itself can develop a social investment policy.

Preparatory activities are being undertaken for stages 2 and 3. The establishment of Jobsys⁽¹⁷⁾ is planned for spring 2004.

In their entirety, the VDAB services comprise job placement, training and education, career guidance and outplacement.

Other providers of career guidance

Career guidance services originating from sectoral or private initiatives (whether commercial or non-commercial) are not dealt with in this report. Nor does it cover career guidance initiatives by employees' organisations. For further information on these matters, reference should be made to the employment conference organised at federal level (September 2003)

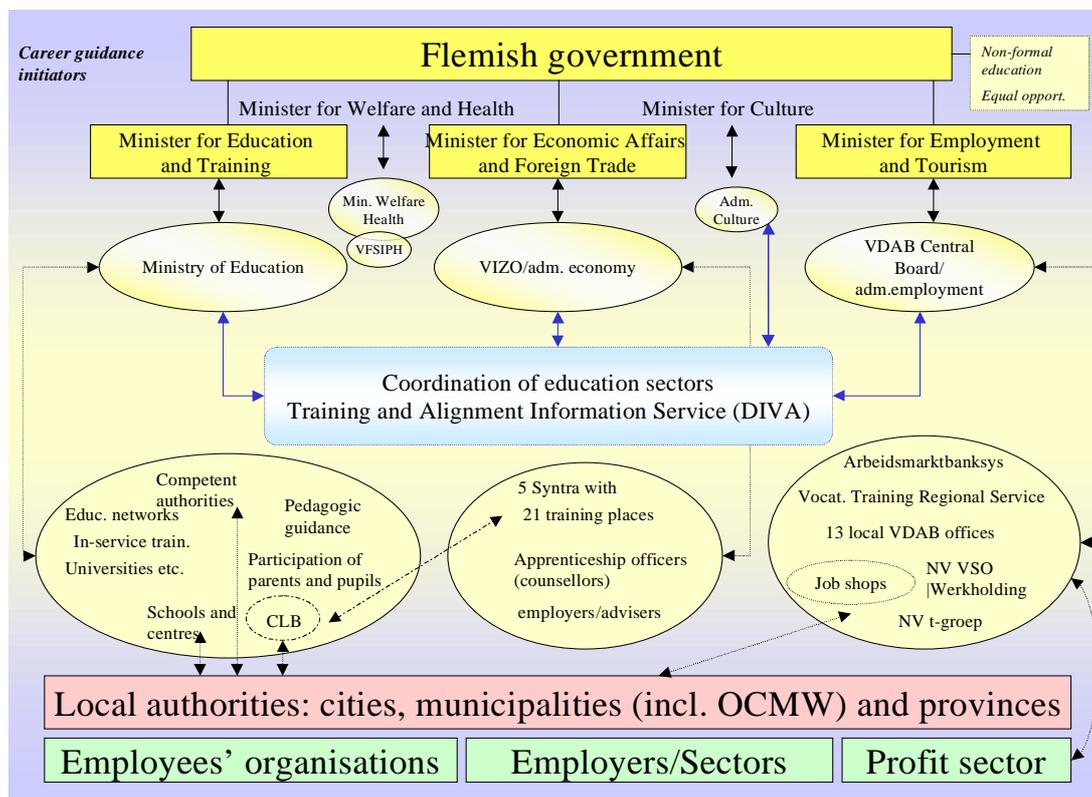
⁽¹⁶⁾ Previously known by the name 't-consult'.

⁽¹⁷⁾ See question 12: data and research.

and, above all, to a detailed report on career guidance in Flanders ⁽¹⁸⁾. The VDAB's website (www.vdab.be) also contains many links to further information on this subject.

There are also occasional references to career guidance services by universities and institutes of higher education. However, these are only coincidental references and do not provide a complete overview of what is available.

Similarly, this report does not deal in depth with career guidance services by sociocultural work organisations, youth work organisations, local authorities or libraries. Their contribution to career guidance generally involves providing information, acting as a referral channel and taking part in local schemes. Often one of the three sectors (education, courses for the self-employed and employment) forms the basis of such a scheme or the initiative emanates from DIVA. Youth work has a direct role in relation to career guidance insofar as it provides information on career guidance services (for example from General Welfare Work Centres) and an indirect role in the form of assistance (sometimes in relation to career guidance, but often independently of it).



An exception was made for the Flemish Fund for the Social Integration of Disabled Persons (VFSIPH), the policy on integration and career development in the administrative service of the Flemish government ⁽¹⁹⁾. In view of their vision of career guidance, the methods they use,

⁽¹⁸⁾ www.vandenbroucke.com, employment conference (federal initiative). 'Towards a right to career guidance', a report by the King Baudouin Foundation commissioned by the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism, June 2002. www.kbs-frb.be. See also Annex 4.

⁽¹⁹⁾ See Annexes 1, 2 and 3.

the organisation of their services and their wide distribution in Flanders, a detailed description of their operation is included in an annex to this report.

Question 2: Influences, strategic goals and initiatives

2.1. Influences and strategic goals

Various factors influence the nature of government policies and the specific measures that result therefrom. Each of the three actors dealt with in this report (i.e. the Education Department, VIZO and the VDAB) has its own individual points of emphasis. These influences emanate both from Flemish politics and policy and from the commitments of Flanders at global level.

A variety of factors are directly or indirectly relevant owing to the definition of the term ‘career guidance’ and to the high degree of ‘integrated career guidance’. This report emphasises the factors that contribute directly to the manner in which career guidance is developing in Flanders. Accordingly, particular emphasis may be placed on the creation of new structures or the reform of existing structures (structural prevention and parameters). At other times, the report indicates the boundaries within which services, projects and local initiatives can take place (substantive indicators and output projections). In both cases, legislation provides the requisite foundations and legal basis for the staffing ratio, subsidisation and financing and indicates what strategic (and sometimes operational) goals are to be achieved. Although specific criteria for the results to be achieved are seldom imposed, the final assessment (evaluation) takes into account the goals that have been set. An indicative role is played by exam pass rates, figures on students who stay back a year, referrals, the extent to which students lag behind children of their own age, transfers, intake and drop-out rates, absenteeism, unfilled vacancies, unemployment figures, and so on. The collection and processing of data, which are useful in evaluating goals and elaborating policy initiatives, are dealt with in a separate chapter.

Flanders

The ‘Colourful Flanders’ project was the result of a policy document of 11 July 2000 in which the Flemish government assessed possible responses to future challenges. In 2001 experts in six ‘vision groups’ met to consider these challenges in the fields of education, enterprise, employment, culture, special needs and the environment. This Flemish Conference, as it was known, concluded with the signing of the ‘Vilvoorde Pact’. Representatives of civil society and the Flemish Government signed the Pact on 22 November 2001, thereby entering into commitments concerning sustainable development and international openness. Specific objectives in the Pact include, for example, increasing the number of: (a) people with basic

literacy skills; (b) people with ICT skills, and (c) young people leaving school with basic qualifications. The Pact also reaffirms the commitment to preventing a divided society by guaranteeing educational opportunities to everyone throughout the entire education process and by efficiently tackling instances of unequal opportunities.

Education

‘The central remit of education policy is to guarantee the quality of education and training. The four pillars of education - learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be - from Learning: the treasure within by Jacques Delors (1996), provide a fruitful basis for viewing the function of Flemish education policy. After all, these pillars emphasise knowledge, skills and competences, social skills and personal development.’

These are the words of the Flemish Minister for Education and Training at the start of the 2000-2004 policy document. This introduction refers to the development of a Flemish education policy that is compatible with a changing Europe, but also indicates that career guidance may be interpreted broadly in this context and should therefore take account of other areas of life and other forms of guidance and counselling. The broad context within which career guidance in education takes (or should take) effect focuses on an integrated approach and the overall development of personality.

Given this criterion, a number of findings and statistical data became relevant as a basis for determining policy priorities and strategic goals in education. Below are examples taken from policy documents which are relevant because of their relationship to career guidance.

‘The share of investment in infrastructure in the Flemish education budget is declining relative to that of comparable OECD ⁽²⁰⁾ countries.’ As a result of this finding, investment in education and training was made an important strategic goal, to be centred around two major challenges/results: (1) the need to give all young people and adults optimal opportunities to engage in lifelong and lifewide learning and (2) the need to prevent any further division of society and at the same time avoid disaffection and violence.

The education received by students still differs substantially according to their aptitude, physical or mental condition, social, economic or cultural environment, age and sex. Students do not start off with equal opportunities in education and the inequality of opportunity often becomes more pronounced during their school career. The level of educational attainment is the main fault line along which society divides into the advantaged and the disadvantaged. This finding, which is described in the 2000-2004 policy document, has formed the basis for concerted efforts to achieve equal opportunities in education. Guaranteeing equal opportunities forms part of the delivery of quality education. To ensure the battle against social exclusion and social division has maximum effect, it is waged at all educational levels

⁽²⁰⁾ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

and in all educational sectors, with particular emphasis on lifelong learning. It also follows that attention must be paid to the organisation and content of education. To quote the policy document, ‘Schools and the composition of their teaching staff and student population must reflect the composition of society’.

The Flemish education system still has too many students who stay back a year and others who become discouraged during their school career and decide to switch to a different educational level on the basis of incorrect course choices (the ‘waterfall effect’) or simply play truant. The number of transfers to special schools is high and raises questions about the extent to which social and cultural background factors and the existence of mechanisms of disadvantage affect this figure. Besides strategic goals such as guaranteeing equal educational opportunity, optimising educational provision and preventing any further division of society, the Flemish government has also set operational goals, for example: (a) reducing the number of students who stay back a year; (b) reducing the number of students leaving school without a qualification; (c) improving the quality of transfers to special schools, and (d) preventing truancy and drop-outs. This has led to the formulation of the following aim: ‘In education, the test of the effectiveness of efforts to combat social divisions will be the extent to which transfers to special schools are limited to those students who really need it and the extent to which the number of students who stay back a year is reduced. The goal here is to reduce these numbers to the average for comparable OECD countries. The Flemish government will make extra efforts to that effect by giving schools the opportunity to widen the range of educational needs for which they cater.’

The policy document also states: ‘It is the intention, in accordance with European employment guidelines, to increase the number of young people leaving school with qualifications.’ In 1998, the Flemish government commissioned the development of an instrument to monitor the number of unqualified school leavers⁽²¹⁾. The aim is to have information on the level of drop-outs by the end of this parliament⁽²²⁾. Researchers apply three dimensions and define three levels of unqualified school leavers on this basis. ‘Unqualified school leavers include all students from the age of 18 who do not have:

- level 1: a certificate and/or testimonial for the second school year of the third stage;
- level 2: a testimonial for the third school year of the second stage of vocational secondary education (BSO), a qualification certificate of part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO), a testimonial for the fifth year of special education (BUSO-OV3), or a certificate of the apprenticeship scheme run by VIZO;
- level 3: a certificate for the second stage of technical/vocational secondary education (TSO/BSO).

It was evidently impossible to make a good estimate for the group at level 2.

⁽²¹⁾ OBPWO 98.10. Research carried out by the Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA).

⁽²²⁾ Dropping-out is defined as leaving a course before its prescribed completion.

The extra efforts mentioned above are the reform of secondary education, legislation on compliance with compulsory schooling (now also modified in primary education) and educational priority policy and the policy of catering for a wider range of educational needs. During this parliament, the policy of catering for a wider range of educational needs and educational priority policy were combined in a single category after evaluation (cf. Equal Educational Opportunities Decree). This was accompanied by a number of substantive adjustments. Providing equal educational opportunities involves focusing attention on the needs of certain target groups and on expanding and improving the provision for these needs in each primary school.

Other strategic goals and the accompanying legislation that should be mentioned in this regard are:

- the importance of quality assurance, for which primary responsibility rests with the schools and institutions themselves; the government encourages self-evaluation and requires a systematic and continuous process of improvement;
- the need for lifelong and lifewide learning, which has led to a wide range of initiatives in cooperation with several partners (cf. the Vilvoorde Pact, an action plan entitled 'Lifelong learning in the right direction' and DIVA). In May 2002, a working group of the Flemish Economic and Social Consultation Committee (VESOC) ⁽²³⁾ called for greater attention to be paid to coordinating the action plan with the goals set out in the Vilvoorde Pact, for provision to be made for inclusion of the new points of emphasis from the Barcelona Summit and for efforts to be made to eliminate the unequal participation of adults in permanent education. As regards the last point, the working group requested in particular that extra efforts be made for low-skilled workers and people not in employment. It also asked that the aspects of the action plan dealing with rights and duties in connection with lifelong learning and an overall vision of lifelong learning for the occupationally disabled be worked out in more detail.

The Adult Education Decree (1999) had previously strengthened the statutory framework for adult education. The aims of this decree are defined as providing greater opportunities for: (a) obtaining a qualification; (b) receiving additional training; (c) personal development, and (d) obtaining a better command of foreign languages (cf. specific labour market problems). Second-chance education became a policy priority, and when the centres became recognised as centres for adult education, they obtained a firmer position in the education world. The establishment of a Flemish action plan to reduce low literacy levels was given the go-ahead in late 2002. The primary education inspectorate recommended an action plan geared towards Flemish needs and has drawn up an objectives document for this purpose. Once this has been approved by the Flemish Government, a task force will be established (probably in late 2003), which will produce a report on the basis of which specific action can be taken;

⁽²³⁾ See also the SERV Newsletter.

- the need to provide for sufficient flexibility. The central element is the idea that in the future, learning paths can be mapped out with greater flexibility. Flexibility is sought at various levels: (a) in higher education; (b) in relation to lifelong and lifewide learning, and (c) within compulsory education. This calls into question the foundations of the present system (the division of the education system, selection and orientation mechanisms and the underlying vision of the learning processes). The efforts in this area are evident from, among other things, activities underway in the context of the renewal of the training structure, the elaboration of an experiment involving the modularisation of vocationally oriented courses in secondary education (BSO, DBSO and BUSO) between 1997 and 2007 and the modularisation of adult education courses. This involves a far-reaching organisational change to the way in which education is provided. Tailored learning paths should be used to ensure students do not leave without a qualification.

In higher education, the need for flexibility is perceived in relation to access to higher education, the learning environment, the curriculum and the organisation of education. There is a draft decree that regulates the introduction of a credit system. The flexibilisation decree⁽²⁴⁾ alters the evaluation of the progress made with a course of study. Students are evaluated on the basis of each course component and no longer on the basis of performance over an academic year. If this aim is to be realised in practice, sound learning path counselling will be necessary, together with an administrative student monitoring system;

- an action plan aimed at evaluating technical and vocational secondary education.

Training for the self-employed (VIZO)

Although the influences and policy priorities described above are emphatically linked to education policy, they also (a) have a bearing on VIZO and the VDAB (e.g. flexible learning and education paths, the modularisation of courses, lifelong and lifewide learning and recognition of acquired competences) and (b) have aspects in common (e.g. quality assurance and the trend towards scale enlargement).

Nonetheless, there are other sector-specific influences and targets that are relevant to both and should be mentioned in the context of this report.

In late 2000, VIZO launched a project known as the Strategic Action Plan for Apprenticeship Schemes in Flanders (known by its acronym, STRAAL). Two priority aims of the plan are to create an integrated system (meeting the need for greater coherence among the various forms

⁽²⁴⁾ See also the introduction of a Bachelor-Master system in university and higher education.

of training ⁽²⁵⁾) and to make optimal use of the available know-how and expertise and of the various professional groups involved.

To that end, the plan initiated a process of change (VOLT ⁽²⁶⁾ 2010), which is now leading to a number of improvement measures established after wide-ranging consultation within the organisation. This includes the preparation of a mission statement (i.e. a clear, unequivocal goal for the various organisations involved in apprenticeship schemes) and the repositioning of apprenticeship officers and their secretariats. Later in this report, we will return to the latter point in particular, since it is relevant to developments in the area of career guidance. In the future, apprenticeship officers will be known as learning path counsellors.

Other aims are to:

- improve communication on the apprenticeship system; a campaign has been launched involving 100 apprenticeship places in SMEs;
- strengthen cooperation with the CLBs and other partners and thereby also: (a) enhance the counselling provided by the organisation itself through development of the network between internal and semi-internal or external actors and (b) provide objective information on apprenticeship in all CLBs;
- strengthen internal counselling by: (a) altering the remit of the apprenticeship officers and how they carry out their job (evolution towards learning path counsellors in contractual employment) and (b) increasing the number of learning path counsellors;
- modularise the courses on offer;
- develop a sectoral policy.

Employment (VDAB)

The policy document of the Flemish Minister for Employment contains the following passage: ‘Besides rising employment, Flanders has relatively strong economic growth. However, there are a number of factors we should not lose sight of. Some population groups are unable to share in this success. On the verge of the 21st century, we are facing new challenges such as an ageing population and mounting competition between the various countries and regions. Furthermore, there are still too many jobseekers and too many vacancies that are not filled.’

This proposition is corroborated by statistical material from the VDAB’s 2002 Problematic Occupations Report. The main difficulties are technical occupations (cf. education: appreciation of technical and vocational secondary education as a strategic goal). In

⁽²⁵⁾ Apprenticeships (young people of compulsory school age), courses for the self-employed and the refresher courses and tailored courses for adults.

⁽²⁶⁾ ‘Flanders Optimises the Apprenticeship System’ (VOLT).

occupations classified as problematic ⁽²⁷⁾, suitable candidates could not be found for 6.5 % of available vacancies. In other occupations, the proportion of unfilled vacancies was only 3.6 %. Demand for higher education, knowledge of foreign languages and experience is greater in the case of problematic occupations.

This finding led to the formulation in the policy document of four strategic goals:

- to raise the level of employment from 59.5 % to 65 % by 2004;
- to increase the participation of those population groups that are underrepresented in the labour market;
- to improve the quality of work;
- to provide more opportunity for individual and social development for everyone.

The following aspects of the implementation of these four strategic goals are noteworthy:

- provision for sufficient, modified training. The policy document mentions that international research has shown that Belgium scores poorly in terms of training for employees. At the same time, it identifies a number of sources that indicate a rising trend: more and more people are getting the opportunity to take a course. During the opening speech at the employment conference (28), Jan Smets, Deputy Chairman of the Employment Council, pointed out that informal training efforts in Belgium somewhat compensated for the lack of formal training provision. By using the term ‘informal training efforts’, he was referring to workplace courses, learning and quality circles, distance learning, conferences, workshops, seminars, etc.;
- continued efforts to promote a target group policy. This relates to education and training. The policy document refers to the number of the economically inactive (of whom 1.4 million are of working age) (29) as a far from negligible factor. Analysis reveals three other factors of importance: (a) the major differences in levels of employment according to sex, background, age and level of education; (b) education and training are a crucial factor in determining position in the labour market, and (c) those mainly affected by poverty are low-skilled one-income households. A policy to help target groups should be viewed in the light of these findings, since the present position is disastrous in the long term both for the individuals involved and for employment.

The policy document *Directing and Acting (Regisseren en Acteren)* of the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism (June 2000) deals with changes afoot under the influence of an

⁽²⁷⁾ Engineers, nurses, IT staff, draughtsmen and technicians (mainly in the mechanical and electromechanical industries), commercial staff (sales representatives and store managers), managerial staff, secretarial staff and specialised operatives, mechanics/repairers and other specialised workers in the mechanical engineering and wood industries, food service personnel (cooks and waiters), bakers and butchers, and hairdressers.

⁽²⁸⁾ Report by Jan Smets, www.vandenbroucke.com, Employment Conference.

⁽²⁹⁾ Two thirds of this group are low-skilled women, who are often dependent on benefits or have absolutely no income. As a result, this group in particular is caught in the poverty trap.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention. The opening-up of the labour market to private employment agencies raised questions about the role of the VDAB and its position as a key player.

The Flemish coalition accord of 13 July 1999 states that the VDAB's role should change from that of key player to key director. As such, the VDAB would arrange, through partnerships with the private sector, for the efficient and transparent operation of the labour market and would increasingly be transformed into a support organisation operating for the benefit of that market. The Flemish Parliament also advocated that the VDAB's 'merit activities' ⁽³⁰⁾ be corporatised by transfer to a company operating entirely under market principles.

In a critical evaluation of the situation in June 2000, the policy document identified three key issues:

- the heavy burden of work of the VDAB caused by the need to play several roles and hence, inevitably, the confusion of roles, which make it difficult for other labour market players to know in what role the VDAB is acting in any given situation and with what authority;
- insufficient legitimacy of the VDAB's commercial services;
- private employment agencies (which were long subject to statutory constraints) have now obtained maximum scope within the existing statutory framework for their operations in Flanders. However, cooperation between the public and private sectors is far from smooth.

The present developments show that these findings are eliciting a policy response.

2.2. From strategic goals to initiatives

These influences and strategic goals provide a basis for deployment of a wide range of initiatives. Below is an overview that is illustrative of how the findings and strategic goals described above are resulting in specific policy measures that influence the content of career guidance and the manner in which it is implemented. It should be emphasised that this overview is illustrative. What is said below under the heading 'policy instruments' is, in fact, a continuation of this.

Scale enlargement

The phenomenon of scale enlargement occurs in various sectors. It is regarded as a means of making more efficient use of available resources. It is also seen as a precondition that must be fulfilled in order to make the step towards greater autonomy and responsibility. It is expressed

⁽³⁰⁾ See introduction, historical basis of the VDAB.

in the form of (a) measures to encourage the establishment of partnerships (without obligation) and (b) reforms bringing about far-reaching structural change.

The authorities decided to encourage voluntary partnerships between schools. Colleges of higher education were an exception to this principle. At all levels of education, scale enlargement was encouraged. These measures resulted in different models. In secondary education, schools that join forces to form combined schools are required to agree on the syllabus each of them will offer. From the perspective of career guidance, the importance of this development is that it provides greater guarantees for the provision of objective information on courses and types of education. This is one of the characteristics of high-quality career guidance. Recent reform of the primary education system provided another major boost to scale enlargement. The government is encouraging primary schools to cooperate and form combined schools.

PMS centres (education) and MST services (health) were abolished by the CLB Decree and replaced by a new structure: Student Guidance Centres (CLBs). This cut the number of services from 300 to 75 and at the same time introduced major innovations and new priorities.

In recent years, VIZO established new training centres known as 'Syntra'. All existing training centres for the self-employed were brought under the control of one of the five Syntra. This development was also accompanied by major improvements that have affected the organisation and quality of career guidance.

Partnerships

Local 'job shops'. In late 1999, the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism launched the concept of local 'job shops'. By the end of 2002, 94 job shops were in operation (including the present VDAB offices and local employment counters (PLOTs)). The aim is to have 140 operational by early 2004. Several partners are involved in this. The implementation of the job shop concept is not straightforward either in terms of the formulation of the legislative basis (decree) or the day-to-day application. Steps are being taken to coordinate the arrangements, and issues for discussion concerning control, local autonomy, powers, and so on are gradually being clarified.

DIVA. Launched in 2002, DIVA was previously known as 'the training interface'. Cooperation between the various providers of training is coordinated by the Flemish Minister for Education and Training. The aim is to make a major contribution in terms of information and awareness and also to help organise flexible courses on a structural basis and prevent students from dropping out or leaving without qualifications ⁽³¹⁾.

⁽³¹⁾ See also questions 5, 7, 8 and 9.

Protocols and Covenants

The Vilvoorde Pact has already been mentioned. However, this is not the only initiative undertaken in response to the major influences and strategic goals described above.

Another example is that of part-time education. The Flemish Ministers for Education and Employment have concluded a protocol with a view to increasing the level of participation in part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO). This is to be achieved by, among other things, improving learning path guidance and cooperating with job shops.

Use can be made of a modified screening instrument developed by the VDAB in cooperation with the education sector. The instrument analyses the attitude of entrants into part-time education towards employment and assesses their training and employment willingness by reference to a test and an interview. The learning path is then determined on the basis of these data. The path counsellor sets the test and monitors the student throughout the learning path.

The Ministry of Education is concluding covenants with various sectors and is endeavouring to ensure better coordination between education (including post-secondary education) and work.

Encouraging change and innovation through projects, whether or not linked to a research assignment

Various projects are organised by DIVA:

- Alignment of RTCs ⁽³²⁾, competence centres, Syntra and adult education centres (CVOs)
Aim: to elaborate forms of constructive cooperation after it has become clear (a) where the RTCs are situated and (b) for what purpose the various players are taking part. This coordination is sought in consultation with the competent government ministers (or their offices). The project got underway in late November 2002.
- Alignment of work placement databases
Aim: to investigate possibilities for strengthening cooperation with regard to work placement databases. The group started work in March 2002 and prepared an overview of the various types of work placement in Education, VIZO and the VDAB. At the same time, it ascertained what databases exist and what data they contain.
- Alignment of software licences

⁽³²⁾ A Regional Technological Centre (RTC) is a form of cooperation between educational establishments, the business community and organisations having a socioeconomic or educational function. It has several aims: (a) to make joint use of technological equipment, training infrastructure and technical and teaching know-how; (b) to develop teaching material for joint use; (c) to provide in-service staff training on new technologies, and (d) to ensure an optimal flow of pupils, students, course participants and employees to industry. There are currently seven RTCs.

Aim: to make agreements about the joint purchase of software licences. To ascertain what other joint steps can be taken in this respect.

- Alignment of ICT courses

Aim: to define and survey existing ICT courses in order to ascertain how they can be better coordinated, for example by eliminating any 'blind spots'.

- Lifelong and Lifewide Learning Yearbook

Aim: to devise a concept for the systematic monitoring of lifelong and lifewide learning in Flanders and to publish a yearbook. Further information can be found in the chapter on data use.

- Accreditation of Prior Learning

Aim: To gather information on the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) in Flanders and to disseminate it among the public at large. A formal advisory report is expected to be submitted in mid-December 2003. This is being prepared by reference to: (a) a methodology drawn up with a view to implementing an APL system in Flanders; (b) pilot projects, and (c) academic research to ascertain whether there would be support for the use of a common portfolio and a common certificate. In other words, the aim is to assess the opportuneness of such initiatives.

The Flemish Education Council (33) published of its own volition an advisory report on APL, in which it indicated that it viewed APL as an instrument that could be used both in learning path counselling and to shorten learning paths. It referred in both cases to the possibilities of a (development) portfolio as an instrument for proving prior learning. At first sight there appears to be support for this. However, there are also a good many questions about the specific conditions of application.

The Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism has started work on a draft decree to devise an initial APL system. A text containing a number of positions on this subject is expected in late December 2003. It is a development that is being followed with interest in the educational sector. Existing occupational profiles contain key skills and occupational attitudes. As they are broader than vocational competences, they must be included in the curriculae and programmes of study. Moreover, the attainment targets for basic education have for many years taken account of the need for more complete personality development.

- Modularisation project

DIVA is aiming at the level of both vocational secondary education and adult education to achieve substantive alignment of programmes and sub-programmes and the related certificates. The modularisation project is contributing to this. The aim of the project is: (a) to devise transparent education structures; (b) to seek correspondence between modular vocational courses of the relevant education providers, and (c) to achieve mutual

(³³) For further information, see the answer to question 4, stakeholders.

recognition of the certificates of corresponding courses and modules. In addition to organising courses in the form of modules (i.e. smaller, clearly delimited units), the project is also working on a list of definitions. Some agreement will be necessary in order to make the step towards mutual recognition of certificates.

‘Learning shop’

This is dealt with in the answer to question 9.

- E-learning

This project consists of two parts: (a) charting e-learning in Flemish adult education and non-formal education and (b) giving a description of the various aspects of e-learning for adults. This is done on the basis of existing systems and best practices in Belgium and other countries.

- Teachers of adults

Aim: to develop a modular concept for the ‘teachers of adults’ course, including certification of the course. Experiments are being established to determine, among other things, to what extent the course can be based on e-learning principles.

- Identification of needs

Aim: to develop a methodology that makes it possible to identify educational needs. The following basic elements are planned:

- ✓ a set of data (quantitative and qualitative data and the use of different types of indicators and sources);
- ✓ a technique for processing and analysis;
- ✓ regular consultation between the relevant actors in order to interpret the information supplied;
- ✓ appropriate reporting for the stakeholders and decision-makers.

- ‘Dutch as a second language’ policy and ‘Houses of the Dutch Language’

Aim: to improve the service to adults who are non-Dutch speakers. The aim is to obtain further information on: (a) demand; (b) the degree to which participants drop out and the causes of this, and (c) existing ‘Dutch as a second language’ waiting lists. It is intended, above all, to improve the coordination of the delivery of courses for non-native speakers (agreements between the various providers) and to use the resources for ‘Dutch as a second language’ courses more efficiently. The ‘Houses of the Dutch Language’ are an instrument with which to implement the recommendations of the second Round Table Conference on Dutch as a second language, which was held on 24 May 2002. Their remit is: (a) to gather and disseminate information on the availability of ‘Dutch as a second language’ courses; (b) to promote expertise regarding intake and evaluation; (c) to organise coordinated intake and evaluation in consultation with all teachers; (d) to register and administer the records of course participants and applicants, and (e) to report to the government on ‘Dutch as a second language’ (identification and advice function).

- Mission statement of the partners

Aim: to align the mission statements of the various partners.

In November 2002, the King Baudouin Foundation published a report on a new perspective for technical and technological occupations and courses. The report was entitled 'Emphasis on talent: an integrated vision of learning and working'. The report refers both to good results and problem areas (students leaving without qualifications, demotivated students, and underappreciation of technology). The committee which drew up the report advocates reforms in technical and vocational education, but also recommends the adoption of an overall concept having such characteristics as: (a) learning differently and choosing differently; (b) working differently, and (c) managing differently. As these ideas would otherwise have remained a dead letter, the vision developed in the report became the basis for the establishment of projects in which candidate schools lead the way in gathering expertise. The Flemish Minister for Education commissioned the King Baudouin Foundation to follow up these experiments and formulate conclusions for incorporation in the policy statement of the next Flemish government.

Time-out projects

Such projects can be found in various work models, and the initiators are to be found in various sectors. However, the common characteristic of these projects is that they 'permit' (34) young people who, for whatever reason, are no longer motivated to attend school and whose relationship with their school is marked by continual conflicts to choose a different path temporarily. The aim of providing this alternative and the accompanying counselling is to encourage the student to make choices and to complete his or her education.

The JOJO starter jobs project (schools for young people - young people for schools)

This project is for young people who have left school early or have discontinued their studies after completing their secondary education. They are given a position in education (currently 100 placements, to be increased to 150) where they can use their experience to act as a bridge between students, parents (particularly parents of foreign origin) and the school.

Focus on the right to career guidance (35)

In autumn 2000, the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism asked the King Baudouin Foundation to establish a task force to prepare an experts' report on the manner in which career guidance can be organised in Flanders. The report was made available in June 2002 (36). It forms a goods basis for debate on career guidance in Flanders. The report

(³⁴) In derogation from the legislation on compulsory education

(³⁵) See Annex 4.

(³⁶) *Towards a right to career guidance*, a report by the King Baudouin Foundation commissioned by the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism, June 2002. www.kbs-frb.be

contains comparative material on the current situation and provides detailed reasons as to why Flanders should make a serious effort to improve career guidance. It also recommends the priorities of such a policy and makes an organisational proposal.

Legislation

The focus on priority target groups is evident from the legislation. Legislation also generally contains operational aims which refer to priority or mandatory assignments. More and more often, such an assignment is subject to quality criteria or quality requirements, and operating principles are imposed. These often refer to aspects of accessibility (for example, low-threshold access) and the rights of users.

New technology is being introduced to disseminate new and prospective legislation. For example, the government is organising a ‘Tour of Flanders’ (provision of information at local level to create awareness) and has opened a website to allow members of the public to respond to legislation that is being developed. It is also providing information on the Internet and, increasingly, issuing information brochures. These new technologies are supplementing the customary consultation and advisory procedures and helping to establish direct contact with the general public at grassroots level.

The role of legislation and specific references to legislation in the field of career guidance will be dealt with below as one of the policy instruments for managing career guidance.

Question 3: POLICY INSTRUMENTS

Although in recent years, the government has expressed the wish and intention to limit legislation, it has found it difficult to change what has come about historically and to adopt a new culture. Striking the right balance between defining clear boundaries (and sometimes providing guidelines) and creating scope for local initiatives and creativity remains a delicate exercise which sometimes creates a certain tension. When considering the policy instruments to be deployed, the government tries to find a happy medium. The solution it adopts should guarantee all citizens (regardless of where they live, their prior education or the identity of the service to which they apply) access to a range of courses of comparable quality. However, at the same time, quality must be encouraged by allowing the providers of these courses the freedom to develop their own ideas. In doing so, the government relies on the providers’ sense of responsibility and allows them to cater to local needs and target group characteristics.

Flanders is moving towards greater decentralisation and autonomy. This is a process in which mutual trust grows as the consensus on the quality to be achieved increases and insofar as agreement is reached on the right of use (quality guarantees) and the manner of accountability (quality supplied and proper use of public funds). In this process of allowing room for

manoeuvre, regulating responsibilities and at the same time monitoring quality, legislation still plays a fairly important role.

Since each of the three sectors (education, courses for the self-employed and employment) involves government initiatives, there is a direct relationship between the policy impulses or policy requirements and the financing and recognition of the organisations concerned. They are allocated resources and must then account for the service they deliver and its quality. On 1 January 2001, the VDAB concluded a new management agreement with the government for a four-year period.

Projects, academic research, partnerships⁽³⁷⁾ and consultation structures should also be mentioned as policy instruments that provide a degree of control or help create awareness.

Legislation is an instrument that is generally used to deploy other policy instruments. The following fragments give some examples of this.

The CLB Decree indicates at various points the boundaries for the provision of career guidance. These instructions apply to both the support offered by the CLBs to schools and to Accredited Non-Formal Education (e.g. in the Syntra).

- The ‘education career’ is specified as one of the four areas in which the CLBs may provide guidance. In practice, however, it is often seen during a guidance process that there is a relationship between the ‘education career’ and other guidance areas, i.e. learning and studying, preventive health care and mental and social functioning.
- Reference is made at several points in the decree to the need to monitor the independent nature of the organisation. This requirement is a consequence of the need to give priority to the interests of the student and to provide an expert (quality) service.
- The CLBs received an explicit assignment to provide information. In this respect, they are also demand-driven, but if necessary they may themselves take initiatives in this field by proposing a guaranteed service to schools or centres. ‘The CLBs provides students, parents and teachers in a structured manner and in good time with information on at least (1) the structure and organisation of Flemish education; (2) the complete range of courses available; (3) the alignment of education and employment; (4) welfare provisions, and (5) health provisions.’
- The CLB is obliged to provide guidance for young people of compulsory school age who are (or are not) registered with the school but do not attend regularly. This guidance is arranged in cooperation with the schools (or centres), which themselves receive clear instructions through legislation in this field. The decree also instructs both schools and parents to cooperate in any measures taken with regard to checks on compliance with the compulsory school provisions.
- The imposed priorities are connected directly or indirectly with career guidance⁽³⁸⁾.

⁽³⁷⁾ Examples of partnerships are given throughout the report.

- If a student changes school or is temporarily not registered with any school, the current CLB remains responsible for guidance until responsibility is assumed by the CLB that has produced a policy plan for, or concluded a policy contract with, the new school. This rule ensures continuity and, if necessary, help in finding a new school.
- Guidance interventions are recorded in a multidisciplinary file.

Below are some examples of how legislation affects the provision of career guidance in schools.

The attainment targets impose quality requirements on schools. One of the cross-subject themes refers explicitly to career guidance ⁽³⁹⁾.

Similarly, the legislation on compliance with compulsory school provisions contains indications of how career guidance is to be implemented:

- the school is primarily responsible for checking on absentees and counselling students; it is also responsible for disseminating information on this;
- the legislation requires cooperation both internally and with the CLB and any organisations from the welfare or other sectors;
- although a curative bias is inevitable, the legislation also stipulates that consideration should be given to preventive action;
- schools are required to achieve concrete results in respect of attendance and avoidance of expulsion; if expulsion nonetheless occurs, guidance must be provided.

In this case, efforts are aimed at ensuring participation in education and training, promoting positive career choices and motivating students to continue their schooling and move on to higher education or employment.

The Equal Education Opportunities Decree deploys not only legislation, but other policy tools as well:

- a school career starts with enrolment in a school. The Decree guarantees students the right to enrol in the school of their choice. This also applies, in principle, to a disabled child. However, if the school shows that it has insufficient resources ⁽⁴⁰⁾, this may be grounds for derogating from the principle. The Decree established two bodies: a Local Consultation Platform (LOP) and a Students' Rights Committee. In the event of a complaint or dispute, the LOP plays a mediating and supporting role. By law, the Students' Rights Committee can give a ruling;

⁽³⁸⁾ See question 5.

⁽³⁹⁾ See question 11, quality assurance. For further information, see: <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo/english/crosscurricular/learntolearn.htm>

⁽⁴⁰⁾ The CLBs were given an advisory function in this respect.

- Extra resources are made available to specific target groups. ‘Equal opportunities indicators’ ⁽⁴¹⁾ are used to designate these target groups. These indicators are based on the assumption that the groups require extra guidance and support in order to complete their schooling successfully and make choices in keeping with their potential and interests;
- Cooperation at local level through the LOP should ensure mutual alignment and generate synergy in order to provide equal opportunities in each school of the relevant region. This cooperation should contribute to the quality of career guidance in every school. Success will largely depend on the motivation of the various partners and on the support provided;
- From the 2003-2004 school year onwards, all primary schools will receive extra financial resources for implementing the special needs policy. In his 2002-2003 policy letter on education and training, the Flemish Minister for Education wrote: ‘By introducing the policy on special needs, I wish to help ensure student guidance is more than simply a response to a wide range of problems and instead promotes the well-being of students, focuses more on dealing effectively with warning signs and differences, organises communication with parents and systematically arranges and evaluates cooperation with the CLBs. The establishment of partnerships at the level of combined schools will be encouraged with a view to making optimal use of the resources and possibilities made available overall.’ This statement gives those involved in school guidance a major incentive to take preventive action as well;
- The Equal Educational Opportunities Decree also prompted the deployment of other policy instruments. Three support centres were instructed to prepare supporting material and introduce it in schools. In addition, in-service courses ⁽⁴²⁾ offered free of charge by the authorities were devoted exclusively to equal educational opportunities, and extra supervisors were assigned to the various education networks to provide support in this respect. A CLB is allocated a higher staffing ratio on account of the presence of target group students in its working area.

VIZO and Syntra are working with apprenticeship officers, employers and the practice committee on a far-reaching process of change. The impetus for this process was provided by an action plan for evaluation of this form of education. This was an initiative launched by the Flemish Minister for Economic Affairs, Foreign Policy, Foreign Trade and Housing ⁽⁴³⁾. The plan contains a number of points for action, of which the following seem particularly relevant in the context of this report:

- the elaboration of an optimal guidance framework for apprentices and employers;

⁽⁴¹⁾ Further information can be found in chapter 7, priority target groups.

⁽⁴²⁾ The Intercultural Education Support Centre, the Experience-oriented Education Expertise and the ‘Dutch as a Second Language’ Support Centre.

⁽⁴³⁾ Following a recent reallocation of various responsibilities within the Flemish government, this Minister is now the Flemish Minister for Economic Affairs, Foreign Policy and E-government.

- a tailored approach and differentiation according to level for a learning path geared more closely to the needs of the student;
- a review of the structure of apprenticeship.

In order to implement the action plan, the minister responsible for supervising VIZO decided to establish an Apprenticeship Task Force.

It is not yet possible to quote from existing legislation in order to indicate more specifically what direction Syntra, apprenticeship officers, employers and the practice committee will be required to take. However, on the basis of the newsletters currently being exchanged between VIZO, Syntra and others, it is possible to surmise what direction this will be. This will clearly have a major impact on how career guidance is shaped in the future. This chapter has already referred, for example, to efforts to optimise the operation of networks, to introduce a new set of regulations and to reposition apprenticeship officers within an improved guidance system. We will return to this subject again in relation to question 8, when we will pause and consider, in the section on methods, the results of an initial review of the key principles to be fulfilled by learning path guidance.

The strategic goals relating to employment are being translated at the VDAB into a wide range of activities. Here too, legislation forms the basis for other policy instruments, forms of service and projects. The employment measures, innovation projects and structural changes, including modifications to the role and position of the VDAB as an organisation, are examples of this.

However, the use of a management agreement concluded between the Flemish government and the VDAB is a characteristic of policy control specific to a given sector. This instrument is also making headway in other sectors. The VDAB's annual report for 2002 says in this regard:

'This management agreement shapes the VDAB's own mission, as well as the principles of the Flemish coalition accord and the 2000-2004 Employment Policy Document. The VDAB contributes, through its operation, to achieving the objectives and the critical success factors.

In this way, the VDAB will play a role in raising the level of employment in Flanders to 65 % in 2004 and 70 % in 2010, as well as raising the level of participation of population groups hitherto underrepresented in the labour market and endeavouring to provide more individual and social development for all.

To achieve this, the VDAB will:

- help match supply and demand in the labour market more effectively;
- provide its service in such a way as to promote the proportionate participation of all population groups;
- take the necessary measures to combat any form of direct or indirect discrimination in the labour market;

- organise and encourage permanent non-formal education for jobseekers and employees;
- make its instruments more transparent, efficient and effective.’

This agreement was concluded in January 2001 and subsequently elaborated in a multi-annual operating plan. This plan is based on the reality of the labour market and is updated annually in consultation with VDAB offices.

The management agreement records a number of quantitative parameters ⁽⁴⁴⁾ in the area of universal services and learning path operation.

Universal services:

- contacts with businesses,
- job supply,
- percentage of vacancies filled,
- contacts with jobseekers,
- diagnoses of labour market readiness (= number of intakes arranged),
- the number of leavers in the case of individual action plans.

Learning path operation:

- the number of jobseekers included by the VDAB in a learning path,
- the number of jobseekers reached per module ⁽⁴⁵⁾,
- the number of leavers (four target groups were specified, each having a different objective in terms of the number of leavers).

Legislation is clearly of importance as regards the further structural expansion of the services offered by the VDAB and as regards the role it is to play in the future as a public intermediary in the labour market. The Flemish coalition accord of 13 July 1999 forms the basis of this evolution. However, agreements concluded internationally have also had a major impact. The way in which reference is made to the function of the VDAB gives some idea of the coordinating role it is to be assigned and points to developments involving cooperation with private organisations in the profit and not-for-profit sectors and with other institutional partners.

‘The directing body must arrange for the transparent operation of the labour market through public-private partnerships and should evolve into a general support organisation. The VDAB must also arrange, through local job shops, for an integral package of services for jobseekers, which must have a low threshold and encourage self-reliance. All other services offered by the

⁽⁴⁴⁾ See also question 12.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ See question 8.

VDAB must be complementary to the services provided by other intermediaries insofar as they are quality services. The VDAB's services must be assessed above all on the basis of the extent to which they succeed in involving at-risk groups in the labour market.' (46)

The role of director is taken to include:

- determining the operational and strategic objectives of labour market policy;
- charting and classifying the activities of the actors involved;
- coordinating the activities of the actors involved through the provision of a coordinating role;
- achieving solutions;
- establishing a transparent and permanent labour market data system.

The policy document quoted above also indicates that these functions must be exercised within a reference framework authorised by the government and form part of an open dialogue with the other actors involved. For this purpose, the term 'actors' means those in the VDAB's own customer network who are involved, the Employment Branch, local authorities, commercial sectors, the non-governmental organisation sector (47) and other institutional actors (e.g. VIZO, the Education Department and the VFSIPH).

Under the influence of legislation, a model is evolving which combines the operation of market forces with a clear government function. The development of such a model is in keeping with an advisory report by the Flanders' Social and Economic Council (SERV), which advocated the presence of a body capable of providing strong direction in the Flemish labour market in order to ensure the provision of basic services and guarantee learning path determination and guidance.

The implementation of this function requires not only professional knowledge of the labour market and instruments and resources which permit coordination, but also an overall view of the situation in Flanders. The expansion of a partnership and public and private alliances are regarded as a working principle.

This development is running in parallel with the creation of a statutory framework within which the possibilities for private actors can be expanded.

The decree on proportionate participation in the labour market is another example of the influence of legislation, i.e. in this specific case, its influence on the VDAB's innovation

⁽⁴⁶⁾ From the policy document *Directing and Acting (Regisseren en Acteren)* of the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism of June 2000.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Often referred to as 'third parties'. These are non-commercial private initiatives, often intended to find work for the long-term unemployed and other target groups in the labour market. They frequently operate under a not-for-profit charter or come under a public social services centre or municipality.

policy. As a consequence of this decree, the VDAB devised an action plan, which was implemented in 2003. The following steps were taken by way of preparation:

- gender and diversity training for innovation chairpersons;
- evaluation of the use of the intake guideline in learning path guidance (a check on observance of its diversity conditions);
- participation of the VDAB as a partner in a new European gender project known as 'Genova'. As part of this project, courses were organised for trainers at the VDAB and Syntra (VIZO). The project also organised a promotional campaign.

Question 4: The role of stakeholders and the organisation of consultation

The term 'stakeholders' covers many participants, some of whose names may vary according to sector. Generally speaking, stakeholders can be said to be those who are (or may be) involved with the service because they: (a) deliver services (personnel); (b) make use of services (students, course participants, schools and parents); (c) are responsible for the configuration, organisation and internal policy of the relevant body (competent authority, Syntra offices, management board, coordinators and employers); (d) represent the interests of employers' and employees' organisations, or (e) are partners.

Flanders

In a number of situations, legislation sets boundaries for the involvement of stakeholders by indicating: (a) what consultation structures must be provided; (b) who must take part in these consultations; (c) what should be their powers and the limitations on their powers (powers to decide or merely advise), and sometimes also (d) a minimum number of meetings.

The extent of involvement (obtaining information, providing advice, taking part in decisions and pursuing policy), the intensity of involvement (different channels and times) and the impact of involvement (the effect on policymaking and policy implementation) depend on the 'house style', the 'culture' of the organisation and the manner in which legislation regulates or otherwise the involvement of stakeholders.

In any event, growing attention is being paid to the notion of participation and to provisions structurally embedding the involvement of stakeholders. This can be seen in the legislation and the evaluation of quality.

As a result of the project concerning the reorganisation of the Flemish civil service ('Better Administrative Policy') and the Participation Decree, the participation structures, participation themes and rules governing participation are currently in a state of flux.

Recent moves to restructure the Flemish advisory and consultation system are a consequence of the realisation that there is scope for improvement of the present situation. The main points of criticism of the existing advisory system are:

- marked divergence in terms of composition, logistical and personnel support, manner of establishment, periods within which advice must be given, practical activities, and so on;
- marked divergence of forms of advice (compulsory or optional, binding or non-binding, by consensus or by majority, reasoned or otherwise);
- terminological confusion between advice, consultation and negotiation, partly due to a lack of clear classification of the present situation;
- the lack of any clear overview as a consequence of the many ⁽⁴⁸⁾ advisory bodies that do not function uniformly;
- an often insufficiently clear link between the advisory bodies and a given policy field or domain or an administrative entity operating in such a field or domain.

As a result of this criticism, it was decided to restructure the system of advisory and consultation bodies at the same time and in the same context as the reorganisation of the Flemish public sector.

Texts on this subject currently in circulation distinguish between: (a) the provision of advice; (b) consultation (formal and intrinsic), and (c) negotiations. The latter term refers above all to negotiations in the context of staff regulations.

The following basic principles were specified in advance:

- the primacy of government (advisory bodies exist to serve government and those responsible for policy);
- recognition of the importance of the relevant social actors and ‘independent’ experts (explicit recognition of their role, the involvement of civil society in implementing policy and the calling-in of experts);
- no hybrid forms (i.e. between advice and formal consultation) within a single body (two clearly different things should be realised in two different structures);
- advice and consultation to be organised within the Flemish public sector in such a way that decisions can be taken judiciously (those responsible for policy should seek to strike the right balance between obtaining social support and/or expert advice and ensuring the government acts decisively; the preparation of a business plan with a concrete work plan for the advisory council).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ A list drawn up in December 1999 by the committee of secretaries-general referred to the 126 ‘most essential’ advisory bodies.

Career guidance

It is not always possible to establish a direct connection between the involvement of stakeholders and career guidance. However, existing consultation and advice structures do have an indirect impact on the organisation of career guidance and its content. The involvement of stakeholders has evolved separately in each of the sectors over the years. This has resulted in differences of emphasis. A few examples can illustrate this.

Education

School councils

Initially, the Special Decree on the Autonomous Council for Community Education of 19 December 1988 provided for the establishment of local school councils for each school or group of schools. The councils included representatives of parents (directly elected) and of teachers (with one third of representatives from the teaching staff committee⁽⁴⁹⁾). The involvement of people from the local community and local businesses was also possible through cooptation. These local school councils had the power to decide on material and financial management as well as education and personnel policy. As a result of an amendment to this special decree, the local school councils were reformed. New school councils were established, which now act as advisory and consultation bodies and no longer have decision-making powers.

The participation of parents and teachers was also provided in subsidised education by means of the establishment of a participation council. This council has advisory powers.

No provision was made for the participation of students in these consultation and advisory bodies. However, they do have the right to be heard.

Student councils

The Student Councils Decree of 30 March 1999 stipulates that student councils must be established in secondary schools as soon as this is explicitly requested by one third of the students of the school. The decree also provides for the establishment of a student participation support centre in order to provide back-up for the establishment and organisation of student councils.

Local negotiating committees (LOCs) and basic negotiating committees (BOCs) are composed of representatives of staff and employers and deal with personnel matters.

DBSO Centre Council

⁽⁴⁹⁾ The teaching staff committee is a meeting of elected members of teaching staff and has the power to advise on all aspects of education policy. The committee also has the power to decide on homework, tasks and tests.

A council is established in each DBSO and has at least six members. The involvement of both mandated representatives of education and mandated representatives of socioeconomic organisations is guaranteed by equal representation on the council. The CLB has the right to attend and give advice. The council advises on the internal regulations of the centre, the organisational and material development of the centre, the programme and the way in which subjects are taught, the use of available resources and the problem of alignment between the DBSO and employment.

CLB Centre Council

The CLB Decree imposes an obligation on the centres to involve: (a) the boards and competent authorities of the schools they work for, (b) the centre's staff and (c) external experts in the internal management of the centre. Such councils currently operate in just a few places. When expounding their views on the establishment and organisation of a council, some centres indicated that they were looking at ways of involving students, parents and partners from the health and welfare sectors.

Flemish Education Council (VLOR)

This advisory and consultation body deals with education matters in Flanders. The three key tasks of the VLOR are to provide advice, organise consultation and carry out studies. Provision was made in the structures of the VLOR (General Council, councils and departments, permanent committees, temporary working groups and participation bodies) for representation of the competent authorities, student guidance centres, organisations representing teaching staff, users of education (parents and, in the case of higher and adult education, students as well), social and economic organisations, staff of the Education Department and experts from Flemish universities. We will have to wait for the approval of a new participation decree to discover whether – and, if so, to what extent – the present remit and structure will undergo change. In addition, an umbrella committee and, for each sector, a sectoral committee were established within the VLOR, since consultation between the sectors and education is crucial. The umbrella committee, which coordinates the operation of the sectoral committees, monitors among other things the general alignment between education and employment. The sectoral committees endeavour to ensure adequate coordination within their sector.

In a recent study of teacher participation⁽⁵⁰⁾, it was concluded that such participation within a school is largely determined by the culture of that school. Statutory councils are essential to guarantee basic participation. However, they do not play a key role. According to researchers, giving teachers a say on practical and teaching subjects is the most effective way of involving them in school policy and introducing innovation. Such involvement is achieved mainly in

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA, proposed on 22 October). It was accompanied by the launch of a new electronic communication channel for teachers known as *LerarenDirect*. A similar electronic newsletter known as *SchoolDirect* for school boards has been in existence for some time. The aim is to provide fast, accurate, up-to-date, factual information and to encourage involvement in policy.

non-statutory consultation structures such as the governing council and staff meetings. The researchers therefore point to conditions that must first be fulfilled if the participation of teachers is to be promoted, for example a personnel policy on the subject of training and remuneration, open communication and participation by the school head.

The structure of training for the self-employed itself indicates the involvement of stakeholders.

Management board

The management board consists of representatives of the socioeconomic sector (employer and employee organisations), the founders of the training courses (Syntra) and Flemish government representatives.

Practice committee

The practice committee assists the management board. It consists of a chairman, representatives of self-employed and SME organisations and representatives of employee organisations. It can take decisions independently of the management board on matters involving practical training and on-the-job training. The decisions in question relate to apprenticeship and work placement agreements.

Committees

VIZO can set up various committees and determine their powers and composition. Although their composition varies, they always consist of people nominated and chosen for their specialised knowledge of the topic under discussion at a committee meeting (i.e. experts). The establishment of a committee of apprenticeship officers, a committee of the centres and a committee of crafts was fixed by law. To that end, provision was made at the outset for a direct form of participation by these groups. There is also an appeals committee, consisting of representatives of VIZO and of the federations representing a particular occupation or sector.

The sector committee decides on the programme and, to that end, gives a ruling on the attainment targets per module, the learning path, the conditions to be met by the teacher and the equipment conditions. It also determines examination standards. The committee is composed of representatives of VIZO, representatives of the occupational/sectoral federations and representatives of Syntra.

In addition, the course of the improvement process refers to the way in which and extent to which stakeholders are involved.

Examples of this have been mentioned above in relation to the development of a mission and the establishment of improvement measures. Other examples include the 'Apprenticeship Newsletter' and 'Apprenticeship Task Force'. The Task Force consists of government representatives, VIZO, the VIZO practice committee, apprenticeship officers, Syntra and two sectors.

The involvement of stakeholders has already been mentioned in reference to the structure of the VDAB and the evolution of cooperation with other actors. In 2002, the VDAB arranged for a questionnaire to be completed by 40 internal and external stakeholders. Although the subject of the questionnaire is not immediately relevant to this report (it involved the VDAB's attitude to contextual issues), what is relevant is that it resulted in a clear report listing strategic, tactical and operational choices which led the management team to commission the preparation of an action plan.

Mention should also be made of the role of Flanders' Social and Economic Council (already referred to above) and of the role of VESOC.

Flanders' Social and Economic Council (SERV)

SERV is a major forum for consultation with the social partners. The Council, acting in concert with the social partners and the sectors, devises not only occupational profiles, but also rules on subjects concerning training and lifelong learning. The connection between education and employment is a common theme throughout discussions within SERV. Very recently the go-ahead was given to a new preliminary draft of the SERV Decree. This will replace the existing decree. According to the present text of the preliminary draft decree, SERV will be given a social consultation and advisory role. SERV will be recognised by decree as the body for social consultation in Flanders. It will also function as a strategic advisory body for policy on economics, employment and tourism. This evolution is in keeping with the 'Better Administrative Policy' process.

The Flemish Economic and Social Consultation Committee (VESOC)

In the present consultation model, VESOC plays a key role as the formal body for consultation between the Flemish government, Flemish employers and Flemish employee organisations. VESOC meets several times a year and consults on policy matters with a socioeconomic dimension that either belong to the jurisdiction of the Flemish Community or the Flemish Region, or require the agreement, advice or involvement of the Flemish government.

Question 5: Targeting and access

It will have become apparent during the reading of this report that career guidance has hitherto been defined fairly broadly and generally approached in an integrated manner. It forms part of a broader whole consisting of education and training, the provision of information, guidance in the making of choices, guidance with learning paths and even the provision of assistance. Depending on the requirements of each individual case, career guidance may contain all these elements or just some.

The decision to use this approach in drawing up the overview of initiatives on career guidance is a consequence of Cedefop's definition of the term. However, it is also based on the strategic

goals set out in policy documents and legislation (51). Also relevant was the personal conviction that narrowing career guidance to the strict process of providing information and guidance with processes of choice (on request or at fixed times) would not do justice to the socially vulnerable (52). In the case of socially vulnerable people or groups, it is necessary to: (a) make them aware of what is available and motivate them to take advantage of this; (b) encourage them to ask questions; (c) provide guidance with specific action at the time of deciding, and (d) strengthen their basic competences, self-confidence and self-image. This last point is particularly important, as it has a major impact on the extent to which there can be said to be a ‘choice’ and as it often has a decisive effect on the choice ultimately made. This is why reference was previously made to efforts in the context of equal educational opportunities and special needs policy. However, structural preventive measures such as career flexibilisation and modularisation of courses are also needed in order to help the socially vulnerable to develop competences in a safe and stimulating environment. Partnerships with primary education, adult education or other courses for adults should help primary and secondary schools learn from broken or discontinued school careers, gain insight into the phenomenon of social vulnerability and the vulnerability of the individual as a consequence of continual failure or feelings of insecurity. Exchanges of information of this kind are all too rare.

This concern will still be voiced in the description of priorities and guidelines on access below. However, in the section on methods and the provision of information, the acquisition of information and guidance with processes of choice will be emphasised. Annexes 3 and 4 show that when it comes to finding employment, the definition of the term career guidance is clearly given a different emphasis. The following section will focus on career guidance in combination with training and preparation for employment.

5.1. Priorities and target groups

Various references to priorities, target groups and even access were made in answering questions 2 and 3. The possibility of some overlapping cannot be excluded, although it is the intention to outline below the day-to-day organisation and implementation of career guidance.

⁽⁵¹⁾ See question 2: Influences and strategic goals.

⁽⁵²⁾ Vettenburg (1989), ‘The concept of social vulnerability refers not only to the structural position of the vulnerable population group, but also to the interactions within which the vulnerability occurs and the possible mechanisms for conquering this vulnerability. The socially vulnerable are those who, in their contact with the social institutions, are faced time and again with controls and sanctions and derive less benefit from the positive aspects available. Within the context of career guidance, this can be translated as “an overriding sense of ‘failure’ in studies and ‘limitation of choices’ instead of tasting success and feeling that one has the scope to make personal choices. This is often accompanied by negative interaction between student and teacher and sometimes even by exclusion and expulsion from school (or the workplace)”.’

Education

Attainment targets are minimum goals which the authorities consider necessary and feasible for a given student population in mainstream secondary education. The term ‘minimum goals’ means a minimum of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes intended for that student population. However, specific attainment targets are goals relating to the skills, specific knowledge, understanding and attitudes which a student in full-time secondary education needs in order to embark on post-secondary education and/or be able to start practising a profession or occupation. The intention is that all attainment targets and development goals be achieved by as many students as possible. Nonetheless, the decree distinguishes between ‘seeking to achieve’ and ‘achieving’. It therefore provides that it is necessary to seek to achieve development goals on account of the student’s specific circumstances and the individual nature of the goals. As results in terms of attitudes and cross-subject attainment targets cannot be properly measured, they too are treated as goals students must seek to achieve. ‘Achieving’ therefore refers specifically to subject-related attainment targets with regard to knowledge, understanding and skills. It also applies to the cross-subject attainment target of ‘learning to learn’. Similarly, it is necessary for all students to seek to achieve development goals ⁽⁵³⁾.

As a rule, the policy on educational needs covers all students and the measures taken by the school in this regard. Nonetheless, the basic idea is to focus above all on the target group of children and young people with learning and behavioural difficulties.

The focus on specific target groups is reflected in various ways.

The Equal Educational Opportunities Decree provides extra resources for the guidance of specific target groups throughout their schooling. These groups are designated by reference to ‘equal opportunities indicators’. In primary education, the indicators are as follows: (a) the family is living on benefits or a pension; (b) the student has been taken into care (outside his or her own family) temporarily or permanently; (c) the parents are ‘travellers’; (d) the mother does not have a secondary school leaving certificate, and (e) the language spoken at home is not Dutch. Different equal opportunities indicators apply in secondary education: (a) the student is lagging at least two years behind his or her age group (learning deficit); (b) the student was not enrolled in the previous school year or did not pass and is now a student in the second or third stage of vocational secondary education or technical secondary education, and (c) the student attended a special induction class in the previous school year ⁽⁵⁴⁾. Learning deficits weigh heaviest when it comes to the allocation of extra staff. Schools are making these target groups visible not only because they yield extra funds, but also because they have

⁽⁵³⁾ The term used in nursery and special education is development goals rather than attainment targets.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Such classes are for newcomers to Belgium and are intended to enable them to learn Dutch and to aid in their social integration. It is a preparation for their entry into mainstream education and is designed to promote their functioning in the classroom and to make the transfer to a class in keeping with their age.

been asked to assess the initial situation and to establish objectives for improving the service they provide to these target groups.

To encourage extra attention for the most vulnerable groups, the CLB Decree provides an incentive in the form of a different staffing ratio according to target group⁽⁵⁵⁾. In addition, an operating principle is imposed as a result of which the authorities explicitly call for attention to be paid as a matter of priority to students (individuals or groups) whose development and learning process is in danger of being undermined by their social background. This ‘extra care’ applies to all student guidance and the support provided by schools. However, it is also evident in career guidance from the priority given to assignments. The CLB is required to provide the following intensive guidance as a matter of priority:

- in special education, guidance with the development of operating plans, guidance with behavioural difficulties and reduction of high-risk behaviour and guidance for students of integrated education⁽⁵⁶⁾;
- guidance to ensure that transfers of students from mainstream schools to special schools and vice versa are adequate and of a high quality; here, the CLB is required to support cooperation between mainstream and special schools;
- guidance for students in nursery education and at the start of primary school who experience learning and behavioural difficulties;
- guidance for students in making choices in courses during their schooling in order to prepare the transfer from the first to the second stage of secondary education and from the third stage of secondary education to higher education;
- guidance for students in technical, artistic, vocational and special secondary education and the accredited forms of non-formal education to ensure safe schooling, in particular safety and hygiene and the impact of practical subjects on students’ health;
- guidance in the first course year ‘B’, the pre-vocational course year, vocational education, part-time vocational secondary education and the accredited forms of non-formal education, and for newcomers with a different mother tongue in order to optimise transfers to a higher form of education, reduce high-risk behaviour and ensure schooling is a worthwhile experience for students.

All of this has an impact on working agreements between the school and the CLB and on the manner in which CLB staff are deployed. Legislation on compliance with the provisions on

⁽⁵⁵⁾ A student in special education, integrated education or part-time vocational secondary education or a participant in accredited non-formal education generates the highest staffing ratio. In addition, a further differentiation is applied according to the level of education. See also question 6.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ Integrated education is a form of education that involves cooperation between mainstream and special schools. Its purpose is to enable students with a temporary or permanent handicap wholly or partly to attend lessons or take part in activities in a school for mainstream education. To make this feasible, additional teaching time or additional hours are allocated to the special school in exchange for the provision of support to the school for mainstream education which integrates the student.

compulsory school attendance requires that any absence receive due attention, as it may indicate an underlying problem. The legislation therefore requires rapid intervention and cooperation between the actors involved. At the same time, guidance efforts are encouraged by stipulating that students with ‘problematic absences’⁽⁵⁷⁾ continue to be regarded as regular students. The school accordingly retains its right to student-related funding. In secondary education, there is also a duty to report problematic absences totalling more than 30 half days to the department. Each school is expected to give due attention to those who are absent and especially to potential underlying problems.

Traditionally, students in transitional years⁽⁵⁸⁾ have been an important target group requiring extra attention in terms of career guidance.

In adult education (Education Department), the special needs provision for certain target groups is evident from, among other things: (a) differentiation regarding enrolment fees (see below); (b) the various forms of education, non-formal education and training for adults, each having its own target group, and (c) target groups who are given priority for certain projects⁽⁵⁹⁾. Various types of training come under the category of ‘permanent education’ and together represent a wide range of target groups and objectives.

The following forms of education are available:

- Education for social advancement. This is a form of continuing education and is provided by adult education centres. It focuses on three target groups: (a) students wishing to obtain an additional basic qualification (who already have a higher level certificate); (b) students wishing to have refresher training or to specialise (additional certificate of the same level), and (c) students wanting personal development;
- Second-chance education. This form of continuing education is accessible to anyone over the age of 18 who has completed primary school. The course prepares participants for an examination set by the central examining board of the Flemish Community;
- Distance education or Supervised Individual Study. Distance education offers self-tuition packages. Course participants work at their own pace. Provision is made for written supervision by an expert tutor-mentor. This form of education is provided for adults who wish to obtain a certificate for an examination set by the State or the Flemish Community and for people who wish to obtain promotion within their company or to look for another job;

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Problematic absences are defined as absences which cannot be accounted for on the basis of the codes provided for in the legislation or absences the legitimacy of which is in doubt.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Significant transitional periods include those between primary and secondary school, between the first and second stages of secondary school and between the third stage of secondary school and higher education.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Priorities were established for the Accreditation of Prior Learning project with regard to certain target groups, taking account of social relevance. In the first year, the emphasis was on integration (portfolio), education (access to teacher training and the teaching profession) and the target group of people with low literacy skills and young people with no basic qualifications.

- Basic education. The courses offered in the centres consist of: (a) literacy and numeracy skills; (b) social and communication skills, ICT and civics; (c) awareness of possibilities and preparation for further learning, vocational education or work, and (d) activation and groundwork. The focus is on low-skilled adults. The sector itself asks the centres to prepare a mission clearly stating that the centres guarantee the development of elementary skills and transfers to other forms of educational provision (60). Under the Strategic Plan for the Provision of Help and Assistance to Prison Inmates, basic education plays a coordinating role with regard to education for inmates. A pilot project is underway in two regions. Previous initiatives in other places also produced a number of specific measures aimed at preparing prisoners for employment or a vocational course (61). These projects were undertaken in cooperation with the VDAB;
- Part-time education in the arts.

Training for the self-employed

Although certain forms of education are aimed at different target groups (people of compulsory school age and adults), there is no other major differentiation in the courses and guidance available to the self-employed. However, efforts are made to help ethnic minorities complete courses successfully.

For example, provision is made for the assistance of an interpreter in the case of the business management course. This initiative was originally launched as a European Social Fund (ESF) Agency project, but will be included in legislation.

As regards the disabled, there is the possibility (as in mainstream education) of requesting certain forms of support through the Flemish Fund for the Social Integration of Disabled Persons.

Employment

Generally speaking, the VDAB focuses on two main target groups: jobseekers and employers. Differentiation according to target group is evident from the wide range of initiatives (62). The low-skilled and other risk groups receive special attention, while the authorities provide financial incentives to employers for certain target groups (employment measures).

In the previously mentioned policy document *Directing and Acting*, a distinction was made between public and private provision. This shows that the public employment services support the employment policy of the government (by reaching groups that are hard to place), but that

(60) *VLOR In Beraad*, Vol. 12, No 3.

(61) Inmates scheduled for release within one year.

(62) See questions 7, 8 and 9.

the private sector is playing an increasing role in reintegrating at-risk groups (especially ethnic minorities) to the labour market. It is estimated that approx. 240 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) organise around 400 projects, reaching some 9 000 jobseekers. Their target group therefore differs from that of the VDAB.

Differentiation by target group is also evident from the role the VDAB will continue to be allocated in the future, namely not only as ‘director’ (see above), but also public ‘actor’. As regards the latter, a link is made above all with the operation of learning paths, the focus on at-risk groups and the increasing duties in the context of lifelong learning. Although the VDAB is in some respects in competition with private actors, it is still expected to offer guarantees for the provision of a basic service consisting of guidance and training modules and to meet the special needs of the most vulnerable groups.

The management agreement also refers to target groups for whom a preventive and curative approach is required. The target group for whom preventive action is needed consists of ‘recently’ registered jobseekers (young people under the age of 25) who have been unemployed for less than six months and people over the age 25 who have been unemployed for less than one year. The target group for curative assistance consists of all others who have been unemployed for longer periods.

Strengthening self-reliance by making available online instruments gives the VDAB the space to focus as much as possible on the category of jobseekers who will not find employment of their own volition (within a reasonable period).

5.2. Regulation of access

Schooling starts with enrolment. The Equal Educational Opportunities Decree confers on all students an unconditional right to enrol in the school of their choice. The explanatory notes to the Decree point out that this principle entitles all students and parents to choose without restriction from a wide range of projects. Admission to a school may be refused only in specific circumstances, and provision is made for mediation and scrutiny to ensure compliance with this principle.

Nonetheless, the principle that access to education (including career guidance) is guaranteed largely depends on:

- the extent to which schools are motivated to honour this principle in practice and to link it with a special needs policy (integration of different measures to support the most vulnerable groups);
- the extent to which admission is assured and an interruption of schooling or unnecessary change of school is prevented. This depends partly on the student (motivation to take part in school activities and not to abuse the wide freedom of choice by ‘shopping around’ for the right school) and partly on the school (preventing expulsions as a result of disciplinary measures and preventing unnecessary or unduly fast changes in educational level). This is

why it is important to monitor the quality of the involvement and operation of the students' rights committee in the case of referrals or refusals ⁽⁶³⁾. However, what is at least as important (if not more so) is the monitoring of the quality of the educational process, the quality of the school and the provision for special needs, and the quality of (deliberative) class councils and the way in which disputes are handled.

The CLBs work for the students and teachers of schools with which they have concluded a policy plan or policy contract. In this respect, access is subject to limitations. Furthermore, the centres work only with children or young people if they themselves are the requesting party or agree to accept guidance. A request by a school to provide guidance can therefore be accepted only if the student or his or her parents (or both) agree to this. In the case of children aged 14 and over, the decision on whether or not to accept guidance is taken by them personally. Compliance with the duty of compulsory schooling is an exception to this, because the guidance and related special needs care are then compulsory.

The centres are required to operate in accordance with the principle of low-threshold access. The theoretical 'access' for this vulnerable group must be provided in day-to-day practice by methods designed to stimulate and motivate each individual, even those who are less sure of themselves in their dealings with official institutions and services. Community work at school is one example of such a method. The need to differentiate is also emphasised in the use of information material. This may even necessitate the provision of translations of information brochures. In recent years, such material has increasingly been provided either as the result of central initiatives or by the Education Department. Local consultation forums and the CLBs have a task to perform in supporting students (and their parents) who are not enrolled in any school.

Access to a level of education, type of education ⁽⁶⁴⁾, form of education and, in some cases, even a particular course is regulated by law, and this also affects study and career choices. In any event, attention should be paid at each level of education to the guidance and support provided to students, for example career guidance. In this respect, access (provision) must be assured, at least in transitional times, but also where individual questions or problems arise.

Access to adult education is based on voluntary entry. No rules have been drawn up comparable to those for compulsory education in terms of either course participants or institutions (cf. equal educational opportunities).

⁽⁶³⁾ Both terms are defined in legislation. A student may be referred or refused only if the conditions specified in the legislation are fulfilled.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Special education.

Training for the self-employed (VIZO)

Access to apprenticeship depends mainly on compliance with an age limit, sometimes in combination with a requirement of a minimum period in full-time education. The situation is comparable to that of students who wish to take a part-time course of vocational secondary education. In practice, the requirements of full-time compulsory education must be complied with. This means that the person seeking an apprenticeship must be at least 15 years of age and have completed at least the first two years of secondary education or be 16 years of age.

The quality of access will be determined to a large extent by the actions of apprenticeship officers and the enrolment policy of Syntra offices. The CLBs guarantee the provision of objective information on courses for the self-employed (and any (optional) guidance). However, the apprenticeship officer is responsible for the conclusion of an apprenticeship agreement and for the provision of guidance associated with any such decision. Having an apprenticeship agreement is a precondition for participation in an apprenticeship.

In part-time vocational secondary education ⁽⁶⁵⁾, admission to a course is not dependent on having part-time employment of any kind. However, efforts are made by the course organisers to ensure the participant obtains a supplementary work placement as quickly as possible.

Employment (VDAB)

As a rule, initiatives undertaken under the responsibility of the VDAB are broadly accessible. To quote the VDAB: ‘In order to match supply and demand in the labour market as closely as possible, the VDAB provides a freely accessible and high-quality service, free of charge, to all jobseekers and employers.’

In cases where a more refined, tailored service is provided, additional criteria apply. The same is true of initiatives aimed at specific target groups.

In the context of learning path guidance, for example, the non-formal education module for individuals is offered first and foremost to immigrants entering Belgium to join a family member (for marriage or family reunification purposes), asylum seekers whose position has been regularised (since 31 August 2001) and asylum seekers whose application has been granted since 31 August 2001.

The local VDAB offices provide regional access, and there are various initiatives to provide low-threshold access. Special mention should be made of the use of local information

⁽⁶⁵⁾ There is also an alternate course in training form 3 (transfer to the ordinary labour market) of special secondary education. This concerns an optional integration stage of one school year, which is intended to facilitate the switch to employment. Students who join this course have already received a qualification certificate, but will, it is thought, benefit from an integration stage. On an annual basis, this involves 500 teaching periods of general, social and vocationally oriented education and 700 hours of on-the-job experience.

counters, the job shop initiative and the increasing use of the Internet as a means of obtaining information and even making an application. The cooperation of the VDAB in integration policy (see Annex 2) is one example of how efforts are being made to lower the threshold and ensure access for certain target groups. Efforts in respect of proportionate participation⁽⁶⁶⁾ show steps are being taken to improve equal access.

Several organisations and services, including some in the education sector, training for the self-employed, local authorities or not-for-profit organisations refer inquiries to the VDAB. They provide information at their level on what is available and, where necessary, make the first contact with the VDAB.

Question 6: STAFFING

Education

Before dealing with the question of what jobs exist in the field of career guidance, we should pause and consider the current state of the career development of teachers, since this affects the answer.

A shortage of teachers is forcing the authorities to consider measures to provide a solution. Better information is now available on employment in education, research has provided a problem analysis and policy recommendations, and some initial measures have been taken. One of the main conclusions of the research is, however, a need to move away from the flat career structure. As a result, the question whether there should be greater job differentiation in education and, if so, in what sense, has been prominent on the political agenda for some time. Although it seems uncertain whether major changes will take place in this respect during the term of the current parliament, it is undoubtedly a subject for the future. The question is whether Flanders is ready to make major changes to teacher training and the career development of teachers. The idea has been aired, however, and there are a good many reasons for considering greater job differentiation, whether or not coupled with different remuneration systems.

On the basis of the pay study, it can already be concluded that the main factors inhibiting career development in teaching are: (a) job uncertainty at the start of a teaching career; (b) limited career opportunities; (c) the relatively limited extent to which teachers are employable outside the educational sector; (d) a lack of coaching and guidance, and (e) limited opportunities for training. It is proposed in the recommendations for the fundamental review of pay policy to consider the development of career prospects for teachers and to base remuneration on principles other than simply qualifications and seniority. Examples include

⁽⁶⁶⁾ See question 3.

criteria such as job difficulty and competences. It is a debate that will have consequences in due course for the training and career prospects of teachers. The research also indicates that although the teaching profession is not usually given to thinking in terms of careers, teachers would consider various aspects of career orientation to be useful. Some 93.7 % are in favour of a system aimed at the gradual phasing-out of the careers of older teachers ('landing runways'). A further 72.8 % advocate a system of career advice providing objective information on their own strengths. Finally, 66.7 % advocate the introduction of individual development plans, combined with career wishes, in which their desired progress is discussed and plans are adjusted at regular intervals. An evolution towards greater differentiation of jobs at school will affect gradual specialisations in schools. Such specialisations could be associated with, among other things, better career guidance for students.

At present, some schools are already making use of the freedom provided by autonomy in order to introduce forms of job differentiation. To that end, they are using part of the teaching period package for school-related activities such as student guidance, subject guidance, student guidance work group, and so on. This does not exceed 10 % of the total package of resources. Often a form of job differentiation (special needs provision coordinator and equal educational opportunities counsellor) is created through extra resources (e.g. equal opportunities). The certificates that enable members of staff to take on counselling or school-related duties can differ. This depends not only on the legislation, but also on local choices. Anyone involved in career guidance will therefore be generally engaged in teaching, but may be a subject teacher, class teacher or teacher having a special assignment. The job of 'learning path counsellor' arose in situations in which hard-to-place target groups required extra guidance in order to enter the labour market (e.g. in special secondary education and part-time vocational secondary education). This was above all an indication of the 'substantive' nature of the assignment and was not strictly linked to particular qualifications.

As CLBs were created by combining the former PMS centres (education) and MST services (health), they also took on the staff of these organisations. This is why the following four disciplines are still mainly found in the centres at present: the psycho-pedagogic discipline (psychologists and their assistants), the social work discipline (social work assistants), the paramedical discipline (nurses) and the medical discipline (doctors). Vacancies arising since 1 September 2003 can be filled by staff with different qualifications. Local needs (i.e. the needs of the work area) take priority, and the centres have the autonomy to adjust the staff framework accordingly. The centres are therefore no longer bound by the strict rules under previous legislation.

Some centres already have an 'intercultural' assistant and each centre also employs administrative staff.

Given the historical background of the centres, people still tend to associate career guidance with staff from the psycho-pedagogic discipline. Although this category of staff are almost always involved in one way or another, they are not the sole discipline. Measures to expand the provision of career guidance (more than one choice of course or profession), the advent of

infothèques, the relationship with other fields of guidance (learning and studying, mental and social functioning, and preventive health care), cooperation with schools (curative and preventive) and the attention paid to risk groups and young people from ethnic minority backgrounds mean other disciplines have also become directly or indirectly involved in career guidance. The centres must provide a guarantee of multidisciplinary operation. The needs of the customer (tailored solutions) will be a key determinant of how this principle is put into operation and which aspects of guidance are involved.

Training for the self-employed

The provision of guidance to students and course participants involves the following jobs: (a) the sectoral learning path counsellor; (b) the person in charge of the study component; (c) tutors; (d) the workplace coach, and (e) CLB staff from the centre with which Syntra has signed a policy contract.

The learning path counsellor arranges the learning path guidance for the apprentice. This is a new job. Unlike apprenticeship officers (who currently work independently), learning path counsellors will be in the employ of the Flemish Institute for Independent Entrepreneurship (VIZO). The aim is to strengthen their independent position. The contract indicates what their job does and does not entail. A transitional measure is planned for the present group of apprenticeship officers.

Employment (VDAB)

Since the overall function of the VDAB affects all aspects of the broad definition of career guidance, it is worthwhile considering its staff establishment in its entirety. This information is based on the 2002 annual report.

At the end of 2002, the VDAB employed a total of 4 372 people. This includes those with whom a contract of employment has been signed or those employed under a set of staff regulations, irrespective of whether they work full time or part time and whether they are present or absent (those absent on account of career interruptions are also included in this figure).

For a more accurate indication, the annual report refers to budgetary units, as these exclude staff who are absent and not in receipt of remuneration. The number of budgetary units, expressed in full-time equivalents (FTEs), is 3 680. This is 270 FTEs lower than the 2001 figure. The cause of this decline is the hiving-off of commercial services in 2002. If this is taken into account, the personnel establishment can be seen to have actually increased by 85 FTEs against 2001. This increase is due to new assignments such as integration policy (+39 FTEs), the establishment of competence centres (+10 FTEs) and the start of the VOLVO project (+9 FTEs). A number of staff also chose not to switch to t-groep (15 FTEs).

The number of staff of foreign origin increased against 2001 by 20 FTEs (now 54 from the EU, 62 from Turkey and North Africa and 30 others).

Examples of jobs directly involving career guidance include: VDAB consultant, process counsellor, learning path counsellor, job shop consultant and Eures consultant (internationally oriented).

The following table shows staff qualification levels:

Level	Men	Women	Total
A (university or higher education – long course)	214	144	358
B (higher education – short course)	388	912	1 300
C (higher secondary education)	175	604	779
D (lower secondary education)	111	718	829
E&E – management (university education or higher education – long course)	93	31	124
E&E – instruction (may be all levels, but receive same pay as university graduates)	551	375	926
E&E – technical (in principle, lower secondary or primary education)	45	11	56
TOTAL	1 577	2 795	4 372

Question 7: Delivery settings

As a result of the ‘learning to learn’ cross-subject attainment targets ⁽⁶⁷⁾, it is clear what efforts and results are expected of each school with regard to (educational) career guidance. The school has the freedom to decide how this should be arranged. Although the general framework may indicate the same boundaries for all schools, major differences can arise in day-to-day practice.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ To be read in conjunction with the subject-related attainment targets in order to estimate their full impact on career guidance.

The same is true of the CLB. Here too, the boundaries are fixed, though the manner of implementation varies. Differences will be perceptible as regards: (a) the extent to which career guidance activities form part of a broader range of guidance activities incorporated in other subjects or are dealt with as ‘separate lessons’; (b) the extent to which there are clear agreements and divisions of responsibility between the school and the CLB, and (c) the extent to which there is cooperation with partners such as universities, institutes of higher education, the VDAB and VIZO.

This affects:

- the quality of the information delivered (objectivity, completeness and correctness of data);
- the quality of working procedures (tailored to meet needs and with respect for the individual’s right of self-determination as well as care for at-risk groups);
- the quality of the cooperative link between the CLB, the school and any partners (complementarity guarantees that the group as a whole obtains information and that students with a need for guidance and those at risk due to complex or interrupted careers receive help; accessibility guarantees information is available for the customer within the network when it is needed; low-threshold access guarantees that the most vulnerable groups can be reached).

In the 2000-2001 policy letter on education and non-formal education, the Minister for Education and Training announced the start of a project aimed at ‘optimising the transition from secondary to tertiary education’. The project, carried out in partnership with VLOR, is being organised, coordinated and supervised by a steering group. A step-by-step plan will group together the various measures in order to improve the choice available to students and increase their chances of success. The Flemish Government has already approved an initial pilot project, which will focus on improving the quality of choice of course and educational guidance in schools. Under the new arrangements for guidance, the school and all teachers play a prominent role in educational guidance and the move to higher education.

The ‘action points’ of the pilot project are:

- professionalisation of teaching staff with regard to educational and career guidance;
- establishment in all schools of internal networks linking those concerned;
- establishment of inter-school networks (combined school);
- integration of educational and career guidance in subjects (including extracurricular subjects);
- use of a course ‘choice file’ in the third stage of secondary education;
- use of ICT applications.

The authorities have opted for open admission to higher education in an attempt to reduce the numbers who fail.

This project takes account of the fact that the CLB Decree (and the ‘learning to learn’ cross-subject attainment targets) creates a shift in responsibilities, as a result of which the school becomes the organisation primarily responsible for briefing and counselling students. The main objectives of the project are to increase the skill and sense of responsibility of students in making choices and to optimise the process of counselling by the school.

The VLOR advisory report on the SOHO project explains views on potential improvements to the present situation and says something about the context in which educational guidance should be organised.

The report emphasises the fact that secondary and higher education have a shared responsibility and points to the supporting role of student guidance centres. It also contains proposals on cooperation between these partners (demand for consultation and coordination) and the desirability of structural measures.

For secondary education, the report advocates:

- greater independence for students (inclusion in the curriculum of the third stage of secondary education of competences intended to promote transfer to higher education);
- flexible organisation of the third stage of secondary education (complete autonomy for the school in order to modify the programme and thereby facilitate transfer to higher education);
- expansion of transitional options (possibility of switching in the third stage if this will ensure transfer to higher education);
- guidance with choice should make use of a choice file; this may involve either educational or career guidance;
- advice on the educational guidance file should be given by the deliberative class council.

As regards the CLB, the report indicates that it expects the CLB to: (a) assist teaching staff who counsel students in making a choice file; (b) assist the class council in advising on the choice file, and (c) use its expertise in supervising the educational choice file of students who are at a higher risk.

For higher education, the report advocates:

- the provision of information by universities and colleges to prospective students providing clarity on admission requirements, objectives, the level of abstraction of courses and general and specific requirements; as information alone is not sufficient, there should also be more opportunity for prospective students to gain first-hand experience;
- various structural proposals with regard to organisation and sanctioning, the structure of the course, differentiation in the courses available, the spread of studies and the use of credit systems.

The report calls for consultation forums to be established to promote cooperation on the concrete objectives of the report. In this way, measures can be taken to coordinate information, optimise the initial situation of students, and arrange cooperation with experts in preparing the choice file or in formulating a recommendation. It is also a way of becoming better acquainted with one another's culture and thinking about the best ways of dealing with failures in the first year of higher education.

The SOHO project was the result of this advisory report and therefore largely capitalises on the suggestions made in the report.

Educational guidance is regarded as a collective responsibility of all teachers over a number of years and stages, in the form of integrated student guidance on educational and career choice. The pilot project itself deals with the transition from secondary to higher education and therefore focuses on the operation of a study choice file in the third stage of secondary education. This is a 'phase' which forms an integral part of a larger whole.

In practice, it is expected that a single teacher (the class teacher or stage coordinator) or a number of teachers will provide counselling for a limited number of students in connection with higher education (a class of 20 students). The counsellor will encourage and support the process of making the choice of study. It is the duty of the counsellor to submit the file to the class council. The class council then discusses the choice of study and makes suggestions as to how the process can be improved. The counsellor discusses the view of the class council with the student and his or her parents. In the course of the choice process, the class council concerned will have to assess the process at various stages. In each case it will provide feedback to the student. All students are expected to take responsibility themselves for preparing a choice file on an independent basis, with assistance when necessary. This could help students, particularly the most vulnerable groups, gain a feeling of empowerment. This is an example of just one process. Schools already anticipating the aims of this private project are using comparable processes, albeit slightly modified to take account of previous developments at their school. Schools are free, even under the pilot project, to adjust the process proposed here.

Student counselling must be supplemented by the provision of information. A network of external partners should supplement the internal network within the school so that their extra input provides students with an objective view of courses and occupations.

The SOHO project operates in a predetermined zone. The participating schools receive extra resources that enable them to appoint a SOHO coordinator. Provision is made for refresher training for teachers who take on the role of educational counsellor. Information on the results of the pilot project is available on the website⁽⁶⁸⁾. Visitors to the website can also find information on the project itself, as well as choice files, illustrative material, instruments, and so on.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ www.ond.vlaanderen.be/soho

Comparable initiatives can be undertaken in part-time vocational secondary education and apprenticeship training. However, the context changes considerably owing to training and guidance in the workplace.

Legislation on part-time vocational secondary education takes account of this by introducing learning path guidance and refers to the complexity inherent in mapping out individual learning paths, as it is a changing situation involving countless people and organisations. Nonetheless, there are two clearly recognisable phases: the initial path and the individual learning path.

Initial path: ‘In the initial path phase, the emphasis is on intake, diagnosis and orientation. To make this phase structurally possible, the centres can establish a “reception group”. This group, which may be temporary or permanent, consists of one or more young people who, for whatever reason, have been unable to make a clear choice of course. It may also contain young people who are not yet ready for employment, but who would be eligible for, say, a transitional project.’

The learning path proper: ‘The learning path proper starts with the definite choice and is characterised by vocationally-oriented training in which every effort must be made to alternate study with employment (or a worthwhile equivalent). Vocational education at a training centre and job experience in a business or institution (or a worthwhile equivalent) should augment each other wherever possible. Job application training, employment agency services and on-the-job coaching should play a key role.’

Adult education organises the education and training courses available in the form of: (a) a traditional system spread over one or more years; (b) a modular system; (c) face-to-face education; (d) distance education; (e) combined education, and (f) contractual education. One of the main challenges for the future will be coordinating the courses available with the needs of the target group. These needs are reflected in the form of demand for flexible learning paths and a number of learning paths, i.e. long and intensive paths characterised above all by intensive guidance and support, and short and accelerated paths and paths that allow a combination of face-to-face education and self-study.

Second-chance education centres (TKOs) were given greater autonomy by the Adult Education Decree (1999), in particular the possibility of issuing their own certificates. This was an initiative which lowered the access threshold to TKOs and encouraged course participants to take examinations which, if passed, confer entitlement to a certificate⁽⁶⁹⁾. This gives TKOs the challenge of accepting responsibility for internal quality assurance. In this case, monitoring quality involves, among other things, providing guidance, achieving curriculum objectives and arranging transfers according to the personal goals of the student at the beginning of the course.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ The number of course participants rose from 1 300 in 2000 to approx. 2 500 in 2003.

In both cases, i.e. the elaboration of flexible learning paths and quality assurance, it will be necessary to guarantee guidance of choice processes and path guidance (above all for particular target groups). It is not always clear how this special needs provision should be reflected in all training places.

VDAB

In 1994, the VDAB was the first public sector body in Flanders to conclude a management agreement with the Flemish Government. This event reinforced the trend towards updating the provision of public sector employment services. However, the evolution of the VDAB as a public sector employment and vocational education service was accompanied by a parallel development giving greater scope to private initiative. In this field, an increase in the number of non-commercial organisations (non-governmental organisations working to reintegrate at-risk groups through methods such as path guidance and network training) and commercial agencies became visible.

These commercial agencies were gradually recognised by the Flemish authorities. This involved specifically the recognition of employment agencies in the Flemish Region (1991), a recognition scheme for recruitment, selection and outplacement agencies (1993), and recognition of a framework for private job placement services (1995). The various professional federations and the social partners were involved in the process through advisory committees. By Decree of 18 May 1999, a 'Redeployment Fund' was established to enable outplacement and guidance activities to be outsourced to the private sector. There were also various subsidised initiatives by employment agencies to promote the mobility of jobseekers, involve at-risk groups and experiment with projects to provide assured delivery. The authorities had adopted a two-track labour market policy, i.e. strengthening public sector involvement and increasing the possibilities of the private sector.

Despite these legislative initiatives, it was quite some time before concrete cooperation got off the ground. In April 1999, the Flemish Government embarked on an initiative which led to the conclusion of a cooperation protocol between the VDAB and the UPEDI (the trade association of employment agencies). This agreement provided for cooperation in the field of labour market information, job vacancy exchanges and work path guidance.

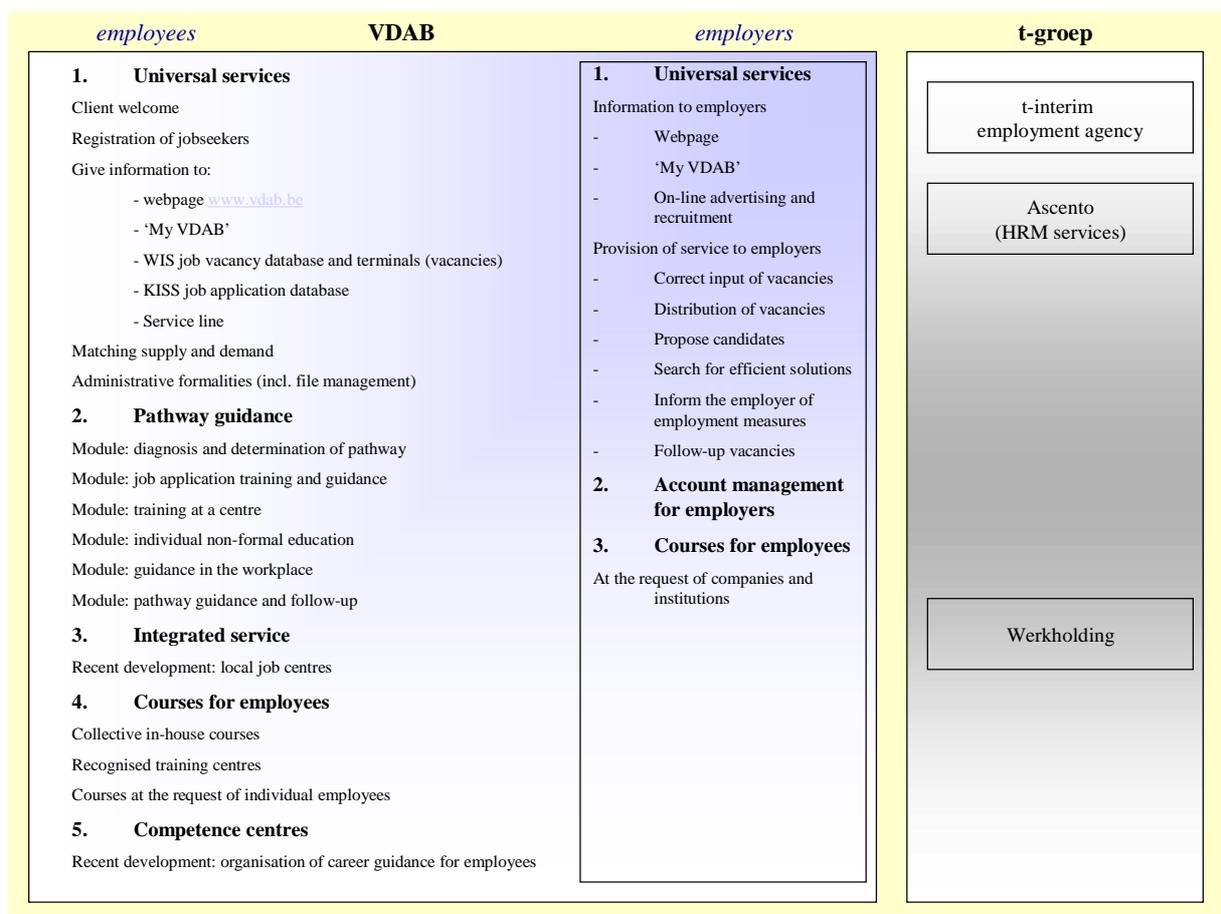
The increasing complexity caused by the presence of several organisations strengthened the impression that stricter overall control was necessary. This control would have to provide a solution to the problems of coordination resulting from the use of different reference frameworks, the competition element, the strong segmentation between the various parties involved and the sometimes unclear objectives and target group orientation. In other words, control was required in order to prevent a lack of transparency for both the target group of (potential) jobseekers and that of employees. In addition, control would have to facilitate better coordination between supply and demand in the labour market. As mentioned above, the VDAB was assigned the role of both director and actor.

The service provided by the VDAB can be divided into three main parts: (a) universal service; (b) work path guidance for jobseekers, and (c) training for employees. The sections below on delivery methods (question 8) and career information (question 9) deal above all with what is available in the category of universal services and path guidance for jobseekers.

The transformation of training centres into competence centres is a major new given in the context of career guidance. The main activities of competence centres are:

- providing information and organising information sessions for customers on working and learning;
- providing career advice;
- organising education and training, particularly follow-up and refresher courses for coaches;
- assessing jobseekers and employees, and if necessary issuing them with certificates.

Not all VDAB courses are given in the VDAB's own competence centres (former training centres) and by its own instructors. Approximately one third of courses are outsourced to third parties. 'Individual vocational courses', in which jobseekers are trained by their employer rather than attending a course in a centre, are also on the increase.



In its management agreement with the Flemish Government, the VDAB has undertaken to transfer personnel from its existing offices to the local job shops for the provision of an integrated service. This service is the combination of services provided by the VDAB for jobseekers and employers, and consists of the universal service of the VDAB and path guidance. This integrated service is offered in all VDAB offices and local job shops. At the centres, the service is offered by the VDAB or by certified partner organisations which take responsibility for the path guidance of specific target groups.

Since 2001, the VDAB has introduced a new model of universal service designed to promote the self-reliance of jobseekers and employers by offering a range of instruments. Examples are the file manager, training guide, WIS job vacancy database and KISS job application database. These are online instruments which enable jobseekers to learn more about themselves and approach the labour market from a stronger position (i.e. one of empowerment). Some 'self-management instruments' have also been developed for employers.

'My VDAB' was the next step in this development process. It provides jobseekers with a virtual job application area in which they can manage their curriculum vitae (CVs), job vacancy selections and job applications. A CV can be analysed and compared with comparable CVs. Jobseekers can also check their CV against the skills required or selection criteria applied by employers. The system also shows individuals how often their CV has been consulted in the KISS database.

Employers can manage their job vacancies and CV selections through 'My VDAB'. The system allows an automatic match with CVs from the KISS database. Here too, comparison is possible with vacancies of a similar nature and the vacancy can be checked against the skills and selection criteria of job applicants. It is also possible to find out how often a job vacancy has been consulted.

The Enlarged Internal Labour Market (VIA) project provides an instrument for the dissemination and management of job vacancies in public sector bodies in Flanders and the Ministry of the Flemish Community.

For rapid screening, consultants can use a 'PROFIL test'. This provides information in the short term on a particular aspect of the overall knowledge of a candidate, without the candidate having to possess the relevant technical expertise. An 'orientation' module is also being developed for the use of jobseekers who have not yet chosen an occupation or who wish to reconsider their choice.

Recent major innovations involve the following themes:

- diversity;
- lifelong learning (including the opening of competence centres and career guidance);
- integration and Dutch as a second language;
- orientation and screening (including the development of instruments for target groups);
- Open and Distance Learning (ODL);
- knowledge sharing;
- improvement of path guidance (new and more efficient forms of work);
- provision of development opportunities for everyone (including initiatives relating to certification and the accreditation of prior learning);
- strengthening of knowledge management (including career guidance).

Question 8: Delivery methods

The CLBs have a long tradition of providing (educational) career guidance and guidance on making the transition to employment. This has been reflected in a variety of instruments and methods, which have evolved over time. As a result, there is now (a) greater participation by students and those involved with students in the process (self-determination and guidance instead of orientation) and (b) integration of career guidance in education (cooperation with schools) and increasing use of systems that provide students with greater opportunities to find and process information independently (*infothèques*, work booklets, choice files, use of the Internet and software packages). The focus of guidance has also broadened over time. The process is no longer based mainly (or sometimes solely) on knowledge, skills and labour

market data, rather it takes into account values, interests and the influence of choices on other areas of life. The choice process is therefore regarded as part of a broader guidance process, in which educational guidance, well-being, health care and, if necessary, social and emotional guidance may also be important. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the influence and importance of the student's surroundings as a factor influencing choices and decisions.

The manner in which all this material is used depends on the agreements made by CLBs with schools in their area. These agreements are influenced by the vision of career guidance in schools.

Choice files, which have been referred to on several occasions above, are a tool that helps students through the choice process. A choice file is not a uniform tool for use by everyone. Instead, various 'models' have evolved in recent years. All of them are aimed in one way or another at enabling students (a) to make personal preparations (self-evaluation by identifying possibilities, limitations, interests, values and expectations) and (b) to make proposals for a choice path (identify shortcomings to be remedied, make proposals for improvements and list improvements already made). All of this is associated with efforts to identify courses and occupations that are available in the market and the consequences of making certain choices and create awareness of the influences exerted by the student's surroundings. The student substantiates his or her choice by reference to the choice file.

In many schools, material of this kind is already used in consultation and cooperation with CLBs. Guidance is usually provided in the form of classroom activities, individual interviews with students and parents, and general information evenings for parents (often intended to explain the education structure). In addition, a school can arrange for students to take tests. These are part of the learning process or student monitoring system. On request, CLBs can hold individual tests where necessary (often IQ tests). The school will, in principle, be responsible for the overall process and the CLB will either take certain steps within the process or play a coaching role. The latter may also involve the provision of material for use by the school. The CLB itself plays a counselling role for at-risk students or complex choice processes.

The present practice contains elements from the vision and path proposed in the SOHO project. However, the connection between the successive steps is not always guaranteed to the same extent, and the focus on ensuring teachers acquire expertise does not necessarily follow from the granting of an assignment. The value-added of the SOHO project lies in the designation of the whole, the emphasis on the individual responsibility of each participant, the focus on the provision of support for the teacher and the importance of refresher training. The SOHO project is being monitored by researchers and will generate information on the development by students of choice competence in the pilot zone.

In courses for the self-employed, career guidance largely occurs in the form of guidance in the workplace. The employer and apprenticeship officer play a key role by providing information and acting as mentor. The first important step in choosing an occupation is the signing of an

apprenticeship contract. Any changes of course during the apprenticeship path are supervised by the apprenticeship officer (in the future, apprenticeship path counsellors), by CLBs and possibly also by teachers of theory. The CLBs have the same function with regard to students in courses for the self-employed as for students in primary education and in full-time or part-time vocational secondary education.

In its newsletter, VIZO sheds some light on the principles of path guidance in the future.

- Path guidance is provided by a learning path guidance counsellor, preferably based in a Syntra office. This is a new function. The learning path counsellor can be approached by the apprentice and the employer regarding practical training. The process to be completed includes: (a) an intake interview; (b) screening; (c) mapping-out of a path, and (d) conclusion of an apprenticeship agreement. Screening instruments are developed by VIZO consultants. The Syntra offices are responsible for arranging screening tests (separate module) and passing on the results to the learning path counsellor, who then maps out a path.
- Efforts are being made to reduce the number of apprenticeship contracts per counsellor.
- A multi-service counter is being developed in the various Syntra offices. These can then make referrals. The counter is staffed by learning path counsellors, supported by colleagues who provide administrative support.
- The learning path counsellor works both as a member of the team and on a sectoral basis.
- A central file of the apprentice and the employer is drawn up. This file must be available digitally for all those involved. Files will therefore no longer be administered on a provincial basis. This applies to all those involved, without exception, in other words, VIZO, the apprenticeship officers/learning path counsellors and, to some extent, the Syntra offices.
- Consultation structures are established with all parties involved in the apprenticeship.

Other initiatives based on the principle of ‘on-the-job training’ or providing methodological and practical support for this approach can be found in a number of projects in which VIZO, the VDAB and the Education Department are involved.

One example is the ‘Practical Training Coordination Data Banks’⁽⁷⁰⁾. Besides matching supply and demand, this project is aimed at: (a) encouraging measures leading to more flexible periods of practical training; (b) reconciling educational interests and employment legislation that also apply to on-the-job training, and (c) helping achieve high-quality practical training by investing in its preparation and supervision. For this reason, information sessions are being organised in cooperation with the Chambers of Commerce.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ See DIVA.

The Vocational Training Service of the Education Department started the VIVES project together with a number of partner organisations on 15 May 2002 ⁽⁷¹⁾. Several products are being developed, including a guidance instrument for on-the-job training during apprenticeship (VIZO). The aim of this instrument is to improve communication between members of the support network for the apprentice. The project has also held a contact day for schools and companies to: (a) promote consideration of good examples of network development between schools and companies; (b) promote useful instruments for evaluation and differentiation, and (c) present the results of a questionnaire dealing with on-the-job training.

VIONA ⁽⁷²⁾ is carrying out research into the quality of practical training as forms of on-the-job training. Six systems of practical training are being studied: classroom training during full-time secondary education; training in the context of apprenticeships for the self-employed (VIZO); training in the context of industrial apprenticeships schemes; VDAB training projects; individual vocational training (individual vocational training organised by the VDAB) and ESF-supported training projects.

The VDAB employs various methods to devise specific projects. This is demonstrated by the following description of what is available. It refers directly to the tools used. We will focus above all on work path guidance, career guidance in competence centres and integrated guidance in job shops.

Work path guidance

Where the universal service proves insufficient, work path guidance is possible. This approach is characterised by the link between the jobseeker and a single fixed consultant (path counsellor) and by the possibility of mapping out a tailored path (including use of the requisite number of modules). The function of the path counsellor is to devise, together with the jobseeker, a realistic and market-oriented path that takes due account of the initial situation. The path counsellor is then responsible for ensuring the various steps in the path are taken. At the very least, this involves diagnosis, path determination, path guidance and follow-up.

- Diagnosis and path determination module. To size up the initial situation (strengths and weaknesses), use can be made of specialised screening, such as assessment, medical research, psychological research and profiling. Once the strengths and weaknesses have been analysed, a tailored step-by-step plan is prepared;
- Job application training and guidance module. The VDAB organises ‘job clubs’, where jobseekers can not only receive job application training (acquisition of skills, attitudes and

⁽⁷¹⁾ This project comes under the EQUAL programme of the European Social Fund. The partnership consists of institutional providers of vocational courses (VIZO, VDAB, the Education Department and the non-formal education organisation AGORA), the employers’ organisations Verbond Kristelijke Werkgevers and Unie van Zelfstandige Ondernemers, and the Antwerp-Waasland Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

⁽⁷²⁾ Flemish Interuniversity Research Network for Labour Market Reporting.

knowledge), but also make job applications. Instructional material and infrastructure are available free of charge (PC, telephone, photocopier, documentation, and so on);

- Centre-based training module. The VDAB organises various courses. It tries to keep them as short as possible and, where necessary, supplement them with practical or on-the-job training;
- Individual training module. This form of training, in combination with guidance, ensures students meet the preconditions for entering employment. The module covers social and personal skills, Dutch as a second language and the ICTs. The VDAB's participation in the integration policy (see Annex 2) is also reflected in this module;
- On-the-job training and guidance module. This module can be offered as a follow-up to centre-based training or for students who have not attended a previous course. Training and guidance can be provided in various ways: alternating training and study, individual vocational courses in an enterprise, subsidised starter enterprises, sheltered work and practical completion courses. Individual vocational courses have proved very successful. The figures in the 2002 annual report indicate that 86.3 % find full-time employment within six months of completing such a course, while 2.6 % find part-time work within this period. One in 10 participants is still looking for work after six months;
- Path guidance and follow-up module. The frequency and intensity of the follow-up is determined by the path counsellor in accordance with the needs of the jobseeker.

In 2002, the various path guidance modules were used by a total of 170 976 jobseekers.

Career guidance is defined on the VDAB's website as 'the help offered to enable people to find new angles of approach, develop new ideas and improve their understanding of themselves and the labour market'. Career guidance can lead to courses, training, individual non-formal learning, on-the-job guidance or, directly, to employment.

Career services are offered in one of the nine competence centres. These were established in cooperation with a number of sectoral funds. The method used to provide career guidance is in keeping with the proposals made by the Career Guidance Task Force of the King Baudouin Foundation (see Annex 4). This method has the following features:

- each individual participant is free to choose whether or not to embark on the process of career guidance;
- self-research as a basis for guidance; the participant makes a realistic assessment of the situation by means of tasks and exercises using an exercise book intended for individual guidance, but also suitable for groups provided a few changes are made;
- specific career choices;
- the preparation of a personal development plan: this step-by-step plan is based on the career choices made and on choices concerning well-being in the present job, priorities in work and life, the balance between family, work and leisure time, and so on; if necessary, links can also be made with initiatives taken in the context of DIVA;

- a competence file is drawn up during career guidance; this is an instrument that catalogues in a structured manner the competences of the customer (prior learning, skills and attitudes); all experience, whether gained at school, in the workplace or elsewhere, is eligible for inclusion; the file is generally used in conjunction with parts of the exercise book.

Jobseekers can seek contact either of their own volition (for example because they are looking for new challenges or seeking to strike a better balance between family, leisure time and work) or in response to a request by an employer (for example owing to the start of a new department or further opportunities for growth).

Infothèques can be used to meet demand for sectoral and labour market-oriented information and can be visited freely by those interested.

Career guidance confers entitlement to training and guidance vouchers. For a maximum of EUR 50, the VDAB provides a service package of 12 hours.

In the course of 2002, 746 employees visited a competence centre of their own volition. Of these, 31 % sought information, while 43 % effectively embarked on career guidance.

The integrated system of guidance provided by local job shops is a recent initiative. The activities of the VDAB's former placement offices are to be integrated in approximately 140 local job shops by the end of 2003. The service provided by the VDAB is supplemented by (complementary) partners. The aim of introducing lower-threshold access and increasing the transparency of what is available (by centralising all services in one place) and offering a local service economy is to provide more opportunities to vulnerable groups.

A local job shop is operated by the following partners:

- the Employment Branch;
- the local employment agency (a not-for-profit organisation), whose main functions are: (a) to allow the long-term unemployed to carry out an activity which, owing to its nature or infrequency, is not performed in normal employment and (b) to promote 'activation' measures; the duties of local employment agency officials in local job shops have been defined;
- the Government Department for Manpower Services (RVA): this is a public-sector social security body which organises unemployment insurance;
- the Flemish Local Networks Support Centre (SLN) (a not-for-profit, umbrella organisation which coordinates the activities of organisations that provide tailored jobseeking services);
- employment path guidance (see Annex 1);
- the public social welfare centres (OCMWs);
- the town or municipality;
- the VDAB.

The job shop team provides jobseekers with the following services: reception, information, individual guidance, coaching, referral to guidance, training and placement, and practical assistance (bicycles and light mopeds which can be borrowed for three months). Customers are entered in the customer monitoring system and can consult and supplement their file at the job shop. The job shop itself also creates employment in the services sector (childcare, home help and odd jobs about the house).

The customer monitoring system, which has already been mentioned, enables all guidance work and courses to be combined in a single customer file.

This provides all partner organisations with an overview of the situation. The VDAB describes the customer monitoring system in its glossary of terms as follows: ‘a system that basically registers the customer data and the path (measures and phases) to be followed by the customer. The aim of the registration is to monitor the path.’

Access to the customer file is obtained by means of an information sheet in which the customer authorises the VDAB to release the file. A guide was drawn up in order to ensure correct use of the system. This is accessible electronically, and both the information sheet and the guide can be downloaded.

Question 9: Career information

The CLBs have a duty to provide information. How this is performed is determined in cooperation with schools. In recent years, the centres have gathered information on courses and subjects at the various schools and processed this in the form of *infothèques* (i.e. brochures available for consultation and classified in accordance with a particular system) and software (electronic survey of courses and subjects, with search functions). The CLBs’ *infothèques* also contain information on the labour market, courses for the self-employed and thematic information which may be relevant to career guidance (e.g. information on health). All this information is linked to electronic information. Classes visit the centre’s *infothèque*, and individual students can also search for information there. A talk with a CLB officer is also possible.

Parents and students can visit the website of the CLB branch (Education Department) to find out which CLB is responsible for providing guidance for the school where students are enrolled. Students also receive this information when they enrol at a school.

Efforts to improve the quality of information (guaranteeing up-to-date data) led to cooperation between CLBs and the Education Department. This cooperation also resulted in the introduction of study and information days, abbreviated to ‘SID-ins’. These are regional, cross-network opportunities to obtain information on studies and courses. They are a major annual event in each Flemish province and were held for the seventh successive year in the

2002-2003 school year. They are organised by the CLBs in cooperation with the Education Department.

The target group is final-year students who wish to enter higher education.

At the start of the school year, they receive a free copy of the brochure entitled 'What next after secondary education?' This brochure contains a summary of higher education courses in Flanders. It was designed specially for the SID-ins. The SID-ins are held in January and February and are open to classes over a three-day period. On the fourth day (Saturday), they can be visited by anyone interested. All Flemish universities, colleges of higher education, professions, VDAB course organisers, VIZO, etc. are invited to take part in each of the regions.

A EURO SID-in is organised centrally for students who are considering going abroad to study. This fair is held annually in Brussels and is intended specially for students interested in studying abroad. The material is provided by representatives of the participating countries and includes information on accreditation and the equivalence of foreign and Belgian qualifications.

Universities and colleges also organise information days and distribute brochures. Intermediaries are informed by means of contact and study days.

During the holidays, the CLBs close for a given period. During these collective periods of closure, the centres operate a telephone information line. The staff who run these lines are deployed centrally and are properly equipped to provide parents and students by telephone with information on courses and professions. If the information is insufficient and guidance is requested, applicants are referred to local CLB staff. Information on these telephone lines is published through the schools and by means of newsheets, libraries, posters, and so on.

Although the CLB Decree stresses the independent position of the CLBs and requires them to develop a code of ethics which must, among other things, guarantee the independence of staff, there is evidently a feeling that additional (or perhaps different) initiatives are required to guarantee the low-threshold access and objective provision of information. The Flemish Minister for Education opened a temporary project known as the 'independent information service' in Ghent on 1 October 2003. This project is being run in cooperation with the regional CLB.

This information service guarantees the provision of information on: (a) the structure and organisation of Flemish education; (b) the full range of courses available; (c) the alignment between education and employment; (d) welfare provisions, and (e) health provisions. These functions are entirely in keeping with the obligations imposed on the centres by the CLP Decree. This project differs from the services provided in the centres mainly in that it covers the entire education field (i.e. provides information on all courses available for both students of compulsory school age and adults) and is accessible to all (not limited either to a particular field of work or young people of compulsory school age). The project focuses on degrees of

guidance related to needs: the opportunity to seek information independently and without help, support with such searches on request, and an interview during which guidance and advice can be provided if the process of choice has become blocked and it is not clear in what direction further action should be taken. Interventions are limited to the provision of guidance on choosing. If it is found that the request for support goes beyond the problem of choice, the person concerned is referred to a contact in the CLB, the school mentors or the regional guidance workers.

This project is perhaps the outcome of a political debate held during the discussion of the draft decree on Student Guidance Centres (CLBs), in which the idea of separating the provision of information (regional and independent) from guidance (at schools in the case of students of compulsory school age) was defended by some and attacked by others (on the grounds that it was not desirable to uncouple information from guidance). Regardless of the arguments for and against establishing regional information services, the main question that arises is how this project relates to those launched in recent years by DIVA. Will 'independent information services' be introduced in Flanders? And, if so, will they be coordinated with the services provided by learning centres and job shops? Or is the recently launched project the forerunner of new, parallel structures? If so, this does not bode well for the future, if for no other reason than cost. After all, it will not promote transparency or low-threshold access for users, although this was one of the aims.

Several projects for the provision of information to adults have been established on the initiative of DIVA. All DIVA's projects have already been listed above. What follows below is repeated because of its immediate relevance to the provision of information.

The 'Big Learning Week' is an annual event designed to make adults in Flanders aware of training initiatives. The first Big Learning Week was held in October 2001, but subsequent editions (2002 and 2003) were held in September. The organisers focus on target groups that are hard to reach. Various partners make a contribution to the success of this event, for example by undertaking to reach their target groups. Incentives for participation are provided in the form of participation grants.

The specific aims are as follows:

- to focus attention on lifelong and lifewide learning;
- to inform the public of the wide range of learning options in their area;
- to foster a positive attitude to education and non-formal education in order to encourage participation;
- to promote cooperation between the various education providers;
- to turn the spotlight on and encourage good examples of non-formal education.

The Big Learning Week is widely publicised. The measures taken by the various partners are supported by a media campaign (advertisements, press coverage and radio and television ads).

The feasibility of the new concept of 'learning shops' is currently being studied. The purpose of learning shops would be to make it easier for adults to find information on the entire range of educational courses and non-formal education in Flanders. Specific aims would be to provide information, make constructive suggestions and, if necessary, help establish a learning path that meets the needs of the customer. This could be accomplished by (a) developing a knowledge system and database (permanent overview of learning possibilities for adults); (b) setting up a call centre; (c) personal contact with the customer, and (d) where appropriate, referring customers to mediation and guidance services (which would have a corresponding role to refer their customers to the learning shop where appropriate). The quality of the service would be reflected in, among other things, the organisation and supply of reliable data, the updating of such data and the availability of information to everyone.

The project group was established in June 2002 and is working on a feasibility study. The results of this study will indicate the effective costs of a learning shop and list the substantive options.

The Learning Guide is intended to provide clarity on non-formal education in Flanders. This is achieved by means of a website: www.leergids.be. This contains information on lifelong and lifewide learning in each province. There is a search function to find suitable courses and training organisations. This database is used above all to supply data for use in devising policy. The project went online during the 2002 Big Learning Week and is still being expanded. Further information can be found at www.onderwijsaanbod.be.

Various references have already been made in this report to instruments developed by the VDAB. Some of these instruments are in themselves channels through which information is provided and therefore also act as an instrument to promote self-reliance. Obviously, a large part of the information in a direct customer-consultant relationship is provided through contact with VDAB offices, job shops, competence centres, and so on. In addition, the information often relates to the identification of supply and demand in the market.

www.vdab.be

This extensive website provides an overview of all services provided by the VDAB, up-to-date information, integration of new projects and many links to websites. It opens the way for information on career interruptions, assistance in exploring the labour market, recommendations and tips on developing a career, help in making choices, IQ tests, and so on. There are also links to websites of commercial organisations and projects undertaken by employees' organisations. Information on numerous subjects is regularly provided under the heading 'e-zine'. Information on the labour market is also supplied on a CD-ROM.

'My VDAB'

This instrument, which is available on the website, was explained at length above. It gives both jobseekers and employers the opportunity independently to analyse and compare the CV (of the jobseeker) or the job vacancy (of the employer). It is also possible to discover to what

extent the information made available (in the form of a CV or job vacancy) has been consulted.

CO.BR.A

The 'competence and occupations' catalogue contains approximately 550 cards, each listing an occupation. The cards consist of:

- a descriptive section (general description of the occupation, working conditions, training and the required training and experience);
- basic requirements of the occupation;
- specific competences;
- products and areas of work;
- specific working conditions.

The information is available on the VDAB website (VDAB vocational orientation). However, anyone seeking or wishing to save information for personal career planning would be better advised to search through 'My VDAB' or use the file manager.

VDAB vocational orientation not only provides an overview of occupations, but also encourages the visitor to make a personal analysis (why is this occupation suitable for me?) and lists the addresses of organisations that can provide further information on a given occupation or help in making a choice.

Online advertising and recruiting

Various forms of advertising were used.

WIS job vacancy database

The job vacancy database is provided through the website and WIS kiosks. In Flanders as a whole, there are some 426 WIS kiosks located at VDAB offices, town halls and the offices of other partners.

KISS job application database

The VDAB concludes a partnership agreement with companies for the use of the KISS job application database and Jobmanager. The database contains an overview of CVs.

Service line

The service line provides a single telephone number from which the VDAB package of services can be reached. The service line may be used to obtain general information, to register, modify a file, report and manage job vacancies, use self-reliance instruments, and so

on. Since 2002, this number has also provided access to the complaints line. The service line is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on working days. There is also a single mail address.

Eures

The VDAB is affiliated to Eures (European Employment Services). Eures provides up-to-date information on working abroad. The information covers both job and living and working conditions and the foreign labour market. Eures arranges international recruitment. Since 2002, the VDAB has had its own Eures office in Leuven.

Infothèques in competence centres

Up-to-date information on occupations, industries, labour market trends, courses, rights and legislation can be found in the *infothèque* of the competence centre. All possible media are used, ranging from books, magazines and press articles to short films and web pages.

Information files for employers

These files combine information on VDAB services and other HRM information, for example employment measures and training subsidies.

Account management for employers

Regional account managers act as a fixed contact for employers. Not only do they provide information; they also identify needs. Their function is to help solve HRM problems. They can refer customers to other services within the VDAB if necessary. They hold information meetings for enterprises. One of the topics already dealt with at such meetings is employee training at the request of employers. Information files have also been prepared for account managers.

In addition to general overviews, up-to-date address lists and internal VDAB documents, the files contain sector agreements.

Question 10: Financing

The wage costs of teachers and the operating costs of a school are borne by the government. There are various scales, depending on qualifications. Entitlement is calculated by reference to criteria such as student numbers, the presence of specific target groups, specific duties (e.g. integrated education for disabled students and education at home). Innovative (temporary) projects or voluntary mergers are also encouraged by extra resources. 'Resources' are expressed in various ways, for example teaching periods, additional teaching periods, extra teaching periods, funds and sometimes extra funds for particular initiatives (e.g. in the field of ICTs).

In the CLB, the staffing ratio and financial support are linked to the number of students requiring guidance in the area of work ⁽⁷³⁾. It should be noted that the CLB Decree allocates a differentiated weighting according to the presence of particular target groups ⁽⁷⁴⁾. Extra funds are also granted for students belonging to the target group of the Equal Education Opportunities Decree and for student density.

Compulsory schooling and the guidance provided by the CLB are free of charge. However, parents may still be asked by a school to meet certain costs (e.g. photocopying or hiring of textbooks) and to pay for certain activities (e.g. excursions and theatre visits). Depending on the school's policy on such matters, these amounts may be quite high. Similarly, the choice file used throughout educational guidance is sometimes provided by parents in exchange for payment. However, the costs are generally minimal. Career guidance in education is to all intents and purposes free.

An enrolment fee ⁽⁷⁵⁾ should be paid for 'social advancement' (continuing) education, though certain groups are exempt. The following are among those entitled to exemption:

- those entitled to subsistence benefits;
- unemployed or economically inactive persons entitled to benefit, jobseekers who are compulsorily registered, except those who have taken early retirement;
- jobseekers over the age of 25 who are not in employment and have registered voluntarily;
- the disabled;
- those recognised as political refugees or who have applied for such status;
- inmates of a Belgian penal establishment;
- dependants of persons in one of the above categories.

Students who successfully complete a course receive a certificate. Primary education is free, but students completing it do not receive a certificate.

The Syntra offices receive funds through VIZO. In the future, cooperation between these two organisations will evolve to the point where they conclude a management agreement. Measurable output indicators will be formulated to that end.

⁽⁷³⁾ The 'area of work' is the group of schools and any training places of one of the five Syntra offices with which the CLB concluded a policy plan or policy contract.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Coefficient 7 (students of special education, integrated education and part-time vocational secondary education, and participants in recognised non-formal education), coefficient 4 (students of the 'B' first course year and of the preparatory vocational course, students of the second and third stages of vocational secondary education, and newcomers to primary and secondary education who are not native Dutch speakers), coefficient 1.5 (students of the first stage of secondary education, unless the group from the first stage was mentioned previously) and students of arts and technical secondary education). Coefficient 1 applies to all other students.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ EUR 0.37-0.64.

In principle, the VDAB provides a free service to jobseekers and employers. However, it charges a ‘cost price/enrolment’ for some services. For example, career guidance in a competent centre costs a maximum of EUR 50 for a 12-hour package. Other products and services are also offered in this way. The VDAB works primarily with resources provided by the Flemish authorities.

The 2002 annual report provides a survey of various costs, own income and government financing. The own income is generated mainly by online items, module 4 of path guidance (centre-based training) and individual vocational guidance in the enterprise. The table below contains examples from the financial statement for the 2002 working year.

	costs (EUR)	own income	to be financed by government
basic service	28 963 411	- 961 217	28 002 194
(path guidance)			
module 2 – diagnosis and path determination	32 831 529	- 336 963	32 494 836
module 3 – application training and guidance	3 698 602	- 25 207	3 673 395
module 4 – centre-based training	111 478 344	- 13 459 416	98 018 928
module 5 – individual training	16 051 946	- 450 752	15 601 194
module 6 – on-the-job training and guidance	15 815 267	- 159 307	5 655 960
module 7 – path guidance and follow-up	13 356 433	- 91 186	13 265 247
Total for modules 2-7	193 232 121	- 14 522 561	178 709 560
Competence centres	992 241	- 130 515	861 726

Question 11: Quality assurance

The educational inspectorate performs an external quality evaluation on behalf of the authorities. It monitors whether the schools, centres and CLBs carry out the duties entrusted to them, taking account of the standards imposed by the authorities (infrastructure and other standards). That way, the inspectorate ascertains whether the schools, centres and CLBs are making responsible use of the funds allocated to them. To that end, the inspectorate uses analysis frameworks ⁽⁷⁶⁾ and gives its decision in the form of a recommendation on whether

⁽⁷⁶⁾ The reference frameworks applied by the inspectorate are based on the CIPO model: context, input, process and output.

or not to recognise and subsidise schools and centres. Each school, centre or CLB is thoroughly audited every six years.

The schools are themselves primarily responsible for delivering, maintaining and improving quality. They are assisted by the school advisory services, which provide support on request⁽⁷⁷⁾. The performance of self-evaluation is increasingly encouraged through legislation.

At present, the autonomy of the institution allows each school, centre or CLB to determine for itself what it understands by quality. Consequently, many different analysis frameworks and methods are used to assess and monitor quality. Whether career guidance is covered by this and whether it is interpreted broadly as described in this report differs from school to school and from centre to centre. Not every school is as far advanced in drawing up a sound system of self-evaluation. There is still a long way to go in this respect.

However, the authorities have also indicated in various ways what they regard as quality, for example indirectly by making available the indicators used by the inspectorate when carrying out audits. Quality requirements are increasingly being clarified by inclusion in legislation:

- This may refer to steps to be taken in a process of self-evaluation, for example making an initial analysis and then determining and elaborating targets for action and targets for improvement on that basis;
- They may be expressed in the special needs provision for certain target groups or in the achievement of better results with certain target groups, for example, the reduction of absenteeism and the number of students who stay back a year or leave school with no qualifications;
- The attainment targets and development goals also indicate what the authorities understand by quality education in terms of the curriculum.

In preparation for an audit, the inspectorate of primary education asks the schools themselves to gather information in order to demonstrate, for example, to what extent attainment targets have been reached. The inspectorate of secondary education focuses on the schools' information file to assess their performance. The output data include the Flemish average, so the schools themselves can evaluate their own results. That way, the inspectorate encourages schools to carry out self-evaluation.

Plans are afoot for a reform that will affect the role of the inspectorate and the school advisory service in external quality monitoring and support for internal quality assurance (self-evaluation) in schools. The idea is that schools and centres should play a key role as the

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Further information on the operation of the inspectorate and school advisory service can be found in: *Onderwijsontwikkelingen* (Developments in education), Ministry of the Flemish Community, Education Department, September 2001. Available in several languages online (www.ond.vlaanderen.be – see publications) or at the website of the Education Inspectorate (www.onderwijsinspectie.be).

bodies primarily responsible for the quality of the education they provide. These plans have been provisionally shelved and will be reactivated only after broad public debate on the issue of quality in education.

Attainment targets are goals regarded by the authorities as a minimum for all students. These targets have been devised for each field of learning in primary education and each subject in secondary education. Fields of learning and cross-subject attainment targets have also been adopted. 'Learning to learn' is one of the fields of learning and cross-subject themes for which attainment targets have been devised. The manner in which attainment targets have been formulated in the choice competence area or sub-theme within 'learning to learn' in secondary education gives an idea of the concrete results that schools must achieve in the area of career guidance for their students. Here too, however, career guidance is broader than the obvious definition of the term and includes other factors that can make a useful contribution to such guidance. This often involves guidance or the provision of education which creates the conditions for making choices and decisions with regard to a school or career.

The 'learning to learn' cross-subject attainment targets are divided into four domains for the first stage of secondary education: (i) implementing; (ii) regulating; (iii) attitudes, views and convictions, and (iv) choice of study. The last of these domains has the following attainment targets:

- students must understand the general structure of secondary education;
- students should be prepared to adopt an unprejudiced attitude to courses, subjects and occupations;
- students should be able to adopt simple strategies to make a choice of study;
- students should be willing to choose a course of study in line with their own learning potential.

The 'learning to learn' cross-subject attainment targets are divided into four sub-themes for the second and third stages of secondary education: (i) views on learning; (ii) acquiring and processing information; (iii) regulating the learning process, and (iv) choice competence. The last of these sub-themes has the following attainment targets:

For the second stage:

- clarification of self-concept
 - ✓ students can express their own interests, capacities and values;
 - ✓ students can develop a positive self-image on the basis of reliable data;
- broadening of horizons
 - ✓ students can, on the basis of their own interests, capacities and values, obtain useful information on educational and vocational opportunities;
 - ✓ students are prepared to adopt an unprejudiced attitude to school careers and occupations;

- choice strategies
 - ✓ students understand and can go through the various stages of a process of choice.

For the third stage:

- clarification of self-concept
 - ✓ students can provide information on their own interests, capacities and values;
 - ✓ students can develop a positive self-image on the basis of reliable data and provide information on this;
- broadening of horizons
 - ✓ students can, on the basis of their own interests, capacities and values, obtain useful information on educational and vocational opportunities;
 - ✓ students know their educational and vocational options, the bodies that provide services involving the labour market and/or further schooling;
 - ✓ students can and are prepared to adopt an unprejudiced, role-breaking and respectful attitude towards schooling and occupations;
- choice strategies
 - ✓ students can endure the various stages of a process of choice and take account of the consequences;
- contextual influences
 - ✓ students can recognise contextual influences on their choices and take a stance in relation to them.

In preparing specific attainment targets, education relies to a large extent on existing occupational profiles drawn up by SERV in cooperation with the social partners and the industries and sectors involved. An occupational profile is a collection of characteristics that describes the essence of an occupation and the activities to be performed as well as the requirements to be fulfilled by a person practising or wishing to practise it. The profile should provide clarity as to the competence requirements and qualifications required by industry and any changes to them.

Quality assurance and monitoring in the context of equal education opportunities are provided by the imposition of a self-evaluation requirement on the one hand and the involvement of the inspectorate for specific purposes on the other. Schools are given the opportunity to determine targets on the basis of an initial analysis, and the inspectorate ascertains every three years whether these targets have been achieved and, if so, to what extent. The authorities have stipulated, however, that the targets must be formulated at three levels, i.e. the school, staff and students. They must also come within a defined theme: preventing and remedying development and learning disadvantages, language skills education, intercultural education, transfer and orientation, social and emotional development, and student and parent participation.

Quality monitoring in the CLBs will be carried out in future by a review committee. The CLB Decree provides that the committee be composed of external experts and members of the inspectorate. Besides the review committee, the inspectorate has other assignments in the context of quality monitoring and the accreditation of the centres.

The CLB Decree requires the centres to conduct a policy on quality aimed at:

- providing a proper service to the customer (i.e. a service that is effective, efficient and continuous and is guaranteed to be socially acceptable);
- providing respectful guidance for the customer (personal reception, protection of privacy, provision of information, customer participation, and handling of any complaints).

The centres themselves choose the theme and quality targets. However, the authorities reserve the right to impose a theme after consulting the Flemish Health Council or VLOR.

Here too, quality aspects directly involving career guidance are monitored insofar as the centres formulate relevant quality targets. Indirectly, the framework provided will lead to self-evaluation and quality monitoring related to career guidance. The analysis and evaluation framework used by the review committee is not yet fixed. However, the committee will consider (a) the specific agreements and cooperation between the CLB and the schools or Syntra offices in the area of work and (b) the centre's policy on quality. In addition to concrete results and the satisfaction of the customer and partners, significant factors include the performance of the assignment, priorities and operating principles.

The transfer of pms-mst services to the clbs was monitored and supported over a three-year period by a temporary steering group established under the decree. The cross-network cooperation encouraged by this resulted in, among other things, the issuing of a joint mission statement and impetus for the development of a code of ethics. In consultation with the centres, the steering group prepared a basic text and an accompanying letter. This referred to the need for further debate on the code and its application in the centres, so the text could create awareness and ensure the centres act in line with the code. This would also help promote the provision of high-quality guidance.

In 2000, VIZO gave the go-ahead for an integral quality assurance project. It was decided to use a translated version of the EFQM model. Within VIZO, a staff officer was made responsible for initiating, supervising and coordinating the process. A steering group and quality coordinators working group were also established.

As a result of various steps taken since 2000, quality assurance is no longer simply an exercise entered into voluntarily. It has become one of the organisational conditions in the Syntra recognition and subsidy order. There are five parameters for assessing whether the resources provided by the authorities are being properly used: integral quality assurance, name and product recognition, customer satisfaction, effectiveness and market share. Favourable results can yield a bonus (in the form of an extra allowance from the Flemish authorities).

In 2002, the Syntra offices carried out a self-evaluation in four of the nine fields that comprise the self-evaluation model (PROZA version, VIZO). This involved resources management, core processes, staff satisfaction and impact on society. The results were recorded in reports and serve as a basis for improvement measures. Two other fields, namely course participant satisfaction and Syntra results, were measured by an external agency in autumn 2002. Self-evaluation in the fields of leadership, policy and strategy, and personnel policy was carried out in 2003.

The effectiveness results (zero measurement in the case of certain target groups) show that after five years, 89 % of course participants have found work. Half of them work in a small or medium-sized business. Just under a quarter are self-employed or work for themselves on the side. And 5 % of course participants are still looking for work.

The VDAB obtained the quality label K2c. This label was awarded by the Flemish Centre for Quality Assurance (VCK), which is the Flemish representative of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The K2c level is the 'starter's level'. The label was obtained both by the local VDAB offices and by the central services.

In the past, self-assessment teams assessed performance in all VDAB offices on the basis of the criteria in the EFQM model. Eleven self-assessment teams operated at central level.

The structure of the VDAB provides for the following pillars: (a) a prevention and protection service; (b) quality assurance; (c) internal audit; (d) ombudsman and equal rights service, and (e) knowledge management. At product development level, the VDAB has (a) an innovation staff department; (b) data management and analysis; (c) project management; (d) knowledge centres, and (e) European cooperation. Provision was also made for planning and quality control at structural level in local VDAB offices.

Reference was already made to the quantitative parameters in the management contract. However, the quality of the operation is not measured solely by reference to these quantitative indicators.

The VDAB systematically measures customer satisfaction by means of questionnaires. This necessitates cooperation between the quality, data management and analysis services and the services management department. These measurements are carried out twice a year among a representative sample of customers to whom services were provided by the VDAB in the six months prior to the questionnaire.

The measurements are made mainly in respect of the basic service provided to jobseekers and employers, the work path assistance provided for jobseekers and the main work path modules. The results form part of the quality parameters of the management contract.

The results of the 2002 working year show that, generally speaking, the level of satisfaction remained fairly stable, though there was a sharp drop in satisfaction regarding work path guidance (down 5.9 %). The most striking areas of improvement were waiting times between

specific measures on the work path and the information that precedes this, and the performance of agreements with other services and colleagues. Four out of five customers were satisfied with the friendliness of VDAB staff and their willingness to listen.

In January 2002, a start was made with the systematic handling of complaints.

Regional officers of the ombudsman service, the service line and the communication management and quality services together drew up a procedure and communication plan (internal and external). Complaints can be filed through various channels.

The VDAB has set itself a deadline of 20 days for dealing with complaints. Reports are submitted every three months by quality coaches to the management boards and the officer of the ombudsman service responsible for the project.

A number of instruments help management develop a quality organisation:

- the balanced scorecard: this is a tool for the strategic support of management and helps the organisation to monitor, evaluate and adjust the strategy adopted;
- knowledge management, which also covers the dissemination of knowledge and the exchange of knowledge. Within the VDAB, this includes modification of the intranet concept, the establishment of pilot projects for community operation in a number of fields and analysis of user needs, and preparation of the introduction of a knowledge-sharing and cooperation platform via the web.

Track 21 is the VDAB's internal training service. Internal supply was structured around:

- initial competences;
- provision of competence development;
- tailored courses;
- free learning.

The content of the initial competences and competence development courses can be consulted on the intranet.

The VDAB invested on average six days per FTE in 2002.

In consultation with the quality manager, the training service developed a tailored programme for the training of quality coaches. The content of this course consisted of aspects such as the role of the quality coach, the support which the quality coach must provide in the context of improvement projects, helping formulate concrete and feasible objectives, and dealing creatively with measurement results in order to detect chronic problems in the VDAB training centres and VDAB offices.

The year 2002 also saw the first use of a bottom-up evaluation. In evaluating department heads of central services and directors of regional VDAB offices, account was taken of information provided by members of staff operating under their direction.

Question 12: The evidence base

The CLB Decree requires the centres to report annually on the basis of systematised data of a somatic, psychological, pedagogic and social nature. This data is intended to help the authorities formulate policy options. Provision was made for the government itself to determine in what form it wishes registration to be carried out and what data the reports should contain.

This provision in the decree led to the establishment of a large-scale project. This project, which grew out of consultation between the centres of the three networks (the free CLB, the Community Education CLB and the CLB of officially subsidised education), received government support. Extra resources were invested in the information technology of the centres, and tenders were invited for the development of a suitable software package. Agreements were also reached between the authorities and the centres for the use of the data.

Contrary to expectations, the system is not yet operational. There may also be some further delay before the systematised data from the sector are actually available for internal use and for use by the authorities for policy purposes.

It is not yet clear how the registration of this information will influence career guidance. At any rate, it is likely to yield information for career guidance which is relevant both for the centres and the authorities. The extent to which it is relevant will depend partly on the registration obligations imposed by the government and partly on what the centres themselves include as data in the system. For example, whether or not customer satisfaction is included, whether or not modules are included to describe the available services or the processing of information from the policy contracts and policy plans in a form that shows what is specifically available in the various areas of guidance. Since the system also provides an electronic diary, it is likely to deliver better information on the nature of the identified need, the activities carried out (provision) and the target groups reached.

The Education Department publishes information containing various education indicators that can be used for international comparison. The Flemish indicators are based on data from the databases of the Education Department, the VDAB, VIZO and the VLIR⁽⁷⁸⁾ and from research studies. The CIPO model is used as a conceptual framework within which education indicators can be classified and discussed. Several of these indicators are relevant to career guidance.

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Flemish Interuniversity Council

A number of these indicators are listed below as examples:

- students enrolled in compulsory education (input);
- students enrolled in special education, the policy on catering to a wider range of educational needs, integrated education, special induction education for foreign children, and educational priorities policy ⁽⁷⁹⁾ (input);
- attitudes to learning and classroom climate (process);
- progress through primary, secondary and tertiary education (output);
- students leaving school early or with no qualifications (output);
- well-being of students in secondary education (output);
- education and work status of young people (output).

For the second time, an extra report on the number of students who stay back a year, the extent to which students lag behind children of their own age (learning deficit), and exam pass figures in Flemish education has been prepared. The theme number provides a quantitative analysis of the data, some of which have also been included in the education indicators publication.

Reference was previously made to the establishment of support centres as a policy instrument. In the context of this report, mention should be made of the support centre for ‘school careers and the transfer from education to employment’.

This support centre was established on 1 September 2002 and receives funding from the Flemish Government. Its function is to develop a database system for monitoring the schooling of young people from primary education to the time of transition to the job market. This support centre should, in due course, evolve into a multidisciplinary centre of expertise covering all aspects of schooling.

The authorities wish to strengthen the capacity for monitoring lifelong and lifewide learning. The indicators on which they seek further information are:

- participation rates;
- the extent to which potential target groups are reached and their needs met;
- the dropout rate;
- teacher deployment;
- the number of hours’ participation;
- costs;

⁽⁷⁹⁾ This concerns the 2002 education indicators publication. This is why there is still a reference to the situation before the policy on catering to a wider range of educational needs and the educational priority policy became part of a new decree on equal education opportunities.

- the introduction of new teaching methods;
- the use of media and communication technology;
- the results of referrals and activation;
- the use of financial incentives.

At present, the authorities have little if any information that would shed light on the current situation in this field.

Efforts are being made systematically to expand the use of these indicators in all sectors. This is why a basic indicator model acceptable to all sectors (statistical and qualitative parameters) is being prepared. It is intended to use this model to carry out simulations that will allow the effects of alternative policies to be measured.

Presently, in the initial phase, information is published in the Lifelong and Lifewide Learning Yearbook. In due course, it is hoped to expand the scope of the system so that it not only collects, processes and distributes the basic indicators, but also provides information on particular trends.

As the yearbook is a DIVA initiative, it also involves the Education Department, VIZO (and the Economics Branch) and the VDAB (and the Employment Branch), together with a number of other partners (e.g. the Planning and Statistics Branch).

The VDAB has a wide range of data at its disposal. These data are used to improve its internal operation, as indicated previously, and as a basis for rendering account under the terms of the management agreement.

Data are made available, among other things, in the annual report, but provision is also made annually for the publication of key figures. We therefore refer to the VDAB website, where this information is also published in English.

The data are also used directly for the benefit of the VDAB services. Such data relate to the labour market and to supply and demand. In the context of the recent restructuring, plans are afoot to establish a public-private partnership known as 'Jobsys'. The aims of this cooperative venture will be:

- to manage, organise, expand and maintain the database containing labour market data;
- to supply labour market statistics (for the purposes of (political) policymaking);
- to supply specialised ICT services to the VDAB and other institutions with similar ICT needs;
- to offer various e-labour market services to individuals, enterprises and organisations;
- to make available various web-based services through an information exchange platform.

Jobsys is due to be launched in spring 2004.

References are made at various places in this report to relevant research studies.

POSTSCRIPT

During the preparation of this report, it quickly became apparent that a description of career guidance based on a broad definition would inevitably involve covering a wide range of initiatives.

In the description of the overall context, reference was made to characteristics which may or may not be applicable, depending on the identity of the party behind the initiative, and which determine the difference between the many career guidance initiatives. As some of the questions were answered from the position of education, education for the self-employed and employment, two aspects can be seen to make a significant difference in the approach to career guidance, i.e. age group and context. How career guidance is defined differs widely depending on whether it involves: (a) young people of compulsory school age who are in education or training; (b) adults moving into employment or education, or (c) adults in employment.

This briefly created the impression that the report could best be divided into three sections. However, a very broad and varied approach to career guidance did have the advantage of highlighting the possibilities for better alignment (opportunities and areas for improvement).

After all, people do not think in terms of boxes or sectors when it comes to their schooling or careers and, in the normal run of things, one phase merges into the next. The present social context means this is usually a cyclical rather than linear process.

The differences identified were also a result of the fact that career guidance in a mainly professional and economic setting (pathway towards employment or a further step in career development) is perceived differently from career guidance in the setting of broad personal development (aimed at social development and not always linked to clear job or career development prospects). The different nuances of lifelong and lifewide learning also became apparent in the approach to career guidance. The characteristics of the target group (another aspect that goes a long way to explaining differences in approach) are therefore directly related to this.

With this in mind, this report concludes by reflecting for a moment on what was perceived during the writing of the report as important developments to be pursued in the future.

- **A clearer reference and conceptual framework for career guidance**

If a broad definition has the advantage that career guidance is approached in a process-oriented and integrated manner, which is relevant from the point of view of the individual involved in the process, it increases the need for a reference and conceptual framework formulated on the basis of this vision. The present reference frameworks and concepts reflect

the way professionals have developed new methods and instruments in response to social issues associated with career development and career guidance (life, education and work).

Moreover, one and the same term or method is sometimes interpreted in very different ways depending on the sector and the context in which it is applied. Path guidance is one example of this.

- **A continuing focus on the most vulnerable groups in the three different situations**

A reference framework of this kind must make clear how differentiation by target groups is to be carried out. In any event, there should be a guarantee that career guidance takes account of diversity and equal opportunities in each sector and at each educational level, for example in adult education and in relation to career development as an employee.

- **Defining quality**

On this basis, the term ‘quality’ in the context of career guidance should not be limited to purely quantitative data. Quality should be determined not only by results in terms of numbers of students progressing to the next level and leaving with qualifications or in terms of personal growth, but also by the application of diversity and equal opportunities and by the quality of guidance. This applies regardless of whether or not guidance is provided in a clearly professional and economic setting.

In the education sector, as in others, an active search for ways to define, then evaluate, improve and monitor quality can be discerned. This dialogue, which ultimately determines the meaning of the term ‘educational quality’, is not without importance to integrated career guidance.

An article in a magazine of the VLOR (80) refers to the fear that utilitarian criteria such as economics and employment are being increasingly linked with education, and identifies a feeling on the part of those involved in and responsible for education that they are insufficiently involved in major new initiatives being promoted at European level.

However, this uncertainty is also aggravated by the identification of trends that suggest an inclination at European level to use quantitative indicators for the sake of measurability and comparability. As a result, there is thought to be a one-sided focus on statistics, and the definition of quality is therefore inevitably narrowed and channelled. Measuring output is a complex matter, both generally and in respect of career guidance, and the net results (figures) serve to send signals, though they should still be evaluated in terms of the context, intake and process. This is necessary not only in order to explain what will ultimately be measured, but also as a supplement, as not everything can be encapsulated in a figure.

(⁸⁰) ‘Does the European Union influence Flemish schools?’, article in *VLOR In Beraad*, Vol. 12, No 2.

- **Preventing parallel structures through continuous efforts to achieve coordination and alignment**

Clearly, efforts are being made to achieve greater alignment and coordination. However, it is not always immediately apparent in the case of new initiatives what measures are being taken to promote alignment. There are a number of areas in which further consideration of this issue would be useful:

- ✓ the relationship between (a) school career guidance (and projects such as the 'independent information service'); (b) the learning shop, and (c) the job shop;
- ✓ the relationship between the VDAB as 'director-actor' and private initiatives;
- ✓ the further development and application of 'structural prevention' in the form of (a) flexible learning paths, (b) accreditation of prior learning, and (c) the provision of information in a manner which also promotes self-reliance;
- ✓ the possibilities of ICTs and portfolio as instruments for taking further steps towards a single file containing data on career guidance. This data should be combined and processed so that it is easier for an individual to monitor and update throughout the various stages. At present, each sector attempts to prevent the fragmentation of data at organisational level (e.g. the choice file in schools, the CLBs' multidisciplinary file, a single central file for each apprentice, and the customer monitoring system used by the VDAB).

- **Arranging the implementation of many new initiatives**

When drafting this report, it became apparent just how quickly events are moving in this area. In each of the sectors involved, i.e. education, education for the self-employed and employment, this is being accompanied by radical structural changes, shifting priorities and changes in how assignments are determined. This is placing heavy demands on those who implement the system, not only in terms of the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, but also in adjusting to changes in the context of work and expectations regarding attitudes. It also places heavy demands on management, who have to ensure these innovations are introduced smoothly in both organisational and substantive terms. The question is whether the present rate of change allows everyone to deal with this effectively on a day-to-day basis and to succeed in bringing about the desired change.

Conclusion

The situation in Flanders (Belgium) shows there are good reasons for reviewing career guidance.

We must continue our efforts to achieve better results with certain target groups. Statistical material has already demonstrated its worth by exposing weaknesses in the system.

Greater cooperation, alignment and transparency remain an important objective. In recent years, important steps have been taken in this area. However, we should remain alert if we are to ensure new initiatives do not revert to ‘old habits’.

It may be some time before improvements start to narrow the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged in society. However, there is a clear trend that suggests we are serious about tackling this problem.

This is in itself a further argument in favour of retaining a broad definition of career guidance. ‘Broad’ means a definition that focuses on the quality of:

- the initial path and structural prevention (equal opportunities, well-being, basic needs, and so on);
- guidance of the process of choice (provision of information and guidance towards self-evaluation, self-choice and self-decision);
- the elaboration and implementation of pathway guidance (where necessary and certainly in relation to the most vulnerable groups);
- encouragement of, and support for, personal growth throughout a person’s career, or assistance with adjustments necessitated by a new job context or assignment.

‘Broad’ therefore also means ‘aimed at young people of compulsory school age in an education or training context, adults moving towards training or employment, and adults in employment’.

The authorities have a responsibility not only to manage, encourage and monitor quality, but also to provide as far as possible for a policy that actively tackles these problems and helps prevent them structurally. We have every interest in avoiding superfluous and parallel structures, since they cost a good deal of money, particularly if they include pathway guidance and a tailored approach.

Martine Vranken

ABBREVIATIONS

APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
ASO	General secondary education
ATB	Work path guidance centre
BGDA	Brussels Regional Employment Services Agency
BOC	Basic negotiating committee
BSO	Vocational secondary education
CIPO	Context Input Process Output model
CLB	Student Guidance Centre
CV	Curriculum Vitae
CVO	Adult Education Centre
DBSO	Part-time vocational secondary education
DIVA	Training and Alignment Information Service
E&E	Employment and education
ESF	European Social Fund
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KISS	Candidate information and selection system
KSO	Secondary education in the arts
LOC	1. Career Development Centre 2. Local negotiating committee
LOP	Local Consultation Platform
MST	School inspection centre
OCMW	Public social welfare centre
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
PEC	Provincial Accreditation Committee
PLOT	Local employment counter
RTC	Regional Technological Centre
RVA	Government Department for Manpower Services
SAIDA	Successful integration of non-Dutch speakers through sustainable employment
SERV	Flanders' Social and Economic Council
SLN	Flemish Local Networks Support Centre
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprise
STRAAL	Strategic Action Plan for Apprenticeship Schemes
TKO	Second-chance education centre
TSO	Technical secondary education
VDAB	Flemish Employment Services and Vocational Training Agency
VESOC	Flemish Economic and Social Consultation Committee
VFSIPH	Flemish Fund for the Social Integration of Disabled Persons
VIA	Enlarged Internal Labour Market
VIONA	Flemish Interuniversity Research Network for Labour Market Reporting
VIZO	Flemish Institute for Independent Entrepreneurship
VLIR	Flemish Interuniversity Council
VLOR	Flemish Education Council

VOI VOLT WIS	Flemish public sector body 'Flanders Optimises the Apprenticeship System' Employment information system
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II. VIZO

www.vizo.be

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Annex 1 Flemish Fund for the Social Integration of Disabled Persons (VFSIPH)

Sources:

- www.vlavo.be
- research study: *The organisation and implementation of path guidance for the disabled*
- research study: *A framework for the organisation of demand-driven support for the disabled and their environment*

Both studies were carried out by Professor Bea Maes et al. on behalf of the VFSIPH.

VFSIPH ⁽⁸¹⁾

The VFSIPH operates under the responsibility of the Flemish Minister for Welfare and Health. It provides:

- financial assistance for various forms of training;
- individual support to disabled employees in the workplace;
- grants to employers who take on disabled persons;
- access to sheltered employment;
- the possibility of supervised work for those who wish to work but cannot immediately cope with sheltered employment.

A disabled person who wishes to work or take a vocational course can apply to the VDAB or their local job shop. They will arrange a screening and, where necessary, contact a work path guidance (ATB) service. The ATB service is specialised in designing learning and work paths suitable for disabled persons. If the assistance of an ATB is requested, this will generally involve the submission of an application and a multidisciplinary report to the VFSIPH. The application can be submitted at various places in Flanders, as the VFSIPH has provided for the accreditation of multidisciplinary teams active throughout Flanders. These teams consist of people who have the requisite qualifications and work for existing organisations such as CLBs and mutual funds. The VFSIPH pays the organisation for which they work a fixed fee for each multidisciplinary report. Applications for aids to support young disabled persons during their school career are also made through the VFSIPH. Applications for aids are sometimes part of the process of path guidance. The granting of resources or support is arranged centrally or through Provincial Accreditation Committees (PECs).

⁽⁸¹⁾ For further information, see www.vlafo.be.

The VFSIPH recently commissioned research into (a) the organisation and implementation of path guidance for disabled persons in Flanders and (b) the organisation of demand-driven support for disabled persons and their environment. The latter report develops a framework for demand-driven organisation and financing of assistance to disabled persons. The structural development of path functions and initial path functions contains elements of a vision of career guidance. This is directly connected with the implementation of personal planning. However, personal support and path guidance are also involved. The common elements in all of this are the need to monitor demand-driven services and the right of self-determination of disabled persons. The report also touches on the importance of a transparent organisation and clear information on what is available. This is quite an important parameter, since career guidance should be designed so as to provide clear information on all existing possibilities (quality of information) and to reveal ‘blind spots’ (signalling function). In the report, this produces a reference to the ‘modularisation’ of youth welfare services and the elaboration of path guidance. Both concepts are defined within the VFSIPH, but are also used in the context of the large-scale project known as Integral Youth Welfare ⁽⁸²⁾. Although the terms are used in much the same way, the definition of path guidance in particular still differs. One of the recommendations in the report on path guidance deals specifically with the need to reach inter-sectoral agreement on the definition of this term since there are major differences in how it is defined and applied in practice.

Obviously, a vision of social inclusion cannot be viewed separately from career guidance. Personal choices in the life of a disabled person range over participation in all fields of social life. Giving effect to this personal choice requires vision and an acceptance by society of the principle of social inclusion ⁽⁸³⁾.

Work path guidance

Work path guidance is a method used to determine what measures would be most appropriate for a disabled person and to ensure optimal guidance. This involves devising and using a planned, step-by-step path aimed at guiding the jobseeker to the labour market. The possibilities include both employment in a normal job and sheltered employment. This is a tailored approach since it takes account of the jobseeker’s individual potential and limitations. Disabled persons are encouraged as far as possible to use the possibilities of the mainstream training and employment system. The VDAB and BGDA ⁽⁸⁴⁾ are the most important partners in this regard.

⁽⁸²⁾ An initiative of the Flemish Minister for Welfare and Health in cooperation with the Flemish Minister for Education and Training (as regards the involvement and cooperation of the education sector). The project is intended to improve alignment and coordination between the six sectors, all of which are actively involved in youth welfare in one way or another.

⁽⁸³⁾ Inclusive policy for the disabled. Examples drawn from practice. Rudy Kennes (ed.)

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Brussels Regional Employment Services Agency

The VFSIPH has accredited five work path guidance centres (ATBs) in Flanders. This accreditation is valid for a period of three years and is renewable. The ATB is a not-for-profit partnership between organisations whose function is to provide orientation, training, non-formal education, job experience, employment services or pathway-to-work guidance for at-risk groups. To gain accreditation, the ATB must provide at least two services recognised by the VFSIPH. In addition, it must be shown to have a different professional integration remit.

A subsidy is linked to recognition. This subsidy may be used for operating costs (maximum of 25 %) and for staffing costs (minimum of 75 %). The staff of an ATB should consist of:

- a full-time ATB coordinator who is a university graduate or at least a graduate of a college of higher education;
- guidance workers for path guidance;
- one or more job-finders whose function is to raise awareness among employers.

The five ATBs guarantee a spread over each of the five provinces. The function of an ATB is to provide work path guidance to disabled people registered with the VFSIPH. This service is free of charge, though claimants do require an ‘admission ticket’⁽⁸⁵⁾. Even those who do not belong to the at-risk categories recognised by the Flemish or Brussels governments may receive guidance from an ATB. In this case, the cost price of the guidance is charged to the legal entity or body claiming it. However, this type of guidance may not exceed 45 % of the total number of cases.

In addition to individual guidance, the ATB is also responsible for raising awareness of the services and providing guidance and information on employment for the disabled. In 2001, the five ATBs arranged 2 789 work paths for VFSIPH customers and 684 work paths for non-VFSIPH customers. Together these paths generated 439 periods of employment lasting for a minimum of three months.

Path guidance

The remit of the study of the organisation and implementation of path guidance for the disabled in Flanders was to examine (a) the significance of path guidance to disabled persons and (b) how such guidance can be organised in the context of modular and demand-driven care in Flanders.

The study consists of three parts:

- an evaluation of path guidance;
- a comparative study of the organisation of path guidance abroad;

⁽⁸⁵⁾ An application must be supported by reasons given in a multidisciplinary report. The two documents form the basis for the decision of the VFSIPH on whether to grant or refuse the application for the service to a disabled person.

- the conditions to be fulfilled if path guidance is to be successfully implemented in Flanders. This part concludes with policy recommendations.

The following definition was used for the evaluation and comparison of path guidance:

‘Path guidance is a process in which a disabled person and those directly involved are actively assisted in clarifying their needs for support and assistance and in compiling, coordinating and following up the support package required to meet these needs and contribute to the quality of his or her life.’

The study then goes on to define the successive phases of a process of path guidance, namely: clarification of need, planning, linking, follow-up and evaluation. The operating principles to be applied are listed as: demand-driven system, empowerment, social networking, including employment and fully-fledged partnership.

The study argues that the present position indicates that all predetermined phases and principles are reflected in path guidance in practice. The existing problem areas are identified as the customer’s own limitations and uncertainties, a lack of cooperation on the part of social welfare bodies and insufficient knowledge and experience of guidance workers. The impact evaluation confirmed that the individual goals set in advance had largely been achieved or in any event that important intermediate goals had been achieved. The study concludes with a number of recommendations.

A framework for the organisation of demand-driven support for the disabled and their environment

The previous study showed that there is a relationship between path guidance and a demand-driven system. It was put forward in that case as an operating principle. But even if a different angle of approach is adopted, a clear relationship can still be found between demand-driven operations and path guidance.

In order to facilitate the shift from supply-driven to demand-driven (demand-oriented) operation, the initial path (consisting of need assessment and the granting of the application) must be arranged in such a way as to put greater emphasis on the individual and his or her immediate environment. It should be recognised that the disabled person has a clear position and a right to a say in the decision and to self-determination.

The study marks out the broad boundaries of a framework for the organisation of demand-driven support for the disabled. One of the main points of emphasis is the structural development of the functions of certain workers involved in the path and initial path guidance. This should be done in order to help the disabled and those in their immediate vicinity make choices affecting their life and their solidarity with one another by participating in society. The study refers, among other things, to:

- person-oriented planning that enables disabled people to retain control over their own lives; this means they themselves should be able to determine: (a) what support they

require; (b) where they wish to obtain it, and (c) how they wish to structure their lives (living, working, training, leisure time, and so on);

- enable the disabled to think about their own position and make choices for the future;
- work with others to bring about changes that improve the quality of their existence.

The report points to a number of basic principles underlying the initial path, substantive preconditions for the process and organisational conditions, such as:

- the independence of the path and initial path workers in relation to guidance workers;
- direct accessibility;
- low-threshold access;
- coordination and continuity;
- expertise which is not confined to a single professional group;
- quality monitoring.

Support of the education or work path

Disabled children and adolescents are entitled to receive special and integrated education if mainstream schools are unable to cope with them⁽⁸⁶⁾. Subject to certain conditions, the VFSIPH provides the following support: (a) transport to and from school and (b) personal assistance in education. The VFSIPH also raises awareness among institutions (including educational institutions) of its socially inclusive policy.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ Organised by the education sector. See also equal educational opportunities.

Annex 2: Integration policy in Flanders

Source: www.wvc.vlaanderen.be/minderheden/inburgeringsbeleid

An integration programme

In Flanders, the municipalities are responsible for implementing policy on the integration of ‘newcomers’. In the case of Brussels, this is the Flemish Community Committee. The authorities encourage inter-municipal partnership agreements between the three main cities (Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent).

Under the integration policy, newcomers⁽⁸⁷⁾ follow a programme designed to increase their self-reliance. Those involved can decide for themselves whether they wish particular aspects of the programme to be emphasised, depending on their future expectations and possibilities. The programme consists of two parts (a primary and secondary path) with a transitional phase to ease the transfer between the two parts. Path guidance is the central element around which the entire programme is designed.

Reception agencies are responsible for the primary path and for maintaining a broad overview of progress throughout the integration programme. For the implementation of the secondary path, the authorities have concluded a partnership agreement with mainstream organisations.

The VDAB has final responsibility in the secondary path for newcomers with job prospects. To that end, it uses ‘integration consultants’. It is their task to help newcomers assess their career prospects with a view to entering the labour market. Those newcomers who opt for an employment-oriented path can, however, work on this even during the primary path. This is arranged in close consultation with the VDAB. Newcomers wishing to enter the labour market are entitled to 20 hours of career orientation. Since this package is offered in the primary path, the reception agency retains final responsibility. The authorities have also concluded agreements with the mainstream sector for newcomers who opt for an education-oriented or socially oriented path.

In October 2003, the Flemish Government decided that the 26 reception agencies that care for and guide newcomers should be merged to form eight new reception agencies. This would be one for each province, one for the Brussels Capital Region and one each for the cities of Antwerp and Ghent.

The position can be illustrated by the following statistics:

⁽⁸⁷⁾ This involves mainly adults, but may also cover children for areas other than education. The Education Department has itself run a separate programme for non-Dutch-speaking newcomers for a number of years. Schools and the CLBs belong to the network of reception agencies.

- in the period from 1 September 2000 to 31 October 2002, the 26 reception agencies held intake interviews with 10 470 newcomers belonging to target groups;
- of these, 4 467 (43 %) took a primary integration path financed by Flemish funds; 1 014 target group newcomers (10 %) took a complete integration path and 490 (5 %) took an incomplete path (Dutch language or social orientation only) financed by local funds. The rest of those interviewed were put on a waiting list or did not get in touch again.

Primary path (educational component)

In the primary path, newcomers receive a basic course in Dutch and a programme of social and career orientation. Although after completing this path, most newcomers are still not able to function fully independently, they are able to transfer to mainstream facilities.

The programme provides for:

- **Dutch courses**

Traditional classes: the reception agencies do not give the courses themselves, but refer the newcomers to mainstream providers of Dutch as a second language or buy in courses. Agreements are reached with local centres for basic or adult education. Provision is made for differentiation according to prior knowledge of the language. Highly educated newcomers take a university language course for which the reception agencies pay the first stage.

Development of course material: the authorities subsidise the development of course material. *Bonte was* ('Colour wash') is one example. The package contains a task-oriented multimedia course of basic Dutch for adults and a number of hours' group tuition.

Self-study packages are provided in cooperation with Supervised Individual Learning (education sector) and are intended for educated speakers of other languages who are unable to attend courses during the day. The packages consist of course material and guidance by a mentor. Course participants can study at their own pace.

- **Social orientation**

This course enables newcomers to gain an understanding of the structure of Flemish society and of its standards and values and gives them a number of competences. The operation of various services is explained, and practical subjects such as public transport, shopping, the postal service, banks, and so on are dealt with. Usually the reception agencies themselves organise the social orientation course. A survey of existing social orientation courses has been made.

- **Career orientation**

Career orientation is intended as a guide to enable newcomers to plan their life. This process should result in the preparation of an action plan. The various areas of life are dealt with in the plan and can be accorded a different weight at any given time. The implementation of career

orientation is based on a ‘vision text’. The following elements from the vision text provide an understanding of how career orientation is organised:

- ✓ the ultimate aim of providing career orientation in the primary path is to enable newcomers to make a well-founded and properly reasoned choice as regards the follow-up path and to prepare a path plan on that basis;
- ✓ to that end, provision is made for a minimum information package; this package is provided to all newcomers and deals with the labour market, possibilities for lifelong learning and voluntary work; the basic information can be supplemented to meet individual needs;
- ✓ the initial orientation in the primary path should result in a properly reasoned choice of direction in the secondary path;
- ✓ career orientation should be viewed in conjunction with other parts of the integration programme and is therefore an integral part of the overall programme;
- ✓ the path counsellor is the person chiefly responsible for career orientation during the primary path;
- ✓ career orientation is continued in the secondary path; the choices are refined at that stage;
- ✓ it is important for the development of career orientation that the services of other partner organisations can be used; such partners are called in if there are specific paths that require expertise not available in the reception agency; cooperation is then arranged through joint talks, group meetings or referrals.

A first concrete application of the career orientation provision was arranged in the SAIDA project (Successful integration of non-Dutch speakers through sustainable employment).

The aim of this project is to optimise the path of newcomers towards employment. Use is made of the ‘portfolio method’. On this basis, the competences and experience of the newcomer are catalogued. This ensures the individual file has a systematic structure and can be used as a means of communication. Throughout the guidance process, instructional materials are made available and exercises carried out.

Transfer

At the end of the primary path, the reception agency guides the newcomer to the secondary path. Contact is made with those responsible for the secondary path and the file is transferred.

Secondary path

Depending on their interests and capacities, the newcomers transfer after the primary path to an employment-oriented, education-oriented or socially oriented follow-up path. This follow-

up path is the responsibility of the mainstream organisations (Education or VDAB, et al.). The VDAB has hired integration consultants, who are responsible for the pathway-to-work career orientation follow-up.

Path guidance (throughout the programme)

In the context of integration policy, path guidance is taken to mean a method by which newcomers receive individual guidance that will ultimately enable them to use mainstream services.

Path counsellors contact their target group by sending a letter explaining the services provided by the reception agency and by organising information days. This is done in cooperation with the municipality.

This is followed by:

- an intake interview in which background, capacities, educational level, job experience and future expectations are ascertained;
- a path plan is drawn up in consultation (to support the life career plan);
- the path counsellor remains the contact for the newcomer and seeks solutions to all problems.

Annex 3 Career development for officials of the Flemish public service

Source: Career Development Information Book (Flemish government, November 2002).

1. Policy principles on career development

A number of policy principles on career development can be inferred from the information book.

In addition to lifelong job security, the government will focus career policy on lifelong employability in the coming years.

Lifelong employability is taken to mean 'the ease with which people can familiarise themselves with a different professional role or a different set of tasks'. Employability refers to the flexibility of individuals and organisations (i.e. the opposite of stagnation). Personnel policy will therefore focus on aspects of career development other than upward mobility⁽⁸⁸⁾.

Development is the key to broad employability; for this purpose it is necessary to possess the requisite competences.

As lifelong learning (formal education as well as on-the-job training) is clearly relevant, organisations must invest in development-oriented HR systems and in a structure without too many thresholds.

The Flemish public sector wishes to pursue an integrated personnel policy.

Such a policy is based on (a) the right person in the right job; (b) flexible forms of organisation; (c) permanent development, and (d) a balance between organisation and people. A new structure will be introduced which will entail changes for a great many people. The first priority of career development will be orientation and reorientation.

Career guidance must be given a positive image.

This presupposes the provision of support, because career development requires considerable energy, especially if it is unclear to the person concerned what the next step might be. To create a positive image, it will also be necessary to invest in preventive measures where possible and in intensive guidance where necessary. Prevention consists of giving people the opportunity to guide their career themselves rather than intervening in the event of problems,

⁽⁸⁸⁾ The emphasis will be on the different positions a person can hold, rather than upward mobility on a hierarchical ladder. Although vertical mobility remains possible, horizontal mobility and the broadening and deepening of experience within a given category of jobs will also be treated as a fully-fledged step in a career.

for example in the case of restructuring. A periodic career check, development of low-skilled staff and policy measures that promote internal mobility are points that must receive attention in the context of a preventive policy.

The Flemish public sector consists of organisations with different sets of staff regulations and different forms of legal personality. Each organisation must determine for itself how it will shape its policy on career development. With these principles as a starting point, the authorities wish to have an administrative system that is flexible and can be organised in such a way as to respond quickly to new situations, based on the principle that a government body exists for the citizens, rather than the other way around. This is undoubtedly a correct starting point. At present, however, there is much uncertainty as to the outcome of the Better Administrative Policy project⁽⁸⁹⁾, and this, combined with efforts to achieve a personnel policy that responds to ‘attitude and competence development in an atmosphere of continuous change and employability’, is causing much uncertainty among all public servants. In addition, some are wondering about the manner in which, and the extent to which, this reform will take account of equal opportunities and, accordingly, of measures to ensure that the combination of work-family-leisure is feasible or at least comes close to being feasible.

2. Career development services

The career development programme of the Flemish public sector is based around three different forms of service: (a) the elaboration of career paths; (b) the establishment of career projects, and (c) support for the preparation of a career policy.

	Career paths	Career projects	Career policy
Target group	Individual employees	Groups or target groups	Organisation as a whole
What	Demand-driven service	Supply-driven service	Preparation and evaluation of career policy
Adjustment by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee • Immediate manager • HR professional 	Personnel Development Branch	Government and top management
Examples of <u>what it is</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance in event of loss of job • Career planning for ambitious employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talent management programme • Initiative for the low-skilled • Website for ‘career self-service’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of internal mobility policy • Research into employability

⁽⁸⁹⁾ An important structural intervention in the organisation of the Flemish public sector.

	Career paths	Career projects	Career policy
Examples of <u>what it is not</u>	Selection of candidates for a job vacancy. Reason: development is not the same as selection.	Assessment of personnel plans. Reason: planning is a job for management.	Staff satisfaction survey. Reason: this concerns HR policy in the broad sense, and career policy is part of this.

3. Vision of career development

‘Career development is a formative process in which people themselves take responsibility for managing their career.’

The emphasis is on the combination of self-fulfilment and the delivery of value-added for the organisation.

In the case of both spontaneous and supervised processes of career development, there are four main modules for deliberate interventions in and measures to influence the course of a career: (a) career application; (b) career orientation; (c) career switch, and (d) career evaluation.

Career application refers to the crystallisation of the need or desire to intervene actively in a career.

Career orientation refers to the clarification of the criteria for the choice of a subsequent career step.

Career switch means there are one or more positions for which the relevant person is sufficiently qualified.

Career evaluation is the process by which those involved look back or look forward in order to evaluate the course of their career, thereby enabling necessary adjustments to be made.

Responsibility for career development rests with the relevant employee, management and HR professional ⁽⁹⁰⁾.

The principle of self-management by the employee is put into practice by taking personal career prospects as a starting point for the development of his or her career path. The employee decides whether guidance is necessary and, if so, to what extent. He or she also has

⁽⁹⁰⁾ To that end, HR professionals are defined as all staff members who are substantively involved in personnel matters. They have specialised in training, selection, HR policy and/or career advice. In addition to specialising in HRM, they are also expected to be competent in the area of guidance and coaching and to be skilled in the field of cooperation.

the decisive say in the planning of the path. Moreover, the employee personally chooses the most suitable job.

The function of management is to protect the interests of the organisation, though this includes ensuring the right person is in the right job.

The HR professional ensures appropriate support is provided for career development. This support is available not only to the relevant employee, but also to the manager, depending on needs. This means specifically that HR professionals are expected to: (a) identify needs; (b) design career programmes and mobilise the resources required; (c) guide and adjust career paths; (d) arrange communication on careers, and (e) coordinate practical aspects.

There is a clear division of responsibilities between HR professionals of the various legal entities and the career advisers of the Career Development Centre (LOC).

This division of responsibilities extends to the field of work, internal customers, the implementation of career paths, follow-up and reporting, design, methods and instruments, policy, and procedures and expertise.

Managers are key figures and therefore have a major impact on whether a change of job proves lasting. This is why they are involved in the career guidance path. However, it does not necessarily mean they themselves provide the guidance.

Guidance can be outsourced to internal or external HR professionals. But even if guidance is outsourced, the manager remains responsible for taking a final decision on planning, follow-up, appraisal, remuneration and investment in development (i.e. the costs of the career path).

The principle of subsidiarity is observed when making referrals in the course of career guidance.

Guidance should not be more intrusive or far-reaching than necessary. Employees are themselves primarily responsible for managing their career guidance and can make use of easily accessible instruments and advice to that end. Further professional development should be sought in the immediate vicinity (HR professionals of the relevant legal entity). Specialised help should be sought only insofar as more specialised knowledge or instruments are required (career advisers).

A career development path should be initiated only after agreement has been reached between the employee, the manager and the HR professional.

The form and content of the path are agreed and recorded in the form of a path plan. To ensure each partner is committed to the path plan, they are all required to sign it.

Career paths are imposed compulsorily only if employees ⁽⁹¹⁾ lose their job for performance-related, organisational or medical reasons.

4. Methods

A modular structure has been chosen for career paths.

Main module	Career application	Career orientation	Career switch	Evaluation
Modules	<p>INTAKE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of the application Choice of manner of approach and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-reflection Result: saying in a few sentences what is decisive in the choice of job. Market survey Projected result: list of 3-5 possible jobs on which concrete information is available. Test Check whether self-image (strengths-weaknesses + competences) corresponds to how others see the employee. 	<p>The following modules become relevant as soon as the employee sets his sights on particular jobs. Four modules promote a quick career transfer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Path follow-up Combination of mediation, guidance and progress monitoring. Development Work on weaknesses in order to maximise the chance of being able to function in other jobs. 	<p>Evaluation is carried out both at the level of the individual employee and at the level of the organisation. This involves looking back and looking forward.</p> <p>Yield for the individual: to be in a job which corresponds to his or her competences and prospects or at least be moving in that direction.</p> <p>Yield for the organisation: career path and career project together provide for development of the organisation as a whole.</p>

⁽⁹¹⁾ Insofar as the 2000-2001 Sectoral Agreement applies to the relevant employees.

Main module	Career application	Career orientation	Career switch	Evaluation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recording of agreements with those involved in a path plan ⁽⁹²⁾ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-profiling Prepare a public relations campaign (communication plan). Self-profiling should lead to a plan that provides an immediate basis for action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical training to gain experience Temporary periods of practical training to acquaint the employee with a new set of responsibilities. Applying Formally apply for a job. 	

In the case of individual paths, reports on activities undertaken are generally submitted every six weeks. More substantive consultation takes place between all those involved every three months. Although this is the standard frequency, it is not necessarily the most desirable, and various frequencies therefore exist.

5. Role of the Career Development Centre (LOC)

The LOC exists first and foremost for the benefit of employees of the Flemish public sector who are covered by the 2000-2001 Sectoral Agreement ⁽⁹³⁾.

The support of the LOC can be requested by (a) the manager and HRM professionals (for employees who have to change job for performance-related, organisational or medical reasons) and (b) the employee in person. As a rule, an application by the employee should always be submitted through the employee's immediate superior or through the HR professional of the relevant legal entity.

The LOC gives priority to certain target groups:

- employees involved in restructuring exercises;
- level-‘A’ employees who are preparing for a management job;
- low-skilled employees.

⁽⁹²⁾ The path plan should specify the aim (desired outcome), activities (various modules), time allocation (estimate expressed in months and hours), cost (for the entire path) and reporting (frequency and manner of reporting).

⁽⁹³⁾ The Ministry of the Flemish Community, ministerial advisers, Flemish universities and research institutions and Flemish public sector bodies (an exception is made for a number of Flemish public sector bodies).

The LOC code of conduct is based on the following principles: (a) discretion; (b) independence; (c) professionalism, and (d) partnership.

6. Time allocation and cost price

Under current legislation, the Flemish Government stipulates that a career path could (and may) last up to two years. Employees are entitled to exemption from their duties for the performance of the career path activities agreed upon.

The time allocated to a path may differ on account of the tailored approach and modular structure.

All costs associated with career development are borne by the legal entity for which the employee works. They are financed from normal operating funds. The Flemish Government does not make extra budgets available for this type of support. At present, there is no charge for the service provided by the LOC. However, variable costs are charged on a path-by-path basis. These direct costs consist of:

- materials (work booklets and psychological tests);
- training courses (job application training and vocationally oriented courses);
- career advisers hired from outside the organisation.

The modular structure means the cost price can be calculated per module.

The costs of the modules can be estimated as follows:

- minimum path, 1 module (EUR 1 000).

In this case, the employee does much of the work in person, and support is provided by the HR professional of the legal entity for which the employee works.

- average path, 2 modules (EUR 1 765).

Career prospects are less clear. The employee is self-managing, and intensive guidance is provided by the HR professional of the legal entity for which the employee works.

- complex path (EUR 5 000).

Career prospects are unclear. There is less demand in the market for the employee's competences and there is little internal support.

To ensure discretion and for practical reasons, employees report to the office of the HR professionals or career advisers. In exceptional cases, this principle may be waived and the HR professionals or career advisers will visit the employee in his or her workplace.

Annex 4 ‘Towards a right to career guidance’

Source: *Towards a right to career development*, a report by the King Baudouin Foundation commissioned by the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism, June 2002.

www.kbs-frb.be

1. The mission

In autumn 2002, the Flemish Minister for Employment and Tourism commissioned the King Baudouin Foundation to form an expert task force to report on how career guidance could be organised in Flanders.

In the foreword to the report, the Minister stressed that: ‘The social relevance of a right to career guidance is, in my view, beyond dispute. However, owing to the numerous steps that must be taken and the budgetary implications of these steps, a “right to career guidance for everyone” may not be achievable overnight.’

Despite this cautious attitude, a commitment was given to make serious efforts to provide a quality service. This commitment was motivated by the finding that (a) ‘jobs for life’ no longer exist; (b) the absence of job security is a source of stress and dissatisfaction, and (c) many people are looking to strike the right balance between work, family and leisure time.

All of these factors lead to a search for (a) concepts that allow flexible forms of work, depending on the needs at given times in a person’s life, and (b) employment in which competences are used and developed to the full. The importance of career guidance can be seen against the background of these findings, and it is a tool that can be used to find an appropriate answer to questions and problems that arise during this search.

The Minister refers, finally, to the role of government and indicates that the possibilities of career guidance in facilitating smooth transitions between work and other areas of life (family, leisure time and education) should not be underestimated in a properly functioning labour market.

‘The government has a key role to play, not only in ensuring this kind of service is achieved, but also in actively ensuring that the service is democratically organised. The service should be accessible to all and should have a low threshold for disadvantaged groups who have difficulty finding their way around the career guidance market.’

2. Execution of the mission

The report was prepared by the Career Guidance Task Force. The task force consisted of 28 representatives of government, industry, the social partners, the academic world and organisations involved in the field of career guidance. The task force also received additional expert support.

The task force carried out two research assignments:

- Career guidance in Flanders: an inventory of approaches and tools; key themes for a discussion framework. This produced an inventory of the tools most frequently used in career guidance.
- Examples of career guidance initiatives abroad. This research produced a survey of career guidance initiatives abroad which could be used in Flanders and were within the remit of the task force.

Both reports are available from the King Baudouin Foundation.

The task force then produced a report in which it formulated policy recommendations.

3. The content of the report

The work performed by the task force in itself answers a good many of the questions in the OECD questionnaire. Taking extracts from the report would detract from the value and quality of the document. This annex is therefore intended to focus attention on the existence of the report and on the research that preceded it. It forms a real addition to the information available on career guidance in Flanders as described in this report.

In the report, the task force expresses its views on the reasons for career guidance and on its content and organisation.

4. Specific proposals

The report defends the development of a Flemish right to career guidance. It defines the content of this right and advises on how it could be organised. As it is still unclear what Flemish people specifically expect in this regard and how they would deal with such a right, the report proposes that the first step should be to assess the practical consequences in more detail. The report indicates that Flanders must take four important steps in order to implement the recommendations made in the report.

Step 1 The exercise of a right to career guidance:

- a market study;
- an evaluation of current experiments;
- the establishment of a Career Guidance Advisory Group and an Institute for Career Guidance;
- the operationalisation of the APL⁽⁹⁴⁾ path.

Step 2 Guaranteeing the delivery of sufficient services

⁽⁹⁴⁾ Accreditation of Prior Learning.

- The information from step 1 should make it possible to assess the ‘demand’ for career guidance and hence how many guidance workers are needed. If there is an unduly large disparity between supply and demand, it will be necessary to indicate what can be done to help create sufficient delivery.
- Provisional accreditation of career guidance centres.

Step 3 An experimental start

- The recommendations in the task force’s report and the experience gained from steps 1 and 2 should make it possible to introduce a right to career guidance on a provisional basis. This provisional form should be the basis of an experiment confined for the time being to priority target groups (i.e. the right should not be immediately available to everyone). The experiences of these groups should be monitored closely to obtain first-hand information.

Step 4 The general introduction of a right to career guidance

- The experience gained from step 3 (together with any modifications to the provisional concept) should result in the introduction of a right to career guidance in Flanders in a more definitive form.